

Women’s Empowerment - Household Case Studies from Malakand District

‘Women’s Empowerment’ is a series of household case studies from District Malakand. 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 rural women 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 women 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 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 4 of 6 – Assiya’s Potential Unleashed through Social Mobilisation

By Saba Saeed

Ms. Assiya, 25, was born and raised in village Bat Khaila of district Malakand. She was the second last among her ten siblings; five brothers and five sisters. Her family lived in a single room mud house. Her father worked as a labourer on a landlord’s farm and mother was a housewife. Unlike other girls in the village Assiya and her sisters were sent to school by their parents and she received education till 10th grade. Due to financial constraints, not all children were able to receive education.



At the age of 18, Assiya was married off to a policeman from the same village. She started her family life in a small house of two rooms in a joint family that included parents-in-law, five brothers-in-law and three sisters-in-law. Her one brother-in-law was married and was lived separately. Her first child, a baby boy, was born after one year of marriage and the second child was born in the second year. She in total has four children, three sons and one daughter. She has twins after five years of marriage. Assiya also continued her studies after marriage

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with the support of her husband and in-laws. She completed her BA along with the responsibility of her children and other household chores.

“It became difficult for me and my family to stay in the joint family system when they were little grownup, so we decided to have our own place. We found a mud house far away in the village. The room was small but with a small backyard. We took the room on rent because there was not enough income to buy land or to afford a bigger house. I myself completed education after marriage, so I knew the importance of education and sent my children to school. Most of the income was spent on the school fees and on the rent of the house along with minor household items. It was becoming difficult day by day to bear all the expenses with my husband’s limited income. The expense of education was also increasing as the kids were promoted to higher grades.”

“There came a time when I couldn’t even provide one-time meal to my family. My husband and my children would get really mad at me and used to fight over lack of food. One day, I went to a neighbour’s house to do catharsis and shun the mental pressure of what will I serve to my husband and kids when they come back home. I was talking to my neighbour when she mentioned the name of one organisation called NRSP and how it helps the poor rural women in organising themselves, reducing poverty and empowering them. She gave me a few examples of the local women who had benefited from NRSP and also invited me to come along with her to one of the CO meetings.”

Assiya said, “I came back home thinking what my neighbour had told me about NRSP and CO. My husband noticed that night that my mind was occupied. He asked me what was I thinking and what the matter was. I was reluctant to discuss it with him because I wasn’t sure how he would react. He asked me three four times so I finally gathered strength and talked to him. He listened quietly until I finished telling him everything. He encouraged me to go and attend the meeting once myself and see how it CO works.”

Assiya’s life began to improve in 2012 when she attended the CO meeting and met the Social Organisers of NRSP. Assiya recalls her first meeting with a laugh. She remembers that there was a lot of confusion and curiosity among the villagers. She attended the meeting with great interest and agreed to become a member of the CO immediately. Majority of the women in the meeting also decided to form a CO because they wanted to improve their lives and break the poverty trap. The members of the CO started meeting regularly after the formation and they also started saving money and discuss issues with each other.

Assiya soon became the leader of her CO named ‘Talha’ and gained confidence from leading the monthly meetings with other CO members. In these meetings the community members would discuss their problems and collectively propose suitable solutions. Assiya also encouraged them to do savings according to their capacity and later the amount was used in times of emergencies or to give loan to fellow community members.

Later Assiya took a 3-day training from NRSP where the importance of savings, linkages and capacity enhancement were highlighted. As she lived in the rural area far away from the city and there was no school for poor children of the village, Assiya decided to open her own

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school because she was educated and school would also help in improving household income. She started her school in one room of her house with less than ten students. Assiya worked with determination and hard work to teach the students. Besides running the school and doing household chores, Assiya was also actively participating in the community mobilisation.

Assiya's financial condition improved and she was able to provide nutritious food to her family. Her personality improved and she became more contented and satisfied with her life. Assiya eventually became member of the LSO, started creating awareness in her village and in nearby villages for women empowerment. She became a community mobiliser and social worker. Assiya said, "Men of our village disapproved the formation of community institutions. They stopped their women from meeting us and they thought that the work we were doing was bad. The villagers looked down upon us and considered us rebellion and disobedient."

On the other hand, the number of students increased in her school and the mud room started becoming smaller to accommodate all the students. Assiya and her husband decided to move to a bigger place so that all the students could sit comfortably. "One day I went to my parents' house and discussed the plan of moving to a bigger place with them.

They were very happy to hear the news. They appreciated me for doing good work and helping the children get education. Few days later my father came to me and gifted me a piece of land. He told me to use the land for my house and shift there as soon as possible."

Assiya and her husband built their own house on the gifted land. They made three cemented rooms with a backyard keeping in mind the space that is needed to run the school. It took more than one year to complete the construction. They used their savings and the income Assiya was earning from the school.

Assiya has one room in personal use and the other two rooms are being used for the school. She now has more than fifty students in her school and her monthly income is Rs. 12,000 (USD 120). As member of the LSO, Assiya does a lot of social work and tries to foster linkages.

The LSO is very active and tries to form new COs on their own in uncovered areas of the union council. Assiya said: "We go to other areas to form new COs and to organise the people but they don't consider this work good. They look down on us and they refuse to meet us. The men in the village also call us names and say that we are working on foreign agenda. They call us disobedient and shameless. Our organisation is still very motivated and we try to explain the system to the women as well as to the men in the village."

Assiya is further planning to involve more people in her school and add two more teachers. The LSO that Assiya is involved with has been giving six months training session to young girls and women. They are taught to learn sewing and stitching at a vocational training centre and women are learning it to have a reliable source of income for themselves. LSO also distributed hens in the village. CIF loans are regularly given to the CO members. Assiya is very motivated and plans to do better and bigger things for her community members and her village. For her future, Assiya wishes to have a purpose built school with all the modern facilities. She is educating her four children and wants them to excel in their studies.

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Assiya concludes her story, “Just when I had hit rock bottom, hope appeared. Becoming member of CO was the life changing event. This provided me an opportunity to harness my own potential, potential that was always there but constrained. Support from fellow CO members and then from my own husband and family allowed me to play a significant role in improving our lives. More than that, through the forum of LSO, we also support other COs in the area. NRSP staff is always available to support and guide us. Now I advocate that social mobilisation is the catalyst for change.”

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