

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. 9/9: Mrs. Bakhtshera

Village: Kadi, UC:Baadshahi, Tehsil: Razan, District: Swabi

By Kulsoom Masood Rehman

“Bakhtshera”, the word literally meaning “the lucky one”, is a woman, of age 35, born and brought up in the Kadi village of Swabi. Quite ironically, she was named Bakhtshera because she was not on really good terms with luck. She had two brothers and one more sister. She was the youngest and took the most part in helping her mother in the household.



Bakhtshera's shop

She was stubborn since birth and that is why she was able to study at least till class 5th. All of her siblings and her parents were uneducated. She also had to leave her schooling eventually due to financial constraints. She had always seen her father being angry at her mother, sometimes without any reason even, and her brothers did the similar to their sisters. Her father was a caretaker of a private land that belonged to someone else. The landowner also let him farm on a small patch of his land but whatever the output was, he was only given a small chunk of it. For example: out of ten apples trees that grew, he was given just 2, which makes it 20%. It was nothing as compared to what he used to do for the landowners because he was responsible for bringing all kinds of chemicals needed for the development of the land. He worked days and nights even in heavy rains and what he got in return was not even a quarter of what he did. Some days he would fall seriously ill and could not even talk but he used to go on work as he was the only bread-winner of the house. That is also one of the reasons why he used to be angry

July 2017

all the time. Bakhtshera's brothers were given nothing for working with their father on the same land as their work was considered to be one man's work.

Sometimes Bakhtshera's brothers would go out of the village in the search of jobs but it was difficult to find one with no education at all. We see people who have their master's degree with them but still are unemployed, how could one expect someone to have a job with no degree at all. They did small labour work whenever there was any construction going on near the village. But such opportunities occurred very less and hence, they used to burst out in anger to their sisters who only knew a life living inside a house of two rooms, listening to the yelling and shouting of the males of the house. They were in a bad condition both financially and socially. At an early age, Bakhtshera parents got her married to her maternal cousin who was twice her age. But it was considered to be a fortune for the girls if their hand was asked in marriage by the member of their own family. It was very rare for a girl to get married outside of the family or tribe. It was a sort of dishonour for the family. Due to this reason, many girls died unmarried. There was a fear of losing property that was owned by the female heir and people tried to get them married inside their family or tribe. Bakhtshera's parents were happy as their girl did not have to die unmarried as well as they got rid of the responsibility of one more house member after her elder sister.

The conditions of Bakhtshera's in-laws were not much different than that of her parents. Her father-in-law had died when her husband and his siblings were very young. She had two sister-in-laws and three brother-in-laws. Her husband was like a fatherly figure for them because after their father's death he took a great care of them. He played the role of both an elder brother and a father. He used to work as a labourer and invested his whole income on the education of his siblings. His brothers did matriculation (grade 10) and sisters did not study because of the common thought of not sending the females out of the house for school. This idea is very much prevalent to this date in all Pakistani villages and in some areas of the cities even.

Moreover, for them he did not get married as he thought getting married would distribute his attention and he would not be able to give proper time to his siblings. But unfortunately, he did not get the same or even lesser affection and thoughtfulness from their side. His siblings grew up selfish. He got all of them married in good places. They were all living together but after his marriage with Bakhtshera, things got complicated. When it was finally time for him to think about his life and happiness, his siblings backed out. They had children of their own and amongst them Bakhtshera's children always used to get ignored. All of them were earning fine and their income combined was enough to run the house. There used to be fights and arguments especially among the female members of the house but after Bakhtshera's third child, his siblings made a big fuss and left the house. None of them left any money or any other source of financial support for Bakhtshera, her husband, her children and her mother-in-law. Her husband used to cry and curse his fate daily for being uneducated and having such selfish siblings who, once left the house, did not even ask if his brother and mother were alive or dead: let alone Bakhtshera and her children. The whole family was heartbroken as well as the means of income decreased.

In their tribe, having the most children and especially a big number of sons signified power. The more a person had sons, the more powerful he was no matter how financially weak he is. Similar was the case with Bakhtshera's husband. After their sixth child, it had almost become impossible to arrange for a meal of two times a day with her husband's income. The days became duller and Bakhtshera's husband kept on cursing his fate. Bakhtshera, unlike her husband decided to not surrender to their fate and do something about it.

July 2017

Those days, NRSP had started a LACIP (Livelihood and Community Investment Plan) program in the village and she came to know about it through an LSO's (Local Support Organization) member whom she knew from her childhood. She suggested her to go to the LSO office and do something about their drastic situation. Her husband had grown very old and grumpy, so she decided to go to the office alone with a lot of fear in her heart as she had not taken her husband's permission. She knew he would not allow but this was the demand of their condition. She inquired about the LACIP project, became a member of CO (Community Organization) and got an asset, a long piece of clothing worth Rs 18,000 (USD 180). She started selling the pieces of that cloth that were of the length of a shirt. Women liked the quality and the colour, and they demanded for more. From the income she got from that sale, she bought few more different pieces of clothes and put them on sale. She was carrying this work secretly but one day when her husband saw his mother and children having good food, he started crying and allowed her wife to carry out her business openly.

After attending a skills workshop arranged by NRSP, Bakhtshera decided to open a home tuition at her house where she can teach the children of the village till the 5th grade as she herself had this much qualification. She took a CIF (Community Investment Fund) loan from the VO (Village Organizer), bought a few books and renovated a small room in her house for the tuition set-up. She started getting income from her tuition as well as her business of selling clothes. She had strategically set timing for both her works so that they did not get hectic for her. The initial one year was really difficult to manage but both her jobs got smoother with time. She was able to return the loan within six months. She now has eight children, four sons and four daughters. Her eldest son is involved with her in her business which has decreased some of her load.

She has added a lot more items to her shop that includes vegetables, seasonal fruits and feminine products. From the income that she got from both her works, she arranged a decent marriage for her eldest daughter. Rest of her children goes to school and both the husband, and the wife have decided to give their remaining children a proper education. They do not consider their female children as a burden and would take a proper care of their health and education. Her husband says if he had concentrated on his education along with his siblings, he might have not had such a hard time. But what was done, was done. They now look forward to enhance their clothing business and have lots of bright dreams for their children's future. All this happened due to after becoming a member of CO. Bakhtshera is grateful to NRSP for showing her the path out of dire poverty.

Disclaimer: This document is made possible with the financial support of the Rural Support Programmes Network and the National Rural Support Programme. The contents are the sole responsibility of author and do not necessarily reflect the views of RSPN and NRSP.

July 2017