

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty – Household Cases Studies from Rawalpindi and Swabi Districts

‘Breaking the Cycle of Poverty’ is a series of household case studies from Rawalpindi and Swabi districts. The case studies contain information about how National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) has worked with poor households and communities to improve people's lives and livelihoods. These household case studies have been carried out to document and present NRSP's contributions. The household case studies also reflect upon the nature of the problems that the people have faced, and how social guidance from NRSP contributed to improve their lives.

These household case studies conclusively demonstrate the value of the social mobilisation approach to capacitating poor people to improve their own lives and livelihoods. More than just economics, the approach also makes meaningful contribution to changing the local social norms that allow the poor, particularly the women, more social space and legitimacy to play a greater role in their own development and in harnessing their own potential.

This is one such household case study that shows the positive social and economic change brought about through the good work of NRSP.

Case Study No. 2/9: Mr. Mehmood Hussain

Village: Durab Jatal, UC: Jand Mehlu, Tehsil: Gujar Khan, District: Rawalpindi

By Kulsoom Masood Rehman

Mr. Mehmood Hussain, 39 years old, was born in Durab Jatal. He lived there with his parents who were farmers. He recalls that his mother used to get up early in the morning even before the call of Azaan (morning prayers) and go out to start working in the agricultural fields. His father and mother were both really hard-working and took a great care of the crops but due to a lack of knowledge of farming techniques, they used to face great hurdles. For example, if a plant was being destroyed by a pest, they did not know of any pesticides or insecticides to get rid of them.



They grew a few vegetables like lady finger, cauliflower and lattice. His father used to take sacks of these vegetables to the nearby town to sell them but usually came back with some little money and the same sacks which he took with himself. It was clear to them that nobody would buy rotten crops but they had no other means of income so every day with a little hope his father went to the market and thought his luck might take a turn.

While laughing, Mehmood shared an incident about his mother that once she cut off the infected crops and did not realize that she cleared almost half of the field. It was because of his father that she stopped cutting the crops or she would have chopped down the whole field. He was the eldest among his 4 siblings and all of them used to accompany their parents in the fields as due to financial constraints none of them could attend school. Farming was the only source of their income but they had a very limited knowledge about it. He could not exactly remember their income per day but he does remember that sometimes his parents used to skip the dinner so that their children can have

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food two times a day. He used to feel really sad and angry but he was helpless. There was no one to guide them because his father was also the eldest amongst his siblings and his siblings had the same or even lesser knowledge about farming. He used to conduct his own experiments while working in the field to figure out ways to make the land arable by putting the cow dung on it. But nothing productive used to happen because they were unaware of the proper techniques.

He grew up in these conditions and his parents arranged a marriage for him with a girl living in the same village. His face got drenched in sorrow and despair as he talked about his simple and boring wedding due to financial constraints. Moreover, he and his wife live with his parents and his wife has given birth to four children. Their income was the same however the number of people increased. His parents also grew older and couldn't work in the fields for longer time. They were not able to vaccinate or even dress their children properly until 2002 when the NRSP team arrived in the village.

He recalled the day when everyone was gathered around a broken bridge made of ropes which connected the village to the nearby town. They were carrying a patient on a "Charpai", a traditional woven, four footed bed but as the bridge collapsed due to a storm, they were not able to carry the bed to the hospital and lying on it the old man's soul departed. And this was not the only case. Many times a number of pregnant women had to cross that poorly made and loosely tied bridge beneath which there was a railway line. The villagers never ever crossed that bridge until and unless there was an emergency.

NRSP team, with its arrival in 2002 in the area, worked with local COs and upon their request constructed took notice of the two bridges that were built over the railways line. With the assistance of PPAF (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund) and BVDP (Barani Village Development Project), the bridge was reconstructed and a strong, concrete bridge was made. Another bridge was also built from the scratch along with a network of roads which connected all the houses to that bridge. Mehmood, getting inspired by all the developmental work, went to NRSP's office and got the first hand information about it approach. With the hope to make his and his villager's lives better, he gathered all the people and told them about NRSP development plans.

Mehmood took a wise decision by motivating his fellow community members for fostering a CO. They started having meetings after every 15 days' interval. The CO spread the awareness in the whole village and within no time almost everyone was a part of the CO. NRSP also helped Mehmood to gain knowledge about farming and modern day techniques which would help him grow a bigger number and variety of crops. He now knew what kind of pesticides and insecticides were to be used for what purposes. He also took the CIF loan (Community Investment Fund) with which he bought seeds and fertilizers. The crops which grew after this were greater in number and he sold them for a good amount of money. With that money he repaid the loan within 6 months. He took the second loan with which he installed wells on his farm which the other villagers saw and followed. A proper irrigation system was made with the CIF loans which the villagers took from the VO. The conditions of many households improved and they were able to return the loan within 6-12 months.

Mehmood saved enough money to send his two sons, who were able to attend schools and did intermediate (grade 12) to Dubai and Saudi Arabia respectively and now work there as taxi drivers. He says that the money earned through farming and sent by his sons helped him spread his fields further, improve the irrigation system and buy a tractor. His youngest son did matriculation and has applied to a college. He also drives a tractor in the fields to help his father. Mehmood's daughter did her intermediate and now his family is busy in the hustle bustle of the preparation of her marriage.

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He never thought, as Mehmood says with a glare in his eyes, that he will get to see this day even. He and his parents had the source of income before also but they did not have any knowledge of properly managing that resource, i.e. their fields. Their lack of knowledge led them to live in poverty. With NRSP's social guidance and provision of CIF, Mehmood was able to improve his household's condition. Mehmood says that with NRSP's support, his family's socio-economic trajectory has changed for the better. It gives Mehmood immense happiness when he talks about the education and achievements of his children. This was all made possible due to NRSP's assistance and his own dedicated and hard work.

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