



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 15 of 15: Ms. Neeta

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Neeta is 40 years old, and was born and brought up in Mehuri Hingorja village Tharparkar district of Sindh. She was the second out of her seven siblings; five sisters and two brothers. Remembering her life with her parents, she said, "We did not own any land. We were sharecroppers. Most of the land in Thar is a desert, and production of crops depends variably on rainfalls during summers. She explained, "Majority of our Hindu community was landless, we depended on the rainfall to either work as tenants or daily wage based labourer for Muslim land owners. We used to cultivate millet in the summer months. In the lean months, my father would work as a labourer on a brick kiln to earn livelihood. In the years of no or less rainfalls, we used to migrate to barrage areas to find food."



She spoke about difficulties during seasonal mobility, "It used to be very difficult to travel in sweltering heat. Out of thirst and hunger, our camel would stop walking and we used to walk and fetched water from households in nearby settlements for ourselves and our livestock. After reaching barrage area, we used to live under the open sky for several days. We slept on

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



grounds in open space and practiced open defecation. On getting work in the fields of a land owner, we would collect twigs and pieces of plastics to build a temporary wall-less shelter in a corner of the field. The place was not safe and we often felt insecure.” She looked after her younger siblings while her parents toiled in the fields. She said that the family used to have minimal meals of red pepper or onion and sometime *rabri* (a mixture of milk or curd and boiled grains).

“Apart from droughts, there used to be problems of diseases in animals; it put strain on our livelihoods. We used to have a small herd of goats, a camel and a cow, and we used to migrate to escape and save our livestock from disease and hunger in droughts. Droughts used to be very harsh.” She remembers that the landlord’s wife would give her used dresses that Neeta and her mother worn and washed throughout the year. She said that at that time, there was not any concept of education in society. However, she had seen boys from rich families going to schools. She does not know at what age she was married off. However, she clearly remembers that a relative from her maternal family searched her groom from Aakli village of the same district. She remembers that by the time of her marriage, the family had lost their livestock due to a disease. Therefore, her parents gifted her a couple of dresses as a part of her dowry.

She said that her in-laws, a family of seven members included her grandmother-in-law, mother-in-law, her three-brothers-in-law and a sister-in-law, and they all lived in two mud huts that would leak in rainy season and the mud-wall eroded away in rains. Every year the family used to search for soil in other village, carried the loads of soil on their shoulders and heads to repair huts’ walls.

Like her parents, the family did not own any land but they possessed a herd of goats, five camels and two cows. The animal produced ample amount of milk that they used to sell in the village. She said that unlike many other families of the village, they lived a satisfying life having their own productive assets. At the time of marriage her husband learned skills of tailoring at a local tailor’s shop. Later, he worked at a garment factory in Karachi. Her brothers-in-law looked after the livestock.

Talking about her daily activities, she said that she was limited only to household chores. She would wake up before dawn and grinded wheat or millet to make flour. Then, she would put on fire in the stove, located in a corner of the hut, to cook flatbread for the breakfast. After feeding the men in her family, females would have breakfast and continue doing other household chores like cleaning, fetching water, and looking after children. Neeta said, “The only time we used to walk outside our hamlet was when we used to go out searching for firewood. Other than that, we often felt insecure because of harassment and attacks by outsiders and landowners. My mother-in-law accompanied me while going out to fetch water and collect firewood. It was later, when my brothers-in-law got married, we sisters-in-law would go out to collect twigs.”

Neeta had her first child, a son, within the first year of her marriage. The other eight children followed with the gap of one year between every child. She said that she gave traditional

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



home births to all her children without any support from a doctor. “Our children’s lives were unpredictable. Just like our goats, children were often attacked by diseases. We needed to have more children to support us in our daily chores, and cattle rearing.

She was expecting her fourth child, when her mother-in-law passed away. She said, “My mother-in-law died a natural death, but grandmother-in-law passed away in the same year due to grief and sadness of her daughter-in-law’s death. The consecutive deaths and their post death ceremonies required money. We sold our camels and fulfilled the obligatory rituals. Also, earlier in brothers-in-laws’ marriages, we had spent a large chunk of resource endowments including livestock and cash. These social obligations resulted in asset erosion and growing family started to face income shortages.”

