

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. 3/9: Miss Bushra Kausar

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

By Kulsoom Masood Rehman

“...Leken mene kabhi ammi se poocha nahi k school kyun nahi jasakti, mujhe samaj ati thi k koi pareshani hai” (...But I never asked my mother why I can't attend the school, I could understand that there was some problem/trouble), Bushra recalls as she talks about her childhood memories. She is 22 and was born and brought up in Durab Jatal. She was born in a house that had 2 rooms: one being occupied by her parents, she and her brothers and the other one had her grandparents living in it. There were fights every day and she could hear her mother shouting even far away from the fields as she used to visit them almost every day with her elder brothers.



As she was too young to do anything, she often felt angry and helpless at times. She would see other women just like her mother, always sad and angry and that's why she had made her mind that this will be her life until her soul left her unlucky and poor body. She used to see her mother and brothers working with her father in the field. She did realize how hard working they were but still could not figure out what was lacking there that they were not able to make enough money. Her father had tried all the ways of making the land more arable and free from insects but they did not know the right technique and could not afford to get insecticides and fertilizers. She was used to seeing her father coming back from the market disappointed and in despair because none of the vegetables got sold due to a poor condition.

She had accepted that she and other girls of her age will never go to the school. It was difficult so to send a male child to school those days that no one could even talk about sending the female child. None of her parents had attended the school so it was almost impossible to think about academic activities, especially being a female child. Moreover, one out of every 3 houses used to have an

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abnormal child. Either they had physical or mental disorders or their mortality rate was too high. The women were hesitant to share their problems related to pregnancy and other private matters. During her teens, she often used to argue with her mother or other females in the village about opening up about their issues but there was no use of it.

One day, as she recalls, there was a crowd gathered beside a house around a woman lying on the grass. On inquiring, the people told her that a group of workers of some organization came there in a van and this lady got scared of them, and she fainted. People around her were laughing and one woman was sprinkling water on her face. Her husband said that an organization namely RSPN had come on a visit and were talking about initiating some developmental projects in the village. Within a week, her family came to know about this organization and like other villagers, her father and mother became a part of the CO (Community Organization). Her father applied for the CIF (Community Investment Fund) loan and bought new seeds and pesticides for his fields. He also attended the workshops arranged by the LSO (Local Support Organization) through which he gained knowledge about farming. Things got a little better and they were able to return the loan within a few months. When the crops started selling at good prices at the market, they gathered some money from that income and got CIF again, and together with all that money they bought a tractor. Slowly and gradually, they, along with other villagers became aware of the worldly matters. They now knew what resources they had and how they can bring it in use for income.

In 2012, her mother became the president of the CO and regular meetings with monthly intervals started to be held at the LSO office. They had enough money to send her brothers and herself to the school, and completed their intermediates. In the coming years, with the help of income from the fields and the CIF loan, they sent their two brothers to Dubai and KSA respectively where they now work as taxi drivers and earn a good amount of money. The younger brother drives tractor in the fields with his father and is intending to get his BA degree. There were not any cases of woman where they fainted on the arrival of new people because they had gained enough confidence to meet and talk about their issues to the authoritative person. Bushra, from a very young age, used to attend the CO meetings with her mother and had gained quite a lot of knowledge about the conduction of the meetings and other processes. As NRSP inaugurated a private school in the village, the children especially the female ones were encouraged to go to the schools. There awareness campaigns about the education of both the male and female child in which Bushra and her mother also participated. According to Bushra, there were about 3000 people in the union council and among them 177 children didn't go to the schools. 145 children got admitted through NRSP's assistance and others were such cases where the children had physical or mental constraints. But now there is a 100% enrollment, Bushra said with a bold smile on her face. Children with special needs receive education at home or in tuitions by well trained and learned people of the village itself. Also, the number children with certain physical abnormalities decreased due to proper vaccinations and polio drops being given to them on time.

Currently, Bushra is the president of the CO and she also manages the CIF grants. She keeps the record of attendance and agendas that are being discussed in the meeting. According to her record, there are about 101 beneficiaries on the CIF grants and the more people are becoming aware of this the more they come and ask for assistance. When the CIF grants were started to be given to the villagers, the total amount was rupees 50,000 and now it has reached about 15 lakhs and 95,000. She keeps the money in her account as she is the president of CO and also a member of the LSO, and then regulates it according to the needs of people. Bushra feels that this work has impacted her personality in a

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positive way. Her management skills have improved; she's become a thoughtful, disciplined and punctual person.

So much so that she, along with the LSO members and the SO (Social Organizer) of that area Mr. Basharat who is the district engineer, has started a project called "WISE" which stands for Water, Immunization, Solid-Waste and Education. Named very wisely, this project manages all issues in her village related to water impurity, vaccinations, recycling of the waste material and education of both male and female child. Through this project, the village's water got checked from PCRWR and contaminations were found in the drinking water. Bushra and her team took notice of the problem and thought of the easiest solutions to this problem. They suggested people to keep the water in the sunlight and also installed a few aqua taps. But Bushra knows that a lot of effort is required in order to ensure completely pure water and currently they are devising a plan about it.

Bushra and her family were able to change their fate because of their struggle and NRSP's assistance. They did not give up and not only changed theirs but even their villagers' lives. Bushra says that just having a resource is not enough until and unless one does not know how to use it productively. Awareness is important. If it weren't for NRSP's assistance, they might have still been working in her father's field, hoping that one day their condition might get better. Bushra thinks of continuing her education alongside working with CO and LSO. She has a lot of ambitions and developmental plans for her village which she intends to implement through NRSP's assistance in future.

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