



Programme Introduction

In 2008, Mr Shoab 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 Jacobabad 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 such community member 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.

Case Study 12 of 15: Ms. Bashiran

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Bashiran, 33, resides in village Abdul Rehman Sarki, district Jacobabad. She grew up among her 10 siblings: seven sisters and three brothers. Her parents were small farmers. Bashiran loved in her family because she was the youngest daughter and then her parents had three sons. She explained, "Having a son in family is crucial and my mother had seven consecutive daughters. After my birth, my three brothers were born; therefore, I was loved by my parents and grandparents." Bashiran said that she attended the local primary school in the village. She was in grade four when her parents arranged her marriage.



Bashiran started her married life with her in-law's joint family in two-roomed mud and straw hut. She narrated that the family did not own any land or livestock. Like other villagers, they used to defecate in bushes. They were sharecroppers, who farmed a landlord's land in the village. They lived a basic life. In the lean season, Bashiran's husband worked as a labourer in a rice mill. Despite this he could barely earn enough money to cover family's needs therefore the family lived constantly in a 'hand-to-mouth' condition.

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Government of Sindh's Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme
Social and Economic Empowerment of Women
Household Case Studies from Jacobabad District



Bashiran said that soon after her marriage, as per the local norm and practice, she took the responsibility to support her sister-in-law in household chores. Her daily activities started from fetching water from a shared hand pump that was located on half an hour's walk from her hut. This way, it took her four hours of her productive day time to collect sufficient water for the household consumption. Water, however, was saline. Then, Bashiran worked in fields till evening. In the evenings, she used to collect cow dung, make cow dung cakes and paste them on walls to dry for fuel.

Bashiran said that after one year of her marriage she gave birth to a baby girl. Later, with the gap of one and a half year between each child, she had eight children. She said that there was no dispensary in her village. In sickness, she used to take herbal medicines that her mother-in-law would make from herbs. Bashiran remembers that till the ninth month of her pregnancy, she was expected to work on the farm fields by her in-laws. And within the week of delivery of child, she used to keep her children with their grandmother and start agricultural work. Bashiran narrated, "My infant children even missed out on breastfeeding; they were kept at huts while I worked on farms in the harvest season. Poor diet undoubtedly resulted in my children becoming thin and skinny. Sometimes children got sick for no reason, sometimes because of lack of proper food. Our diet was very basic; included boiled rice, Lassi (butter milk) that some of our neighbours gave us and sometimes we ate some vegetables." During the rains, her shelter used to leak making the floor muddy. During winters, often they ran out of food and family's menfolk had to take loans to feed the family.

Talking about the 2010 floods, Bashiran said, "Heavy rains and flood water had flooded the agricultural fields. Many villagers lost livestock due to lack of fodder and many lost their huts and mud houses. That year was the worst year of our lives. We lived throughout the year in our damaged huts in deplorable condition."

One day Bashiran was waiting in a queue to fetch water in her pitcher when a woman came there and greeted them. She narrated, "We kept looking at her because she was an outsider and she was accompanied by some men. Men directly went to Autak (community meeting room usually belonging to the village notable) while this woman started talking to us. She asked all of us to gather at a common place as she wanted to meet with all local women. Out of curiosity, we asked her who she was and why she wanted us to get together. She explained that she is a staff member of SRSO and that SRSO would work with the local women if they all agreed to come together to make groups.

All of us were perplexed because we did not understand why she wanted us to make groups. On the other hand, our men had started to argue when male SRSO staff said that SRSO would only work with local women. Later, when we discussed this SRSO plan to work with local women, our men sternly rejected SRSO's offer. Our menfolk warned us that these SRSO staff members are fraudsters and planning to loot us. However, after repeated visits by the SRSO field team and many dialogues with our men, their misconceptions were removed. Then our men allowed SRSO's female staff to interact with the local women. We agreed to work with SRSO and to follow their directions. Finally, we fostered Community Organisations. In my CO, we were 15 women in the beginning, now we are 22. We selected our president and members

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Household Case Studies from Jacobabad District



elected me as CO's Manager to keep records because I could read and write. I attended training sessions at UC Muhammad Pannah Channa office. This was the first time in my life that I ever stepped outside my village. I learned that there were many villages in the Union Council. I was excited and happy to meet other women and developed friendships with women from other villages."