She said that after a year of her mother-in-law’s death, the extended family decided to split. In inheritance her husband received a mud hut and a goat. While her husband continued working in the garment factory in Karachi, she looked after the children and undertook her household responsibilities. She said, “He was paid per every piece he stitched. Every month, he would send a meagre amount that I used to hand over to my brothers-in-law to purchase food ration for my family.” She continued, “Experiencing obstacles, my husband emphasised on our children’s education. He suggested me to cut down the household consumption and spend on children’s education. I sent my sons to the nearby government school, where education was free of cost. However, for girls, our village was unsafe. We preferred our unmarried young daughters to stay at home and learn household chores.”

“The situation for girls’ mobility changed for worse when one of our Hindu community’s 14 years old girl was kidnapped one midnight. The kidnapper was the landowner’s son.” Like other families of the community, her parents worked for the landowner. The family had been working for generations on their lands.

She narrated, “While that seemed like any other day, but it changed the fate of whole community. The community’s men got together and begged for the young girl, but the kidnapper warned and threatened the community. He forcibly converted her religion and married her. This agitated our community and they started to argue against violence. In return, the local landowners got united and filed an FIR against our community. Soon after our community members found themselves in courts, for nothing. They accused our community of theft and other crimes. The hamlet converted into a haunted place for us. Fights aroused and it became extremely insecure for us. We could not relieve the distressing environment, and could not stop them and watched our daughters taken away right in front of our eyes. It was so cruel.”

“With despair and pain our men searched out for new places to migrate. Neighbouring villages’ Hindu families also got terrified and angry. We could not think of having a future in the place. Landlords were influential and we were dependent on them. We were poor and worked as farmers on their land. They could crush and exploit us whenever they wanted.”

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



Speaking on the matter, Neeta's husband said, "We informed the local police about our planned migration to seek their support regarding the security of our females during shifting our belongings to Mithi. On February 28, 2010, seeking safety at 2:00 am, 71 families left Aakli for Mithi. In Mithi, we had arranged a large tent in a deserted place, where all families took refuge. Observing the incident and need, TRDP provided us with food for a month. Young and active members of the community spread the news in Karachi and other parts of Tharparkar to seek support from Hindu community. The Meghwar community gathered Rs. 1, 800,000 (USD 18,000) to support the refugees. They allocated each family a plot of land to build huts. On my plot I built a temporary shelter." The new settlement, Thar Murk Wandh, was later registered in the national revenue department as a village in the Mithi taluka.

Once the families settled in their houses, TRDP revisited the newly formed settlement to conduct a survey. Neeta remembered, "After a month to the survey, TRDP officials revisited our hamlet. All families from the village gathered at a common place. They revealed our Poverty Score Cards (PSCs) and my score was nine (9) out of 100. In the gathering, one of the staff members told us about Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP). He said that through this programme the Government of Sindh will work only with the females to reduce poverty. To get support to reduce poverty and improve livelihood, women have to come together, get organised and set up committees and groups. Our men were familiar with the TRDP's work and also they had provided us emergency aid at the time of forced migration, so we confidently agreed to form groups to get support from them. We were 71 families in the settlement. We formed three groups as Community Organisations (COs)."

In 2010, Neeta became a member of a CO, comprising 20 members. The CO members named the newly formed CO as CO-Suraj Paro. They collectively decided and selected a president and a secretary. She said, "Since the formation of our CO, we have been meeting every month. In the beginning, our meetings were mediated with the help of a Social Organiser by TRDP, later our leaders received training about meeting management and record keeping, they got accustomed with the regulations of the meeting, and now we conduct meetings without any hesitation. As all of us [women] were illiterate, we could not read and write. My husband, who, after migration had left his job and stayed home, volunteered to keep record for all three COs in the village."

With the formation of COs, females' perspective of life and society started to change. "Previously in the community we were made aware of dangers. As soon as our daughters were seven or eight years old, we were instructed on how careful we have to be while working in fields or fetching water and collecting firewood. Our elders did the same for us. In a way we had internalised this concept that females must stay confined to the household. However, our participation in the CO meetings gradually erased this fear. We started to come out from the boundaries of houses and talked to outsiders, the TRDP staff that included both Hindus and Muslims. We realised that not every Muslim man is harmful to us. We learned to speak up, share our ideas, and learnt about savings, health and hygiene, and importance of childcare and vaccinations against diseases like Polio. This platform became a source of gaining knowledge for us, who knew nothing other than household chores."

