

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. 4/9: Miss Sidra Bibi

Village: Bhagpur, UC: Bhadana, Tehsil: Gujar Khan, District: Rawalpindi

By Kulsoom Masood Rehman

It seems an easy way out to blame the government or someone else if you are facing financial constraints. But whom do you blame when it's not only about the financial but physical abnormality too? Sidra Bibi who is a young girl of age 23 was born with disability in her left foot due to which she could not walk properly. She was born and brought up in Bhagpur. Upon inquiring, her parents said that she had this disability since birth and she was not the only case in the village. There were many other houses in the neighborhood which had children facing physical disability. And this was due to the poor diet and health of the mother. Also, there was no concept of regular check-ups during pregnancy. There was only one hospital in the nearby town but the road that connected the village to the town was so out of shape and uncomfortable that the expecting ladies would often opt to rather not go to the hospital than taking that road.



Despite of all the hindrances, Sidra's parents somehow managed to get her into a government school. But life for Sidra was not as normal as it would be for any normal and healthy child. A person faces many physical and mental challenges if he or she has a physical disability even in the best schools or good living conditions. So one can only imagine what difficulties Sidra must have faced, living in a house of three rooms with two other families who gave them one room on rent. And going to a government school where the students could not stop making fun of her disability and the teacher did not bother to do anything about it, Sidra had to face a new fight with life every day. She had three other sisters, two elder and one younger than her. Her eldest sister did her intermediate (grade 12)

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and the second sister did matriculation (grade 10) from the same government school. Sidra herself did matriculation and then all the sisters just stayed at the house.

Their father was the only bread winner of the family. He worked as a laborer in construction sector and sometimes used to be really sick due to which Sidra and her family suffered a lot. Sometimes there was no food and on some Eid celebrations they wore their old clothes because of the financial constraints. During this time her father got a motorcycle by getting loan from someone, but that became a headache for them as they could not repay the money back. The other two families living with them did not interfere much in their household and also were not of any help, apart from giving them a room on rent. Their living conditions were also not so good. The person who lent money to Sidra's father was from some construction company and used to call them every week to ask about the money but every time her father could not repay because he had no money. Giving the rent along with repaying the loan and other household expenditures made Sidra and her family's lives miserable. They had no hope for a better future and had accepted this as their fate, as their lot.

Then one day Sidra's father overheard his other labouring friends talking about this organization called NRSP who had come to the village and was visiting random houses. When he got back home, Sidra's eldest sister informed him about NRSP's developmental plans and that how wanted to work together with the villagers to make their lives better and prosperous. Sidra's eldest sister and her father both became the part of CO (Community Organization) fostered by NRSP. Sidra's sisters started attending workshops arranged by the NRSP teams where they came to know about the ways in which they can utilize their education.

Sidra along with her other sisters discussed everything with their parents and agreed on start a primary level tuition centre at their house. They took a CIF (Community Investment Fund) loan and set up a room where the children could come for the tuitions. In no time there were a big number of admissions in the tuition centre and they repaid they CIF loan within a few months, approximately 6 months. Things started getting better but the motorcycle loan still remained. They devised a plan and took another CIF loan, joined it with the amount of income they got from the tuitions and started repaying the motorcycle loan. As the CIF loan could flexibly be paid back, they did not have any tension and were not in a hurry. In a year, their living conditions began to improve. They had no loans and Sidra had something else coming up in her mind. Sidra's oldest aunt had taught her how to sew clothes. She was surprised how she never thought of putting this skill to use. But after attending a few CO meetings, many women suggested her to utilize her sewing skills. She took another CIF loan of Rs. 10,000 (USD 100) and bought a sewing machine. She started with sewing clothes for her family and the two other families that lived in her house. When people started admiring her work, women from the other houses also came to her and she started placing orders. Her skill became her source of income. Now, she taught tuition along with her elder sisters in the afternoon and sewed clothes in the evening.

From only one person earning for the house it became four persons; Sidra, her two sisters and her father. They now take their father for regular health check-ups and he is better now. Her younger sister is in the process of completing her matriculation. Sidra says we had skills but did not have any guidance. It made her sad that they were sitting in the house with that amount of education and knowledge and were not doing anything about it. But she is thankful to NRSP which made her sisters make a use of their education and also made Sidra realize that even physical disability cannot come in between your ambitions and you if you have a strong will. She is an example of bravery and confidence for all the people in her village and those people, who used to mock her, now quote her as an example

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to their children. Sidra says that NRSP's social guidance build her confidence and now she and her family can look forward to a better and secure future.

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