Bashiran said, "After learning about time management, mediating meetings, record keeping, and saving mechanism in the training sessions organised by SRSO, I learned about the value of getting involved in CO's activities. I discussed it with my CO members. We started to meet twice a month. This agitated our men because the meetings suspended our agricultural work. Most often our elders in families got angry at our involvement in CO. Gradually we started to save whatever amount we had in our hand in the CO account. In the meetings, we also discussed our problems and respected each other's opinion. Earlier, we never asked our neighbours if they had any problem. Now, at the platform of the CO we shared our household level issues as well as our common issues. One of the remarkable achievement that my CO members had achieved was getting access to drinking water. Previously, we used to have arguments over the shared hand pump. We discussed the problem in our CO and VO and we passed a resolution to SRSO. We are now provided with hand pumps at household level. Also, we had issues relating to stagnant water that had a bad odour in our streets and surrounding. SRSO supported us in building toilets and paved streets."

Poverty scorecard data showed that almost all CO members lived in poverty. In a CO meeting, Bashiran observed that many members wanted to do something to improve their livelihood but they did not have resources. Bashiran said, "Many women had the skills of making Rillis, but they did not have money to buy inputs. Likewise, some females had stitching skills, but they did not own a sewing machine. Others could raise livestock but they did not even have one. With the setting up of the Community Investment Fund at VO level, a solution was found. Each member household prepared a Micro Investment Plan (MIP). In MIP, every CO member with less than 23 on PSC, identified activities for which they needed CIF loans."

Bashiran herself applied for a CIF loan. She had identified an opportunity for setting up a small shop at her home for selling snacks and materials for making local handicraft products. In 2011, Bashiran received a CIF loan of Rs. 10,000. With this amount Bashiran set up her small shop. She was able to repay the CIF loan after one year.

Meanwhile, SRSO also provided training sessions about handicrafts, tailoring and designing under the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Programme. Bashiran along with her many CO members attended the training sessions and started to make handicrafts, shirts, kurti, shawl, pillowcases and many other products. While taking the benefit of embroidery work, Bashiran also increased inventory of key inputs at her shop, e.g. fabrics, colourful threads, and other items. As demand from fellow villagers for inputs increased, Bashiran applied for another loan from the CIF in 2012. She received Rs. 10,000 that she used for buying more inputs and snacks for her shop. This time she returned the loan within six months. Bashiran used the profit in extending her shop. Apart from managing the shop, Bashiran also made handicrafts in order to fulfil her household needs. Observing enhanced household

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Household Case Studies from Jacobabad District



income, Bashiran's husband built a separate room to extend the shop and also to keep and sell grocery items. In 2014, Bashiran again accessed a CIF loan amounting to Rs. 10,000 and invested this amount in her shop.

Bashiran says with great pride, "I saw improvements in my family's awareness and approach when I began to get involved in the community activities. With material support from CIF, I was able to set up a regular source of income for my family. More control over finances and sound management encouraged my husband to trust me with his daily wages. Today, we make a profit of Rs. 200 to Rs. 400 per day. While meeting our household's needs, we have also continued to save, which we have utilised to build a two-room concrete house."

Apart from the CIF and vocational training, SRSO linked the CO/VO with other organisations. SRSO linked the COs/VO with Plan Pakistan for a short project about health and sanitation. Being an active member of her community, Bashiran worked with Plan Pakistan as Community Resource Person for three months. She said that from the training sessions, the CO members learned about cleanliness of household and surrounding. She received Rs. 23,000 as an honorarium. Adding some more amount from her savings, Bashiran bought a buffalo. She said, "The buffalo has recently produced an offspring and it produces 6-7 litres of milk on daily basis. We consume some milk at the household level and I sell surplus milk and save earning to fulfil my desire of educating my children in the city."

Furthermore, during the 2010 floods, building of the government primary school in the village was damaged. Children in the village did not have access to education. In 2016, SRSO created links with BRAC Pakistan who has provided a Non Formal Education (NFE) centre in Bashiran's village. Bashiran said that after a 15-day training, she was appointed as NFE teacher. There are 30 students at the centre: 15 boys and 15 girls. Since BRAC Pakistan needed a room for the centre, Bashiran allocated one of her rooms. Now Bashiran receives Rs. 2,500 as her monthly salary and earns Rs. 3,300 as rent.

Bashiran concludes her story, "Since the devastation of 2010 floods, our lives have improved manifold. There is new thinking and attitude within our households and community. Materially, we are also in much better condition. All this happened when our menfolk finally agreed to let women meet with the female SO of SRSO. Once we got organised the wheel of progress was set in motion. The key change over the past few years is that now our menfolk do not deem women as burden. We are now an active partner in decision making and resource utilisation. As a result of this, we have more voice at home and within the community. Now men and women work together and make our families' lives and livelihoods better, eat better, clothe better and nurture our children better. Without our CO, all this would not have been possible at all as we would have carried on living in the same condition."

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