



## Programme Introduction

In 2008, Mr Shoaib 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 5 of 15: Ms. Husna Khatoon

*By Savaila Hunzai*

Ms. Husna Khatoon, 36, is from village Sayed Daman Ali Shah in Jacobabad district of Sindh. She was born into a peasant's family. She was the eldest among her eight siblings: four brothers and four sisters. She remembers that her parents worked as labourers in the landlord's fields, where they grew rice or wheat depending on the season. Her family lived in a hut on the landlord's land. She said that since there was no school in the



village, like other girls in village she too remained uneducated. Recollecting her childhood memories, Husna said that in mornings she collected water from a hand pump in a neighbour's house for household consumption and in the evenings she collected cow dung and wood pieces for cooking purpose. She learned making Sindhi cultural hats from her mother, who made hats for her sons and husband.

Husna was married at the age of 18 to her cousin. Her husband was the eldest among his three siblings. She said that her parents gave her two dresses as gift at the time of her  
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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**



marriage. During the initial days of her marriage her husband drove a donkey cart, later when the donkey died of some disease, he worked at a brick kiln for meagre wages. Her father-in-law and two brothers-in-law worked as tenant farmers on the local landlord's land.

The family's diet was very basic and included boiled rice, Daal (lentils) and potatoes. Husna remembers that during lean periods of the year when there was food shortage, the women in the family had to eat much less while the men and children would eat dried Roti (flat bread). The family did not own any livestock; their neighbours used to give them Lassi (butter milk) on some lucky days.

Talking about physical conditions of her house, Husna said, "We lived in a single-room mud house that leaked whenever there was rain. We did not have electricity for lighting. Drinking water was available from a shared hand-pump nearby, but we did not have toilets. Children would go to the nearby bushes to defecate."

Husna said that her daily activities involved doing all household chores; starting from collecting dried-cow dung and wood pieces, collecting water, cleaning house, gossiping with her sisters-in-law and taking care of children. She said, "We only took care of our family and were limited to the boundaries of the house. We could barely go to the government hospital in sickness and that too with a male companion. It was not secure for females to go out by themselves. In early mornings, we (women) in groups used to leave for field to squat and chat, while our men went to different places."

As the joint family kept extending, Husna became worried about her children. She said, "Educating our children was beyond our imagination, when we were unable to provide them two meals a day." She added, "We did not own any land to make a separate house and the plot of land on which our house was built was also owned by the landlord."

In 2009, a team comprising males and females visited the village to conduct a survey. Husna had thought that this was 'a survey by the government to count number of people in household'. Later, she learned that the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) had conducted this survey to identify poor people in the village to support them to organise and to improve their livelihoods. Husna said, "After a couple of months, they repeatedly visited the village and talked to our men. As the females in the team desired to meet local females, our men allowed us to meet them. They asked us to get together and form Tanzeem (Community Organisation). In the beginning, none of us understood what they meant by Tanzeem. We discussed with our men about what the females talked to us. My husband and brothers-in-law laughed at us saying, "If you don't understand why you even participate in their meeting." My father-in-law prohibited us from attending meetings because he had heard that the team might come out as a fraud and fool the village women."

In 2010, the village was hit by a flash flood and heavy rains that destroyed houses and standing crops. The villagers took refuge in the government school, where NGOs provided them aid. Husna said, "After two months of staying in the emergency camps when we returned to our village, we found our houses and huts were severely damaged. We along with

*June 2017*

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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**



our children lived under the open sky for many days until we collected straws to make shelters. We survived on pre-cooked meals that NGOs provided. Our children suffered from diarrhoea, malaria and skin infections due to stagnant flood water, processed food and mosquitoes.”

In this backdrop, SRSO team supported the villagers in building shelters and provided tents. Husna narrated, “These people [SRSO] were not fraudsters; our men also realised it after observing their support during flood. They said, ‘if you organise yourselves in groups and share problems, SRSO will support you resolve the problems.’ We agreed to form our Tanzeem. Our Tanzeem consisted of 12 members in the beginning. All the members agreed to select me as their president because they thought I was honest and truthful and was able to give time. The Social Organiser (SO), who mediated our initial meetings told me that we have to work for our community with dedication and sincerity. Many other Tanzeems were also formed throughout the village at the same time.”

“In our Tanzeem, we learned to identify common problems and discuss with the SOs. Later, presidents and managers of all COs in the village were asked to attend training sessions at village level. I participated in the training sessions where I learned record keeping, saving and setting the meeting agendas. I also learned how to articulate mutual problems to seek support from SRSO. Also, the representatives from each CO in the village formed a Village Organisation.”

