

VHC: a catalyst of change!

Basti Toba Machian is a settlement in Union Council Shahpur of district Rahim Yar Khan. It is located on 60 km distance from Rahim Yar Khan City. Toba Machian, with 2200 population, is an underprivileged area deprived of basic facilities. The ratio of poverty is also very high, restricting poor community members avail basic education or better health services. The literacy rate of UC Shahpur is also very low as compared to other UCs. There



was no school in the area. Nearest school for girls and boys was 2 to 3 km away. Non-formal education center was there but it was not properly functional which resulted in the high ratio of out-of-school children. Moreover, the rate of birth registration is also low in the area due to lack of awareness and practice of giving birth to babies at home with no system of birth registration in practice.

Under the PSI funded Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing (PRHSSM) project, a Village Health Committee Toba Machian, comprising 10 male and 10 female members, was formed. The issue of out-of-school children was taken to the VHC and members of VHC decided to spend the fund money they collected over the education of children. Hence the amount was used to facilitate parents to get 25 children (8 boys and 17 girls) enrolled in the school and to undertake 20 birth registrations of children. Social Organizers of NRSP accompanied with President of VHC conducted several meetings with teachers and school administration during the process. Moreover, the president of VHC registered 20 children's names and gave them to the Secretary of Union council and paid Rs. 100 fee for each child. Additional amount of cost was borne by parents themselves as they also started taking interests.

The President of VHC states, "Before NRSP started working, community members had no awareness about the process of birth registration. Most of them also did not send their children to schools because they believed that schooling would not benefit them. Now, the mindset of people has been changed. VHC members are determined to sensitize people of the area. We

are thankful for NRSP who brought our attention to these crucial issues and we are hopeful to continue working for assisting community members in each possible way.”

One of the female students says, “I am happy to get enrolled in a school. I will daily go to the school and will become a doctor.”

In addition, VHC Machain also assisted community members in getting health services. Five poor women were given financial assistance for their medical checkups and adopting birth spacing methods, whereas other ten women were referred to the mobile health camp. Moreover, five pregnant women, who could not afford going to the hospitals for deliveries, were provided logistic support by the community members. VHC arranged vehicles for these women and the cost of the petrol was either shared by the VHC fund or by the family members. Apart from reproductive health, VHC also supported to run a polio campaign and to raise awareness for children vaccination.

VHC members emphasized that with mobilization efforts, few households have taken a step to go forward and do something practical. This process will further be carried out to mobilize more members for the betterment of community in future.