



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 5 of 15: Ms. Lachhman Bai

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Lachhman Bai is 35 years old and lives in village Lasio of Taluka Diplo of the Tharparkar district. She has lived a very difficult and painful life full of agonising events, losses and shocks. She was born in a poverty stricken, landless family of village Sadio. The only productive asset this family had was their labour. The family worked as farm labourers to make their livelihoods and meet survival needs. Her parents



worked as farm labourers during the four-month rainy season for the local land owners. During the other dry months, her father worked as a brick layer at brick kiln on meagre wages. Lachhman remembers that her father worked very hard, and never took off a single day from his work; he knew that his family depended on his wages. Her mother, suffering from chronic tuberculosis continued to work and made embroidery items for fellow villagers and charged

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Rs. 10-50 (USD 0.05 - 0.010) per piece. Given this situation, many a time the family members went hungry.

Lachhman was the third of her five siblings; three brothers and two sisters. Her elder brother supported the father in brick making. He started working on the brick kiln at an early age. The younger brother suffered from polio and both of his legs were paralysed. She said that the family suffered further misery when he developed urinary infection. Since the family could not afford his treatment; the pain of poverty and disease was suffered quietly. She stated, "Our situation was so bad, our poverty so dire that it seemed that we were cursed by *Bhaghwaan* (God). At times of drought and food shortages, we relied on the charity provided by Muslim land owners in the neighbourhood. We used to beg for food. This is how we just managed to survive." Observing the land owners' children getting education in the nearby government school, Lachhman's youngest brother also desired to attend school, however he was not allowed since the family needed him to work at the brick kiln and to contribute small amount to family's income.

Lachhman also began to make her small contribution to the family's income by learning the art of embroidery from her mother, as well as working on the farm fields during the rainy season. Lachhman remembers that she was still a teenager when her parents decided for her to get married to a man in Lassio village of the same taluka. At the time of marriage, her husband's family included her father-in-law and her husband. The family lived in a single room mud-hut. In a corner of this hut they had a traditional mud cooking stove and few utensils. Like other huts in the village, there was no electricity, running water or a toilet. Lachhman remembers that she used to do the family's laundry near a dug-well far-off from the village. There was no awareness about sanitation and they practiced open defecation.

As her mother-in-law had already passed away, soon after her marriage Lachhman had to take all the responsibilities for undertaking household chores. Lachhman would wake up at 3 am to walk across several sand-dunes to collect water from a dug-well. Along with her neighbours, she made the water-fetching trip twice a day, including in the sweltering summer months. She said that each load carried consisted of three pots, two, balanced on head and one carried on her hip. Each trip took about two hours. She said, "We used to leave the young children at home when going to fetch water from the dug-well. One day when we returned from the water trip, we found that one of our neighbour's child had killed himself playing on a swing." Talking about the scarcity of water, Lachhman said, "Fetching water was the most difficult task for us. The dug-well, located far-off from the village was the sole source of drinking water for several settlements. In the years of drought or less rainfall, the water level used to fall even further. It required three to four women to pull a single bucket of water. Besides the physical strains and stresses, this also took a big portion of our productive daytime." She continued with a laughter, "Each drop of water used to be very precious for us. We used to slap our kids if they wasted a single glass of water."

Lachhman remembers that in the initial years of her married life, she did not have much workload. While her husband lived in another far off village where he worked as a bricklayer at a brick kiln, she only looked after her father-in-law and her two milk-giving goats that her

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parents gifted her as part of her dowry. She did not have much to do. She said that she often thought of doing some embroidery work, but she never had courage to ask her husband to bear the cost of inputs. She had her first son after two years of her marriage. Later, with the gap of two years between each child, she had six more kids; three daughters and three sons. She said that she also had a miscarriage for an unknown reason. She said that due to lack of basic health facilities in the village, patients were usually forced to walk to towns to see a doctor.

Lachhman said, "For us women, it was even more difficult to walk when in labour. I gave birth to my children at home. While I was pregnant with my third child, I suffered from Hepatitis and my health condition deteriorated. First, I did not have a male escort to visit a doctor in town. I suffered with pain for two weeks. Secondly, we did not have any telecommunication system to make a call to my husband in an emergency. I sent my message through a fellow villager informing him about my sickness. This person reached my husband after four days. My husband, then, took leave from the kiln owner and returned to the village. My condition was extremely bad. He did not have cash in hand, so he sold our assets, the goats we had, and took me to Mithi for treatment. Every time I suffered from sickness, I used to delay my treatment for weeks and months waiting for my husband to come back and take me for treatment."

