

Programme Introduction

In 2008, Mr Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), and Dr. Rashid Bajwa, Chief Executive Officer National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), conceptualised the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP), and undertook policy advocacy with the Government of Sindh (GoS). In 2009, the Chief Minister of Sindh considerably agreed to support the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) to implement UCBPRP in Shikarpur district. Under UCBPRP, SRSO mobilised rural women to foster their own Community Institutions. Rural women formed Community Organisations (COs) at *mohalla* level, then federated COs into village level, Village Organisations (VOs), and finally the VOs were federated at the Union Council level into Local Support Organisations (LSOs) in rural areas of the district. Organised women then began to take initiatives to improve their families' livelihoods and lives, some through self-help measures and some with SRSO's support.

This is a case study of one of the community members that clearly demonstrates the positive economic and social change that has been brought about by GoS's UCBPRP leading to reduction in poverty and generating hope for a better future.

Nabul's journey from despair to hope

Nabul Khatoon, a 29 year old, was born and raised in village Mujharat of Taluka Lakhi Ghulam Shah in Shikarpur district. She has 12 siblings; seven brothers and five sisters, and is the fifth among her siblings. Her family lived in a straw hut. Her parents worked as labourers on a local landlord's farm. Nabul had a very rough and tough upbringing. Nabul, tears in her eyes, narrated her childhood memories, *"once when I asked my mother for money to buy my necessities she burst into tears,*



because she did not have a single penny in her pocket. I remained silent. However, after that she would give me a Rupee coin, once or twice a week, which I would save in a jar."

When the savings were sufficient, Nabul purchased a wooden frame to create embroidered products, using cloth. She was a quick learner, so she learned the art of stitching and embroidery from her mother and neighbours. She wanted to contribute to the family's livelihood, but many a time she was unable to buy the necessary inputs, e.g. cloth, thread and needles. Nabul remembers that her parents rarely bought clothes for themselves. Her mother could barely afford to buy a single cloth in a year that her grandmother would then stitch in a very simple design.

Nabul was married to her cousin at the age of 16. She recollects that at her marriage ceremony she was not even asked about acceptance for the marriage. She said that it was a simple departure with her cousin. She started her married life in a single room mud house. Her husband was the eldest among his five siblings. Her parents in law were tenant farmers receiving one third of the harvest for work. Nabul remembers that the share the family received was not even enough to meet their basic needs. It was not unusual for the family to take rice and wheat on credit from local shops to eat, and survive. Nabul's husband also worked along with his father.

After 18 months of marriage, Nabul gave birth to a baby son, who is now 11 years old. She recollects that she did not know anything about pregnancy and health related issues. She did not see any doctor; therefore, she was not aware of the child's nutrition, vaccination immunisation or medical check-ups. The baby was born at her home without the assistance of a doctor or a midwife. With the gap of one year between each child, Nabul had five children. Unfortunately, two of the children died within few months of their birth due to lack of treatment. Due to the family's poverty, they could, unfortunately, not take the children for treatment. Nabul spent her days looking after her children and also did the household chores.

"One fine day, Madam Saima from SRSO visited our village and asked the women to gather for a meeting," recalls Nabul. *"The elder women discouraged the young ones from attending the meeting. We had never stepped out from the boundaries of our houses."*

Describing the village's social context, Nabul said, *"once a male neighbour went to NADRA office to apply for CNIC. The NADRA staff asked him to bring his wife to the office. He acted accordingly and received the CNICs. Hearing about this, the villagers started taunting him. They accused his wife of having a bad character, because she went out to the city. Similarly, when my husband went to make his CNIC, NADRA staff asked him about me and he answered that he is not married. Such was the village environment."*

Nubul's father-in-law prohibited her and many other women of the village from attending the meetings called by SRSO. He complained saying that these outsiders will ruin the women and bring great dishonour to the village. She narrated, *"Initially, I went to the meetings secretly. My father-in-law came to the meeting and saw me and then fought with us, while the SRSO Social Organiser remained speechless."* Nabul, however, persisted and kept on attending the meetings and finally joined the CO as a member. After hearing about the Community Investment Fund loans available to poor CO members, Nabul informed her family about this opportunity. However, her father-in-law was against Nabul taking CIF. She said, *"my father-in-law thought the loan will be with a heavy interest and he also said that SRSO and all such organisations are fraud."*

However, Nabul's persistence paid off. In 2013, she applied for CIF loan and received it. The loan amount was Rs 15,000. When she handed over her CIF to her father-in-law, he smiled and seemed pleased. With the interest free loan amount, Nabul's father-in-law bought fertilizer for the land. After harvest sales, the loan was repaid. In 2014, Nabul took another CIF loan of Rs 15,000 for agricultural inputs. That loan has also been repaid. In 2015, Nabul received the third loan for agricultural inputs which she plans to repay by the end of 2016 after the rice harvest sales.

Being from a poor family, Nabul also received further support from SRSO. Under the livestock project, Nabul received two heifers. One of the heifers unfortunately died, while the other one is now pregnant. Nabul's husband attended a Vocational Training Programme supported

by SRSO. He learnt designing and stitching clothes. Upon completion of training, he opened a tailoring shop in partnership with another fellow villager. Later, Nabul also learnt stitching dresses from her husband. Now, Nabul and her husband are able to earn by stitching clothes. She charges Rs. 150 per baby's suit, Rs. 350 for a man's suit and Rs. 300 for a female's suit. Now they have two sewing machines at their home.

Nabul, after the aforementioned changes, started to think about her children's education. She has begun to save money to that end. Nabul learnt the importance of savings from the CO meetings. Her eldest child studies in grade two and the younger one in grade one. Nabul says that she has plans to educate all her children.

"I was always eager to do something, especially after my marriage. It was only after becoming a CO member that the avenues opened up for me. I am so glad that SRSO came to our village and supported us to set up the CO."