



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



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). The Chief Minister of Sindh considerably agreed to support the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) to implement UCBPRP in Tharparkar district. Under UCBPRP, TRDP 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 13 of 15: Ms. Kashi

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Kashi is a 48-year-old woman who resides in Malji Jo Wandio village of Taluka Nagarparkar of Tharparkar district of Sindh. She was born and brought up in Mondro village of the same taluka. Remembering her childhood life, Kashi said, "Life was beautiful with my parents. We owned lands, a huge herd of livestock and a good house. My father had kept labourers for manual work. Some worked in



our farms while others looked after our livestock. I was the second child out of eight children (four brothers and four sisters). Our brothers attended a school, but for girls, we did not have any school. There was no concept of female education in the whole area. I used to spend my time with my mother and learned embroidery work from her. My mother made embroidery work for pillow cases and table cloths for household use and stayed at home looking after children and undertaking household chores. We lived within the four walls of our house. We did not lack anything, we had a good life. We had access to a variety of foods."

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Kashi's life was turned upside down when her father decided to marry her off at the age of 12 to a poor landless family. Kashi was married off to a man from Malji Jo Wandio. Her aunt (Father's sister) lived in the village who had searched for the groom in her village and convinced her brother to agree for the marriage. Her parents gifted her a cow and jewellery as part of her dowry.

The joint family of 11 members including her parents-in-law, grandparents-in-law, three sisters-in-law, her husband and his two brothers lived in two rooms; a mud hut and a straw hut. She remembered that there was a stove in a corner of hut to cook meals for the family. Unlike her parents, her in-laws were landless sharecroppers. Neither did they own any livestock, nor did they own any land. The family sold their labour and lived a subsistent life. Her husband and father-in-law did the labour work on agricultural farms and her brothers-in-law shepherded for a local livestock owing families. They received a meagre wage.

Kashi spoke about the hardships she faced after her marriage. She narrated, "I was expected to wake up before dawn to fetch water from the far-off dug-well. The family did not even own a donkey. We had to carry the loads of water on our heads and trek for 2-3 km. Due to heavy loads, I had a miscarriage in eighth month of pregnancy. All households from two villages shared the single dug-well. It often got crowded at the well and we usually had arguments over the turns. Therefore, my mother-in-law would suggest us to collect water before dawn. In the evenings, Thakkur community would collect first and then Rajput community's females filled their pots. We were expected to fill our pots last. One day, my community females were filling our pots and a Rajput female came late. We continued filling our pots and asked her to wait until we were done. She argued and threw our pots into the well. The fight intensified and females started to hit each other. The village females threw her in the well. This situation got worse and communities' menfolk also got involved. Then the local landlords decided for us to collect water late in the evening after Takkur and Rajput community females had fetched water."

She continued talking about her daily routines, "While the mother-in-law ground millet to make flour we would collect twigs to make fire for cooking breakfast. After having breakfast, the family's menfolk leave quickly towards fields or shepherding. Then, the females and children would eat the morning meal and joined our men in agricultural fields. After toiling well till the evening, we returned home and made a trek to fetch water and cooked the night meal for the family. While our men used to sleep early, we did the dishes, finished household chores and then slept later at night. We did not have electricity for lighting. We used kerosene as the primary source of lighting."

Kashi said that after three years of her stillborn, she had a daughter. Later, with the natural gap of two and half year between every child, she had nine more children; six daughters and three sons. She said that she gave traditional home based birth without any support of a midwife or a doctor. The family could not afford medical check-ups, and hence never visited any hospital in case of sickness. She narrated, "due to unavailability of healthcare centre in the village, the patients used to walk or travel for kilometres. If anyone got serious sickness, it would cost a lot; the people could die before they reached a hospital." She said that her

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father-in-law died of a natural death. The family did not have any cash in hand, and to fulfil the post death ceremonies, her husband took a loan of Rs. 150,000 (USD 1,500) from a landlord in Oanjo Wandhio village.

The family moved to the landlord's house to work on his land to compensate for the loans. She said, "We worked for the landlord for five years to compensate the loan. We did all the manual work on his agricultural farms for free. The landlord's wife would give us her used dresses that we wore and washed throughout the years."

After five years in Oanjo Wandhio, the family returned to their hamlet. She said, "When we returned here, it had not rained for a while and all the water reservoirs had dried up. We ran out of basic food. Our cow died because of lack of fodder in the drought years. My husband worked as a labourer and earned a single meal for the family daily. On the days when the family's menfolk did not get any work, we would starve. Our children cried out of hunger and it was so depressing to see young children sleeping hungry. We took loans from the local loan lenders to feed ourselves."

One day a team of officers visited the village and conducted a survey of households in the settlement, Kashi said. After a month of this visit, the officers revisited the village and asked females to get together in a common place. The village men after inquiring about their motives, allowed their females to meet the officers. The team had a female member too. She said, "Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) and Government of Sindh would support the local women, if they agree to get organised in Community Organisations (COs) and live in harmony." They introduced the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) in the village and requested the local women to form groups. Kashi said, "We were reluctant to meet them because we had never met strangers. Without a male escort we had never stepped outside for any activity apart from farming. We had a fear that the outsiders would harm us and take us away with them. However, with their frequent visits to the village, we got accustomed to them and their humble nature during their interaction in meetings tended us to build trust in them. I joined the CO that had 18 members. We selected our leaders, who attended training sessions and learned about conducting meetings. On return, they confidently conducted the CO meetings."