Lachhman continued talking about the local culture and customs where women's mobility was severally limited and only allowed with a family's male escort. She explained, "As my husband worked far from the village, I usually missed family gatherings on social events and festivals, and marriage ceremonies. Without him escorting me, I would not visit my parents. I remained confined to my home, looking after my children and undertook the household work. My husband would buy ration every month, and of course I never visited a shop even. In the cases of urgent need, the local shopkeeper did not supply ration items without the consent of the family's male member. Only men dealt with the money matters."

Lachhman said that with the growing family size, the household's poverty situations worsened. She explained, "Initially, My husband and I had enough food to eat and had enough space to live. My husband earned Rs. 500 (USD 5) per month. He kept Rs. 250 (USD 2.5) from his earning for his daily expenses and with the remaining Rs. 250 (USD 2.5) he used to buy sufficient ration for us. The ration included some kilos of *Bajra* (millet), *Basar*, and onions. Our diet included a *Bajra roti* (flat bread) and smashed onions mixed with chillies. When children were born and they were growing up, we needed more food to feed them, clothes to wear and needed more space to live. We started to have food shortages at home. Also, the prices of food items increased making our lives very difficult. A minor health problem in children could result in income shocks to the family. We started to rely on borrowing money to meet food shortages and to deal with health shocks."

This poverty ridden situation of Lachhman's family began to change for the better when the Sindh Governemnt launched the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) in Tharparkar district in partnership with the Thardeep Rural Development Programme in 2000. Lachhman said, "It was about seven years ago, when my neighbour came

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home to invite me for a gathering in an open space in the neighbourhood. He said, 'Some guests are visiting the village and they want to meet the village womenfolk.' Upon their arrival, I joined my neighbours to meet the guests. One of the TRDP staff members stood up and spoke about the Government of Sindh's new poverty reduction programme and said that they will work only with poor rural women of Tharparkar district. He also said that the women have to come together, get organised and set up their own *Tanzeem* (organisation). TRDP will then support the *tanzeem* to help women improve their families' lives and livelihoods. Some of the village men were familiar with the work of TRDP therefore they readily allowed us women to get organised with TRDP's support. Our village has six *Mohallas* (settlements) and we were able to set up six *tanzeems*, one in each settlement." In 2010, Lachhman became a member of a newly fostered Community Organisation (CO). While talking about the initial days of CO formation, Lachhman said that her CO comprised 15 women.

The CO was named Khushbu (fragrance). She said, "We selected Radha as our president because she was vocal and trustworthy. Initial meetings were mediated with the help of field staff from TRDP. We used to be very shy, even amongst ourselves. For examples, many members would not say their names out loud. We used to cover our faces and hesitated to say anything. Before CO meetings, we used to discuss amongst ourselves about how and what to say, but in meetings we would forget everything. The TRDP staff, mediating the meetings, did not give up hope. They continued to encourage us. With the passage of time, we developed some confidence and CO members began to speak. TRDP also trained Radha on how to conduct the CO meetings and record-keeping. The initial meetings started with simple conversations and discussions about benefits of working together in harmony. Then, we would discuss our problems and potential solutions. We gradually learned many things including importance of savings, health and hygiene, child care, children's education, time management, sanitation and Community Investment Fund (CIF)."

Once TRDP had conducted the poverty scorecard census, it shared the scores with households. Lachhman said her household's poverty score was 10 out of 100. She recalled, "After receiving my household poverty score, I was asked to identify an income generating activity, and the resources for this activity would be provided as a loan from CIF. Since I lacked confidence, I refused to take the CIF loan option. I was afraid that my income generating activity would fail and I would not be able to return the CIF loan. Given my dire poverty and lack of confidence, TRDP agreed to give me an Income Generating Grant (IGG). In December 2010, I received IGG of Rs. 15,000 (USD 150). With this amount I bought three goats from a local livestock seller. The goats produced more kids. This small grant had become a significant source of income for us. We raised income by selling male goats."

