



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 7 of 15: Ms. Amran

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Amran is a 35-year-old woman, who was born in Bhador village in Diplo Taluka of Tharparkar district. She was the fifth out of her 10 siblings; six sisters and four brothers. The family was tenant, who farmed a local landowner's fields on share basis. The family used to farm the fields during the summer rainy season. For the other eight months her father worked as *Dhanaar*, one who shepherded others' livestock on a wage.



Her mother made *rillis*, traditional floor and wall coverings. Amran also worked on farms. She said that she attended a local government school, where education was free of cost. After her school time, she supported her mother in house hold and farm activities. She passed her grade five from the primary school and could not fulfil her desire for higher education due to absence of a middle or high level school in the village.

After she completed her grade five, her mother insisted that Amran learn embroidery work and *rilli* making. Amran said, "Although I was not into *rilli* making, my mother taught me embroidery work. I was finally able to make embroidered items for my dowry." In 2005, when
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she was 19 years old, Amran's parents arranged her marriage to a man from Onehrio Wachhra village. She said that her mother's sister, who resided in this village, brought the proposal of her neighbour for Amran. She said that her in-laws lived in a joint family of 10 members; parents-in-law, the elder brother-in-law and his family, a sister-in-law and a brother-in-law younger to her husband. Her husband was the third among his siblings. They lived in three mud huts with thatched roofs.

Like Amran's parents, the new family was also landless and sharecroppers. They grew millet in the monsoon season and looked after livestock for the owners. The livestock owners paid a fixed wage. Also, her husband worked as a labourer in other Talukas. She said that he did loading and unloading trucks of crops during the harvest seasons and usually was paid a decent amount. In the cases of emergency, the family took loans from the local money lenders on interest and repaid when her husband sent the money. Also, they owned a cow and two goats that produced milk. Amran said that they lived a subsistence oriented life.

Soon after her marriage, Amran took responsibility of household chores and also worked in the farms. She explained, "Although we divided our daily chores in the joint family, daily work was not easy. We used to wake up early in the morning to grind 2-3 kg of millet with a mechanical floor mill to make floor for bread. This process took her at least 2-3 hours. Then I, along with my two sisters-in-law, would collect twigs and straws to put on fire and make *roti* (flat bread) for breakfast. After feeding the family, we made a 3 km walk to fetch water for household consumption. Besides physical strain of heavy loads of water, our four hours of daylight productive time was spent on water fetching. Then, we would join our men in the fields. After working till evening we would return and boil rice for meal at night. We did not have access to electricity. We used kerosene as primary source of lighting."

Amran gave birth to a baby after one year of her marriage. She said that the other three children, two daughters and son, were born with the gap of one year between each child. She said that she was not aware of family planning. She explained, "We just thanked Bhagwaan for blessing us with children. Usually it was perceived as good to have more children because children's lives were unpredictable. Infants' death rate was really high because of malnutrition and diseases. Either children were stillborn or died at very young age. Also, nobody in the village, until recently, knew about the importance of gaps between child births. In sickness, we relied on homemade remedies. We did not have any health facility in our village or nearby, and medical expenses in other towns would exhaust our income in many ways. First, we always required a male escort while going out from the village. This would cut down the daily wage of the family members that was earned from the labour. Secondly, the doctor's fee and medicines used to be expensive. We could not afford and usually took loans to buy medicines. Therefore, treatments used to bring more vulnerability to the family."

She further talked about hardships that her family usually faced. She said that the straw roofing of their huts leaked during the rains and mud wall eroded away in monsoons. They had to live on the muddy floor. They often stayed outside under the open sky when their huts fell down. And when it did not drizzle enough in monsoon, they faced famine-like situation. The family would starve during droughts.

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Amran reminisced, “My family was not the only one facing all vulnerabilities. All villagers, whose source of income was nothing other than labour work, suffered equally. And for generations faced the same situation and somehow managed to survive through the hardships. Then, one day a team from the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) visited us and our lives started to change for the better. Our men asked us to get together in the nearby government school building. All females left their chores and attended the gathering. Three TRDP field staff were there. They introduced TRDP’s Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP). They said, Sindh government has planned to work with the women of the village and the programme was aimed at improving the standards of living. We felt good. Some of our men, who had heard about TRDP and the government’s programme, encouraged us to participate. On their second visit, we attended the gathering again and learned that we had to make Community Organisations to get support from TRDP.”

