



## 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 7 of 15: Ms. Shamim

*By Savaila Hunzai*

Ms. Shamim, 32 years old, is a resident of Shah Nawaz Malangi village of District Jacobabad. She was born in a poor family in Bismillah Shah Village of the same district. Her father was a herder who looked after other people's livestock, and her mother was a housewife as well as working as a labourer on a local landlord's land. In return for her efforts, Shamim's mother received a single meal for her family. Shamim said that she was the third out of four siblings: two brothers and two sisters.



Shamim said, "It was not possible for our parents to feed us properly, and most often we had to wait the whole day for our mother to return from fields for us to have the only meal in the evening. There was a government primary school in the village, but due to lack of awareness and resources my parents could not afford our schooling so none of the siblings attended school. We all lived in a simple open hut."

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Shamim continues with her story, “When I was about 15 years old I was married to a man who already had a wife and a son. In the Baloch community, elders prefer their sons to get married twice or thrice. This is because the bigger family means more power associated with it. Also, more children grow up to become a source of support for earning wages. My new family included in-laws, three brothers-in-law, two sisters-in-law and their children.”

This large family was poor and quite vulnerable. There was lack of cash. They were simple landless peasants. They did not own any livestock. Shamim said, “Our men also worked as labourers but there were no regular opportunities. Whenever they would find casual work, we got to eat properly otherwise we were eating only boiled riced with onions. Our already poor life became even worse when my husband developed diabetes. This restricted him from undertaking heavy labour work.”

Shamim said that after one year of her marriage, she had a baby son. Other children followed and now she has six children: two sons and four daughters. All six children were born at home with the support of traditional birth attendant. Shamim said, “We did not have awareness about maternal health at that time. Neither did we vaccinate our children. My third daughter, eight days after her birth, became paralysed after fever.” Shamim said that her father-in-law took her daughter to the nearby dispensary but their treatment was not effective. The family could not afford her proper treatment. Now she is nine years old and is dumb and paralysed.

The situation of the family was worsened by the 2010 floods. Shamim said, “The floods and heavy rains in 2010 destroyed everything. Our family migrated to Larkana and took refuge in a government school for two months. When we returned to our village, the family found out that their huts were destroyed and crop land was still flooded with water. When a slightly higher land became dry, we collected straws and wood pieces to make a shelter. The family members, especially children suffered from skin diseases. NGOs provided food items including grains, ghee, flour, tea packets and soaps for two months and left us soon after the land started to get drier. Our men searched out for work in the cities to be able to buy some food. On many occasions, we were barely able to feed our children while the elders slept on empty stomachs.”

Shamim further narrates, “One morning Mr. Shah Nawaz Malangi, the landlord and the main decision maker of the village, called our men out for a meeting at the village Autak (meeting place). He informed our men about SRSO and that this organisation will work with the community women. Prior to the flood, SRSO staff had visited the village but none of our men allowed them to interact with us. After the flood and economic crises, the village men and women’s perception about outsiders [NGOs] changed since they had provided much needed support. Now the villagers participated in dialogues whenever an NGO arrived to support. Once the village men showed their willingness, the community women also gathered at the Autak. There the SRSO staff announced that the organisation brings a message that the lives of the people can only be improved if people foster their own organisations. Therefore, SRSO will support the village women only if the women come together to form their own groups where they will discuss their potentials and opportunities and identify ways and means for

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harnessing the potentials. While most of the women agreed to form a group, I hesitated in the beginning. May be I did not fully comprehend what was being said.”

Shamim said that the village women asked her to join their Community Organisation (CO) that initially consisted of 17 members. The CO members christened their organisation CO Shah Nawaz Malangi, after the name of the landlord who was generally kind and supportive. The newly formed CO selected their president and a manager, who attended training sessions about record keeping, savings and setting meeting agendas. Shamim attended monthly meetings where she learned about savings and cleanliness. Shamim said, “Some of us objected to savings saying we do not have a single penny, why are you asking us to save money. CO President asked us to save as little as we can. I also learned in the meetings that SRSO will support us to initiate income generating activities.”

