

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 5 of 6 – Hafsa Tabassum: A Local Social Activist

By Saba Saeed

Ms. Hafsa Tabassum, 21, was born and grew up in Bat Khaila Village of Malakand District. She was the eldest among her five sibling, three sisters and two brothers. Hafsa grew up in a small mud house of three rooms with her parents and her siblings. Her mother, like all the other women in the village, was uneducated but her father was a teacher in a school.



Hafsa’s father also practiced traditional medicine in the village. Even though the father had two occupations, the income was only sufficient to just to cover the cost of food. Hafsa’s parents could not afford to send her to school but that did not stop her from getting education. She studied at home and put her efforts to get a private degree of BA.

Hafsa was married at the age of 19. She started her married life in a five room mud house in a joint family system with fifteen people. Her husband was the eldest of eight siblings, seven brothers and one sister. Her husband was a policeman but his salary was not enough to provide for all the family members. The survival of the family was on the income of her husband and the pension of her father-in-law. Out of seven brothers, only one brother was working as a driver. Hafsa wanted to help her husband to support the family and improve the financial conditions, especially to ensure that all eat well.

The scenario changed for Hafsa in 2011 when a team of NRSP visited their village. She finally realised her true potential and has been working as a social activist since then. She said, “In

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2011, NRSP started to work here and I was invited like all other females of the village to attend the meeting. Social Organisers of NRSP told us that they came with a simple message that the people can help themselves to improve lives if they get organised. The focus of the meeting was on organising for self-help and savings.”

She further narrates, “The meeting and female Social Organisers influenced and impressed me a lot. That was the moment when I decided that one day I will also try to bring change in somebody’s life. I went back home and discussed it with my husband. The other villagers were talking behind our back and looked down on us for going to the meeting but I knew my husband would support me because he was educated. My husband supported me and encouraged me to attend the meetings.”

“I approached the NRSP team then and told them that we will form a CO in our neighbourhood. I came back to the locality and convinced other women of the village to become part of the organisation. I was chosen the President of our CO because the members thought I was the reason they gathered courage to be part of the organisation and attend meetings. In the meetings, we discussed savings and the Micro Investment Plan. We also discussed the issues of members and possible solutions.”

Hafsa went on to say that not all the villagers were in the favour of formation of CO. The men in the village stopped their women to attend the meetings. It was difficult to convince the villagers to become part of the organisation because of the environment of the area and lack of education. The men despised us and called us names. They thought we were dishonouring our families and going against our fathers and husbands. We had to hold meetings for men in the village to educate them that women’s CO is not against the religion but it is for the betterment of the people.

“The LSO Awaz Welfare Khawateen was formed in 2013 by the help of NRSP. When the team of NRSP left, the total coverage was 43 percent and there were 67 COs in the village along with 3 VOs. The LSO was formed by the team and there were initially 24 members. There was an introductory training of the LSO members which focused on three main areas including savings, capacity building and developing linkages.”

Hafsa in 2013 became the Manager of VO and later in the year became the Office Secretary of LSO. She has continued to work for the betterment of her community members and to empower the women in her village. She continued to go to other areas and nearby villages to spread awareness. She narrated, “I use to go to other villages where the women were not organised and inform them about the importance of the organisation and self-management. I also used to tell them how problems can be solved with little organisation and lives can be improved. I was able to make 18 more COs by myself.”

The community members have placed great trust in Hafsa Tabassum. She has actively contributed in the village development projects. She used the training well and developed linkages with various sources of support. She used her linkages and contacted the British Council who helped the LSO to get seven electric water coolers installed in village schools for children. With assistance from NRSP, a medical camp was set up in the village for women and

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children where latest machinery was including an ultrasound machine was arranged for diagnosis. Hafsa highlighted that due to lack of medical facilities and especially a maternity home in her village, women have to go to the city for treatment. Most of the time, due to lack of services, women die on the way to hospital. She was also able to increase the enrolment rate in school with the help of other LSO members. Hafsa said that there are now 74 more children studying in the school as compared to last year.

In 2015, Hafsa contacted the Forest Department of her area and set up a nursery in the village. Through her linkages and the help of LSO, she was able to get more than 1,500 plants and she sold them in the village and nearby areas. Hafsa was able to generate revenue of more than Rs. 100,000 (USD 1000) for herself in a few months. She said that by the end of 2017, she will use the earned money from nursery and set up cloth business in the village to further improve the financial conditions of her household.

LSO has been working on several development areas with major focus on education, health, clean water availability and child vaccination. The LSO is utilising their resources in the most efficient manner and empowering the women of the villages. Other than empowerment of the women, Hafsa along with her team is very determined in changing the lives of the rural people and bringing a positive change in their behaviour and lifestyle. Hafsa said that the household coverage has now reached to almost 80 percent of the village and along with the larger projects they also try to do small projects for the betterment of the people. In recent years, the LSO has done several cleanliness activities in the village in which they not only collected the garbage but also conducted awareness sessions about hygiene and cleanliness. Hafsa further informed that in every few months they conduct training sessions for the women to make them independent and also enhance their abilities and skills. The LSO also provides CIF to the needy people to set up a stable source of income and improve livelihoods. Hafsa said that they have provided loans to more than 90 women in the village to set up small businesses.

Hafsa has contributed to support members of the COs and LSOs. In return, the villagers have responded very positively and Hafsa said her aim is to bring improvement in the lives of the people. She has also involved her younger sisters to participate in the community work and wants them to get higher education. It is her dream to see all the children of her village getting education. Hafsa takes great pride in the development work that she has so far carried out and is determined to do much more. She said: "I have gained confidence from being part of the CO, VO and LSO and I have now become independent financially as well as mentally to take my own decisions. I have also become aware of my rights and I wish to pass it on to more women so they don't live their lives in misery. It is my mission to empower women and to educate them about their position and strength in the society."

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