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



At household level, Neeta was quite poor. Her husband worked as a labourer at a tailor's shop in the market. He earned a meagre wage depending on the number of orders they received. She said, "It was painful to see our children sleeping with empty stomach. Until my husband received some money from his work, we had to wait."

In this dire poverty situation, when TRDP's field staff introduced Community Investment Fund (CIF), Neeta showed her desire of raising goats. In 2010, she applied for and received a loan of Rs. 12,000 (USD 120) from the CIF. With this money she purchased two milk giving goats. The goats produced more kids. The family sold the goat-kids and returned the loan. After returning the first CIF loan, she applied for another loan. "Goats' milk improved our nutrition and it allowed me to feed my children when I had nothing to cook at home," she said.

In 2011, she received another loan of Rs. 20,000 (USD 200) from CIF. With Rs. 12000 (USD 120) from this money, she bought a sewing machine for her husband, who could stitch clothes, but because he did not possess the requisite capital, he could not utilise his skills properly. She said, "Having owned a machine along with a paddle to work efficiently, made it easier for my husband to earn more. He stitched both males' and females' suits and charged Rs. 350 (USD 3.5) and Rs. 400 (USD 4) respectively per suit. Neeta said, "When he used to take rest after stitching two dresses a day, I used the machine to stitch *rilli* cases for the villagers. I pooled the money that I earned from stitching *rilli* cases for villagers and bought more fabric to make the *rilli* cases to sell in the market. I charged Rs. 500- 1000 (USD 5-10) per *rilli* case depending on the cost and quality of fabric."

In the same year, heavy rains hit the village and damaged the family's shelter. The family took refuge in an emergency tent. She said, "We lived in the tent along with other families whose shelters had fallen. After 15 days TRDP conducted a survey and identified us as a beneficiary to receive shelters. Through its Low Cost Housing Scheme, TRDP provided me with a concrete shelter comprising two rooms. We cooked and lived in one room and the other we used for our work. My husband continued stitching clothes, and I contributed by making *rilli* cases for sale."

Gaining the confidence from the benefits of CIF, she applied and received another loan of Rs. 25,000 (USD 250) in 2013. She purchased fabric to make *rilli* cases for sale. She explained, "I purchased the fabric in kilograms. It costed me Rs. 200 – 250 (USD 2-2.5) per kg of fabric. With 1Kg of fabric, I made two *rillis*. I sold each *rilli* for Rs. 700-1000 (USD 7-10) depending on the quality of fabric. I spent this money on my children's education and household needs. Also, I saved money in monthly meetings in the CO account. With the improved household income by CIF, we regained the lost hope and confidence in our children's future. We sent the elder ones to schools in Mithi."

Further, Neeta and her fellow CO members attended vocational trainings provided by TRDP. She said, "I learned stitching clothes in a two-week training session. Now, I help my husband in stitching female dresses at home. Apart from tailoring, TRDP taught us how to dye cloth and block print on fabric. We, CO members, make block prints whenever we get any order."

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



Although Neeta and her fellow CO members had been improving their livelihoods and awareness through CO meetings, they were yet concerned about their younger children's education because after migration their children had dropped out of their schools. National Commission for Human Development provided the community a school for few months, but it was shut down as the project was for short term. The older ones could walk to town and attend schools but it was difficult for the young children. She explained, "We did not have a single school for our children in the whole settlement. Through the CO meetings, we had learned that we must consult the concerned departments of government to provide us with basic facilities. Leaders from all COs met the Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) and Deputy Commissioner (DC) to discuss the problem regarding education in the settlement. They positively answered and provided two schools in the village, where our children are studying now."

Similarly, drinking water was another problem for the villagers. Neeta said, "We did not have water in the new settlement. Every month we used to purchase a water tank worth Rs. 2500 (USD 250). We raised the issue in our VOs and passed a resolution to the MPA and Chairman of the Union Council. They provided a water supply after an agreement on the monthly fee of Rs. 200 (USD 2) per household. Now, every household in the settlement has access to drinking water."