After VO formation, Husna was provided training on maintaining records, preparing Micro Investment Plans and CIF distribution. She said that when she returned from the meeting she called a meeting in her CO and shared what she learned. The CO members agreed to meet twice a month at her place. Later, observing the CO meetings, more females joined the CO.

In one of the CO meetings, SO distributed Poverty Scorecard (PSC) scores to each member. Husna said, “My poverty score was 11. The SO informed the CO members that those who had very low PSC will receive a grant that is not refundable. For the members whose PSC is less than 23 will have to apply for Community Investment Fund (CIF), a loan that was free of interest. She informed us that CIF was to be utilised to only generate income and not to consume for household expenses. After a VO meeting, a resolution was submitted to SRSO for provision of CIF.”

Husna said, “By the end of 2011, 14 CO members received CIF loan. I had applied and received a loan of Rs. 10,000. I added Rs. 10,000 that I took as a loan from a relative to this amount and bought a donkey. We already had a cart. My husband was now able to earn Rs. 350-400 per day. I saved some amount on daily basis and returned CIF loan in 2012. Now we have donkey as a productive asset.”

In 2014, Husna received another CIF loan of amount Rs. 10,000. She bought a sheep with this amount and within six months she returned CIF from her husband’s earnings. She said that now she has two sheep that she has kept with a shepherd. She said, “The advantage of having

*June 2017*

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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**



sheep is that we can sell them on higher prices on Eid-ul-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice). This enables us to increase our financial assets.”

In 2016, Husna again applied for and received a CIF loan of Rs. 10,000. With this amount she bought a sewing machine for her eldest daughter, who had received a tailoring training provided by SRSO. Husna said that her daughter earns Rs. 200-300 per suit by stitching clothes for villagers. Husna also received Traditional Birth Attendants' training provided by SRSO. She received a certificate after completion of the training session. This certificate later enabled her to get a job as Focal Person with Save the Children. Husna says, “Every month I gather 15-20 females in my locality to conduct sessions about family planning, maternal health and health and hygiene. Earlier, many women suffered from complexities during deliveries. Now, I and Community Health Worker guide these women from their early days of pregnancy about maternal and child health. I earn Rs. 2,000 per month as my monthly honorarium.”

Husna added, “In CO/VO meetings, we discussed the problems related to open defecation, but we did not know a suitable solution for this. When we attended sessions about health and sanitation, we came to know about toilets. We wrote a resolution to SRSO to support us in building latrines in our village. SRSO linked us to another organisation, which provided latrines in the village. This has lessened pollution in our surroundings and diseases like diarrhoea and malaria have been controlled to some extent.”

Apart from health issues, education was one of the main issues in Husna's area. She said that there was no school for girls in the village. To deal with this issue, she along with her VO members approached SRSO for support. With the assistance from SRSO, they got introduced to Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO). SPO established a primary school for girls in her village. Husna said, “Now four of my children (two sons and two daughters) are getting education in the school.”

In addition to working for the development of her household, Husna has also continued to work to support her community. She has continued to support members of the COs and VOs and has developed and demonstrated leadership skills at the community level. In return, her community females have placed great trust in her.

Husna said, “I had a huge ‘Aha!’ moment when I realised the power of collective action in my village. When our landlord passed away, his son took over the control of the land. He asked us to leave the land where we had built our huts and mud houses. He did not even care about our livelihoods and ancestral ties that we had cultivated for generations. He started to strip us from the land with the help of machines. Looking at the machines our men were afraid because we did not have any place to go. Our men begged him that they have been working really hard on the land, but he did not listen to a single plea. I could not see tears in the eyes of my villagers, I gathered my VO members and asked them to gather members from their respective COs. Almost all mobilised females participated in the strike and we went to our MPA's office. Thankfully, we were now able to speak publically and conveyed our message of getting our right to the concerned person. The local police also noticed the crowd and supported us to ensure our rights. Our men also joined us when they observed us getting

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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**



united. After a week of confrontations and negotiations, we got back our land legally. I received a small plot of land, where I have built a two room house and a toilet.”

Husna concludes her story with great pride, “Now I feel secure because I have a good shelter. We eat good meals a day. My children are getting education. Despite a complex mesh of multiple hurdles from household to community level, we did not give up. Whatever I along with my villagers have achieved is due to getting united at the platforms of CO and VO. By setting up our own organisations, we realised our inner potential to change our fate.”

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