After some months of CO formation in 2012, SRSO linked them to other organisations, such as HANDS, who provided them latrines. Shamim said, “Earlier the families used to go to bushes to defecate. Also, post-flood viral diseases were spread throughout the village. Children and elders suffered from diarrhoea that weakened them day by day. In COs, we learned about cleanliness of our body, food and shelter. I used to attend the CO meetings thinking that I will get something in return to change my poor situation. I was depressed as my husband suffered from diabetes and my children suffered from skin diseases and diarrhoea. I could not afford their treatment.

I usually asked my neighbours for their food leftovers to feed my children. Until you experience the long-term poverty situation, you can't really comprehend how it devastates your ability to function. It also affected my health because of the stress and inability to eat healthy food.”

One day the SRSO team visited the village and announced that there is an opportunity under their vocational training programme for women. Shamim said, “My neighbours who had time availed this opportunity and attended training sessions about tailoring, making handicrafts and embroidery. I could not attend the training sessions because it needed a lot of time. My children were young and I could not leave them, especially as some of them were sick. In 2014, at one of the CO meetings, the Social Organiser from SRSO discussed the Community Investment Fund (CIF). An idea about opening a shop in the village popped up in my head. The village women used to purchase the inputs of Rillis (traditional wall/floor covering) and handicrafts from the cities.

Also, there was no shop in the village. In the Micro Investment Plan, I mentioned that I wanted to open a shop. I applied and received a CIF loan of Rs. 15,000. With this money, I bought fabric and threads for Rillis, mirror pieces and laces for handicrafts. I opened up my shop in my shelter and informed village women about the shop in a CO meeting.”

Shamim said very proudly, “The CIF loan enabled me to open the first shop in my village. I sold the material for making Rillis and handicrafts in the village and earned a profit of Rs. 3,000 - 4,000 per month. I saved the profit and was able to return CIF loan within six months.

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With the profit, I was able to gradually extend the enterprise. I started to keep sweets, baked buns and other edibles for children. My husband supported me in this enterprise. He would travel to city to make purchases for the shop.”

By getting involved in an income generating activity that contributed to meet the household's needs, increased Shamim's confidence and she began to think about making more efforts for income generation. She said, “I finally realised the importance of saving that was discussed in the initial meetings of CO. I did not increase my household consumption until I saved enough to purchase a motorbike for my husband. With Rs. 10,000 from my savings, my husband bought a second-hand motor bike. With this bike, he started to collect milk from the village and supplied it in the markets in Jacobabad city. He earned Rs. 4,000 - 5,000 per month excluding the input and maintenance cost of the bike. This increase in my household income enabled us to build a two room-mud house. Apart from this, we continued to work on the landlord's land and received our share of the harvest of wheat and rice.”

In 2016, again Shamim applied for and received CIF loan of Rs. 15,000. Adding some more amount from her savings to the CIF loan, she bought a young male steer. She said that the steer has now grown up and will be sold on the eve of next Eid-ul-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice) at a much higher price. In the meantime, Shamim has returned CIF loan from her husband's earnings.

Shamim said that she was always inspired by the female and male staff of the SRSO field team. She also wanted her children to get educated like them. Now she has admitted all her four children in the government primary school. She said that she could not afford their education earlier but now as she has diversified her sources of income, she can spend money on her children's education and well-being.

Shamim concludes her story, “Now, I feel happy and secure because my family has a secure shelter and good food to eat. I have recently purchased a refrigerator to keep home food and soft drinks to sell in my shop. I do not want to remember the painful past. I look forward to see a better future for my children. By becoming a member of CO, I have not only gained economically but also become more aware about the importance of health and hygiene. I have learned that children can be immunised by vaccinations and polio drops that earlier we had prohibited. This revolution in my and my family's life could not have happened without the Government of Sindh's support. All village women are grateful to them for providing this opportunity to us so that we can help ourselves.”

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