Neeta said with a pride on her face, "Being the record keeper of our Village Organisation (VO), my husband gained confidence to speak up. He met the political parties to discuss the problems that the villagers were facing on daily basis. Also, observing his tireless services for village people developed trust in him. Now, he has been selected as general councillor to identify people's problems and discuss it with the chairman of the UC. Previously, the subsidy dealers sold the wheat out in the market, but now he manages and vigilantly distributes the monthly wheat subsidy (50 kg per household) and ensures the equitable distribution of the resource allocated to the households in the UC."

Further, her husband attended training sessions on Disaster Risk Management (DRR) and works as a Community Resource Person. He commented, "Earlier, we did not know how to reduce the severity of hazards. Heavy rains, floods, and fire used to make heavy damages that left us with nothing other than vulnerability. These hazards eroded our assets that we accumulated by extreme hard work. To rebuild our household economies to previous levels, it took us decades.

The sudden fires in our huts cascaded all our endowments leaving us under the open sky. Now, as we are trained about risk management, we can at least reduce risks of fire and lessen the impacts of natural disasters. TRDP has provided us with a kit to mitigate the impacts of hazards. The community is well aware of warning systems and we get together in preparing emergency supplies in need." She narrated, "Recently, a hut got on fire in our neighbourhood. The community got together and evacuated the neighbouring families from their huts. We, the trained members, used the kit and techniques that we learned in our trainings and extinguished the fire. We saved the whole village from getting on fire. Earlier, when a hut got

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>



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



on fire, it used to spread and the whole village would turn to ashes. DRR training enabled us to extinguish the fire immediately.” She concluded with a laughter, “The fire brigades arrived after 30 minutes, when we had already extinguished the fire.”

Further, talking about the benefits and achievements that her family gained through the CO, Neeta said, “This CIF turned out to be a significant source of resource generation for my family. Several times, when I needed cash for educational expenses of my children, I have sold the goats’ kids and fulfilled the needs. Also, we consumed the milk produced at home. This has saved the money that earlier we used to spend on purchasing milk from the market.”

She said with a smile on her face, “Now, we eat good quality food and wear good clothes. Taking initiative from the CIF loan, I have accumulated more assets for my family. Now, I own a herd of 20 goats, five sheep, and a donkey. I have a comfortable house including two concrete rooms, six concrete huts, a kitchen and three washrooms. We have access to water and electricity. We have electric fans and a refrigerator. Above all, my biggest assets are my sons. My elder two sons have completed their Bachelors in Arts. Both own motor bikes. The eldest one now works as a clerk in the government hospital. He has also learned dispenser’s work and completed a diploma from a technical college. Now, he earns Rs. 15,000 (USD 150) as his monthly salary. The second son, who has also completed his BA, works in the police. As a monthly salary, he earns Rs. 25,000 (USD 250). Other five children are studying in grade 12, 5th, 4th, 3rd and 1st respectively.”

Neeta concluded her story, “Before, we lived in poverty; we lived in hunger. Besides hunger, we lived a silent life. We felt insecure, and fear of kidnappings and harassment cases made us confined to the boundaries of our household. Being a part of the CO transformed our lives from nothingness to prosperity. The CO is a platform that prepares us to avail opportunities to improve our lives through material gains and knowledge acquisition. Today, we [women] are doing things which we never thought of. We led our men to ensure our basic rights as education and water. Through the CO, TRDP supported us in demanding our needs. We have learned to speak up. On household level, CIF allowed me to utilise the existing skills in income generation and it also diversified the sources of income. The enhanced income allowed me to educate my children and now I live a happy and secure life with all the basic needs available at my home. I am grateful to TRDP for guiding us towards this respectful, prosperous, and dignified life.”

Disclaimer: This Publication is made possible with the support of Rural Support Programme Network (RSPN) and Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP). The content is the sole responsibility of the RSPN and TRDP and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Sindh.

December 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success IV – UCBPRP Case Studies from Tharparkar District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Road-to-Success-IV-UCBPRP-Case-Studies-from-Tharparkar-District.pdf>