After CO formation, Kashi and her fellow members learned the importance of health and hygiene, savings and sanitation. In the CO meetings we were asked to come neat and clean, so we used to clean our dresses and washed ourselves before we attended the meetings." In one of the meetings Kashi learned about Community Investment Fund (CIF). She said, "The SO asked us to fill a Micro Investment Plan (MIP) for our households. In the plan, I showed interest of raising smaller livestock." She applied for and received a loan from the CIF of Rs. 20,000 (USD 200) in 2011. With 10,000 (USD 100) from the loan she bought two milk giving goats and spent the remaining amount on purchasing vegetable seeds. She said, "TRDP had already provided me with a water hand pump at my doorstep, I used its water for kitchen gardening. I grew tomatoes, carrots, spinach, *baingan* (aubergines) and cabbage in my yard. This added a variety of food in my family's plate and also we sold the vegetables in the market.

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Every week, my husband would sell vegetables and earn Rs. 2,000-3,000 (USD 20-30). I saved the amount from this earning and returned the CIF loan.”

In 2012, Kashi attended Traditional Birth Attendant's training provided by TRDP. After completion of the training, she became a midwife. She charged Rs. 100 -150 (USD 1-1.5) for a delivery. Depending on affordability of the pregnant women. She said that due to heavy workloads, pregnant women faced a lot of challenges. In their ninth month of pregnancy, they carried heavy loads of water on their heads and toiled in the field without daytime meals. This, in return, resulted in stillborn births and malnutrition in newly born babies. Kashi would suggest them good practices and also referred them to doctors in case of emergency. In the same year, Kashi and her fellow women passed a resolution to TRDP regarding drinking water issues in the settlement. TRDP, after conducting a survey, provided the settlement with a boring and water hand pumps at their doorsteps. “The water hand pumps have allowed us to enjoy good health and leisure time.”

Speaking about the benefits of CO, Kashi said that in 2014 TRDP provided the villagers with concrete houses through its Low Cost Housing Scheme. Kashi said that her house was damaged by the rains in 2011. TRDP conducted a survey in the village and identified the households that needed assistance. She said, “They provided me with two concrete-huts. The new shelter was much safer and secure for us.”

Kashi said that the family worked as tenants and lived a smooth subsistent life until Kashi's sister-in-law was found with cancer. She narrated, “It was the year 2013, and my sister-in-law took the swelling of her abdomen as pregnancy. I suggested her to see a doctor because for seven months, she didn't feel the movements of her baby. She used to have severe pain, but due to poverty situation she kept the word to herself. One day, both of us were working in agricultural field, I found her crying out in pain. I quickly packed our things and rushed towards home. We took her to a doctor who suggested her bed rest, and said that there was little swelling. We waited for 12 months, she didn't deliver. She kept crying. Again, we took her to another doctor, who found uterus cancer. She was not pregnant. She had cancer. We took loans from a local moneylender and pooled money for her surgery. The doctors charged Rs. 200,000 (USD 2,000) for the operation, but it was not successful, and she died of cancer. The interest on loans kept increasing. For two years, we worked as labourers on the moneylender's land to compensate for the loans, but we still remained in debt of the outstanding loan of Rs. 50,000 (USD 500). Then, I decided to take another loan from the CIF, and invest it in vegetable farming. I applied for and received Rs. 20,000 (USD 200) from the CIF in 2016. We grew onions on half land and millet on the other half land of a landowner. Luckily, we had good rains and the land has a tube well as well. Our harvest was beyond our imaginations. We sold a truck of onions and earned Rs 150,000 (USD 1500). We were finally able to get rid of the debt. We bought two goats and gifted to our daughter, who got married this year.”

Kashi also bought two sewing machines, one for herself and the other for her daughter. Her daughter had attended a vocational training, but she did not have a machine to utilise her

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tailoring skills. She charges Rs. 300 (USD 3) per suit. She is able to contribute to her household income.

Kashi gives a lot of credit to her CO for the transformation in her life. She said, "Without the support from TRDP, we would never have seen this change. And without formation of CO, we would not get this support. My husband is now convinced about the importance of CO, so he supports me immensely. Before, we were not allowed to move within the village, now I am able to travel to Umerkot, Diplo, Chilar, Chachroo, Islamkot and Nangarparkar without his escort. I share my experience with other COs/VOs/LSOs and encourage them to take benefit from TRDP and unlock opportunities to improve their lives." She said with a laughter, "I always tell my husband that he had never took me outside the village, but TRDP made me confident enough to explore whole of Sindh." Her husband commented with a smile, "That's true. I could not take her out. I agree that these females have brought change to our village. We didn't have light, they brought electricity supply through solar panels; we did not have water supply, these women took charge and installed hand pumps at the doorstep; we did not have good shelter, they brought a secure and durable shelter for us."

Kashi concludes her story, "Without organising ourselves, we could not access support from the Government of Sindh or from TRDP. Getting organised was essential and now we are well on the road to success for ourselves and for our children."

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