

## Creating possibilities through BiB

Asma Noureen, married, age 24, resides with her husband in Basti Baloucha in Union Council Chak 22DNB, district Bahawalpur. Chak 22 DNB has approximately a population of 32,000, located at 85 – 88 km distance north of district headquarter Bahawalpur.

The basti is characterized by poverty and lack of basic health facilities. The nearest health facility is 14 – 15 km away. The villagers had no way of accessing basic Reproductive Health (RH) services.



Due to a conservative value system in the village, the women were not allowed to step out of the house so they hardly had any knowledge of or access to contraceptives. After the introduction of the Population Services International/Rural Support Programmes Network (PSI/RSPN) Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing (PRHSSM) project, RH services were made accessible in the village. National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), implementing partner of the project, achieved this by mobilizing the community and fostering a Village Health Committee (VHC) of 10 female and 10 male members.

The VHC was given awareness of reproductive health and the importance of birth spacing. They were asked to select Community Resource Persons (CRPs) who will be responsible to carry a survey of all Married Women of Reproductive Ages (MWRAs) in the village and then to initially conduct group sessions with them in order to orientate them on the importance of birth spacing and reproductive health. The CRPs would conduct monthly household visits in the community in order to supply short-term contraceptive methods and refer women to project Lady Health Visitor (LHV) mobile camp.

Asma was selected as CRP in her village. She was a tailoress before she started working as CRP. The VHC convinced her family to let her do outdoor work on this cause. It was very difficult as when she was selected she was unmarried and reproductive health was a controversial topic for unmarried women to work on. Due to the efforts of the project and VHC, awareness was created on reproductive health which made it easier for Asma to carry out her CRP responsibilities. Amongst approximately 150 MWRAs, 30 new users of contraceptive methods were created due to Asma's efforts.

In order to ensure financial stability for Asma even after the project ends, she was given a Business in a Box (BiB). Asma took advantage of this opportunity and expanded her BiB by adding stitching items like threads, needles, etc. As she was a tailoress in the past, she already had experience in buying stitching items, which she incorporated in her BiB. The items were very popular, as women could not access them before. They had to wait for the male members in their households to take them to the market, which was really far. "Now we don't need to leave our house to get these things, sometimes we don't even have the

money to afford a trip to the market but now we can just buy them from Asma who lives nearby. It has made our lives much easier,” said one of her clients.

Asma is very happy with her work, last month she made a profit of Rs. 500. “I am very glad that I took this opportunity. My profit is gradually increasing for the last four months from Rs. 200 to Rs. 500 per month. It has given me direction in life and it has empowered me. I don’t need to rely on others as I have my own micro business now. When I started working I was unmarried, I got married four months back. I told my husband and in-laws that this business would remain a part of my life. Luckily they have been very supporting and are encouraging me to expand my business,” says Asma. She is willing to continue working with BiB and in that way will also carry out her responsibilities as a CRP. She is grateful to community institution (VHC), PSI, NRSP and RSPN for an opportunity that has pushed her in the right direction to become an empowered female entrepreneur.