Lachhman added, "The summer rains were beneficial for our goat herd, as this meant there was plenty of grass for grazing. However, rains also damaged our mud huts. The walls of our mud hut eroded away in the heavy rains of 2011. The roof leaked and the floor became muddy. We could not even light up fire to cook our meals. Some of the neighbours' huts collapsed and they lived under the open sky. We discussed this major problem at our CO meetings and passed a resolution to TRDP seeking its guidance and support. TRDP's staff and some engineers visited the village and surveyed the hamlet. Under the Government of Sindh's

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Low Cost Housing Scheme, new concrete huts were constructed for us. My family was provided with two concrete huts. Now, we do not feel insecure about our housing. The floor and walls are made up of cement. We have windows for ventilation.”

Lachhman further took benefits from vocational trainings provided by TRDP. She explained, “I attended a two-week long training session, where I learned the art of embroidery, colour combinations to make beautiful *rillis* (traditional floor/wall covering), applique items including bed sheets, table clothes and pillow cases. I also learned traditional Sindhi cap making. I started making Sindhi caps on orders. The villagers provided me with inputs and designs, and I charged labour cost of Rs. 150 (USD 1.5) per cap. I pooled earnings from cap making and bought inputs for *rillis*. Each *rilli* costed me Rs. 500-600 (USD 5-6) and I sold the finished product for Rs. 1000-1200 (USD 10-12).” This also enabled her to save some money with CO. She said, “Previously I used to save Rs. 5-10 (USD 0.05-0.10) in the CO account, with the increase of income I started to save Rs. 50 (USD 0.5).”

Furthermore, Lachhman and her fellow CO members discussed the problem of drinking water at their CO meetings. After a meeting at village level, they passed a resolution to TRDP. Lachhman said that TRDP provided them with technical and financial support in installing water hand pumps, and now every household has access to drinking water supply through hand pumps. Lachhman spoke about the benefits of having access to water at her doorstep: “Water hand pumps have made our lives much easier, drudgery has been reduced significantly. We do not carry heavy loads of water that used to put pressure on our heads and necks worsening our health conditions, anymore. Now, we utilise the saved productive time in making embroidery items for sale. Also, we take good care of our children as we do not make the lengthy walk to fetch water any more. We ensure our children’s schooling and hygiene. My eldest son works at a petrol pump for livelihood. Due to poverty we could not proceed with his education after grade eight. The second son works at a water filtration plant in Karachi. One of my daughters has completed her grade eight and does the embroidery work staying at home. We could not continue her education because we do not have a high school in the village and unlike boys, it is hard for girls to walk to other villages to attend high school. The younger three children attend the government school and we have plans of continuing their higher education.”

She said, “With the increase in household income through livestock rearing and embroidery work, we are able to accumulate more assets. We own a solar panel for lighting. It has saved the expenditures on fuel. We have batteries for use at night. Our children do their homework and we make embroidery at nights as well. Further, we own a V-wireless telephone to communicate with my husband and children. Now, we can easily communicate and send our messages in case of emergencies. Also, livestock has made us cope up with the income shocks. In cases of emergencies, instead of taking interest based loans from the local loan lenders, we sell a goat and meet our cash needs. I send my children to the nearby government school while my husband looks after the animals. Now, I have a herd of 50 goats, worth several lacs (lac equals Rs 100,000 – USD 1,000). Improved income flows have led to improvement in the family’s diet. Now my family has access to variety of food items that we purchase from the market.”

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Lachhman concluded her story with some pride, “After becoming aware and joining *Tanzeem*, I have gained confidence and can share my ideas and opinions. Earlier, no one asked us about anything; we were unheard at home and invisible in the community. Without any question, we used to eat whatever our men provided. Now, I go to the market and select and purchase items of my choice. I purchase my food, utensils, dresses, jewellery, shoes and other household necessities. My sons also hand over money to me to spend on household needs. Every month I go to Mithi for purchasing ration for the household. I can now bargain on prices while purchasing. I have built this confidence only through the CO meetings. If we did not get organised, my life would not have been changed. Government of Sindh and TRDP have shown us pathways out of poverty. We have witnessed a quiet revolution in our lives. Indeed, as wise people say, unity and organisation are powerful, very powerful. I know as I have directly witnessed and experienced its impact.”

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