“We tried to understand and follow what the field staff said. The field staff kept visiting the village more frequently. With frequent discussions, we learned that we, women, had to get organised in groups, that is, what they called Community Organisations (CO) to get support to improve our lives and livelihoods. Once we got organised, they encouraged us to attend the weekly meetings. We selected our president and a treasurer, who received training and conducted CO meetings afterwards. Our meetings had the rule from the beginning that we have to sit on the floor in circle, so that everyone’s face could be seen. We were not confident in the beginning. When they asked us questions, we shied away and hesitated to answer. Even though we knew the answers, we covered our faces and refused to answer. Each of us was heard even when we had nothing to say other than our name. In the beginning, we did not even know how to speak. We learned to speak in turns and respected others’ opinions. With the passage of time, we learned about many things, including saving money, importance of household sanitation, child care, health and hygiene and family planning.”

In 2010, Amran became a member of a CO that consisted of 25 women. The newly formed CO was named as *Roshni* (light) because the members thought that their CO would bring light into their lives. “In the meetings, we discussed about common problems,” She said, “Our main problem was our poor household situations. How could we think of our community’s problems when we were uncertain of having next meal? At the household level, we suffered from poverty. We discussed it with the field officers and asked them to support us. They informed us about Community Investment Fund (CIF) and each household was given with result from the Poverty Scorecard survey that TRDP had conducted. My household poverty score was 10. They asked us to fill a form (micro investment plan – MIP) and mention what we desired to do to improve household economic conditions. In the form, I mentioned the desire for raising livestock. Then, I applied for a loan of Rs. 12,000 (USD 120) in 2011. My husband bought two milk giving goats with this money. My father-in-law shepherded the goats with the herd of the livestock that he looked after for a local livestock owner. I repaid the CIF loan little by little on monthly basis, whenever my husband sent some money. The goats produced more kids and we sold the kids to fulfil our needs.”

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Amran said, "The heavy rains in 2011 severely hit our fragile huts. The rain water eroded the mud walls and two huts fell down. All family members lived in one hut that was also insecure. We collected bushes and straws and made a temporary shelter for our children and the elders slept under the open sky. The rainy season brought us new hope and although we worked in agricultural fields, we [CO members] managed to meet. We shared the problem of housing with the TRDP staff. After a survey of the settlement, they provided us with two room concrete shelters. I and my husband also registered our names and received two rooms for my family. Now, we have two-concrete huts and a latrine. Now I have my house, with windows for ventilation; it is safer and durable."

While their housing scheme was in process, the CO members passed a resolution for renovation of the primary school building. The heavy rains had damaged their children's school and it was no longer safe for them to attend classes under the damaged roof. Amran said, "TRDP has never disappointed us. Soon after we passed the resolution, they provided financial support and we renovated the building. Now, the community children, including my two daughters attend the school."

Amran narrated, "The field staffs' proactive response towards our development, fostered trust in ourselves and CO. We punctually attended the monthly meetings and each one of us saved Rs.10 (USD 0.1) every month. In the meetings, we kept discussing our problems. We raised the problem of drinking water in the village. We had to walk 2-3 km to fetch a single bucket of water. Also, carrying the loads for a long time was even more exhausting. We passed a resolution regarding lack of access to drinking water in our hamlet. TRDP provided with double casing borings near houses. Each household is now provided with a hand pump. We use this water for household consumption and for livestock as well. Above all, it saved our precious time that we used to spend on fetching water. We are also able to utilise the saved time productively. We make embroidery and look after our children well."

In 2012, after gaining more confidence from the benefits of CIF that she took earlier, Amran applied for another loan. She received Rs. 15,000 (USD 150). With the money she bought three goats. She said that she returned the outstanding loan by selling the kids produced by her older goats. While her husband continued his work, she looked after her goats and also attended a 15-day long tailoring training by TRDP. Amran said, "Now, I stitch dresses for the village women. I charge Rs. 120 - 200 (USD 1.2- 2) depending on the design of the dress. Further, TRDP provided us with solar panels and a battery free of cost. Each household is provided with the set of solar panel, battery, wires and three bulbs. We, now, have access to electricity for light."

Amran said with a deep sigh, "My husband passed away in an accident in 2014. My family's well-being was just improving and I had nurtured new hopes for my children. All hopes were shattered with his death. At the time I felt helpless. He left me behind with old parents-in-law and my young children. However, now I am empowered enough to meet the family's livelihood needs. I can use my tailoring skills for livelihood. I own a herd of 10 goats that produce milk adding nutrition to my family's diet. In the cases of emergencies, I usually sell the goat kids and fulfil the needs. If TRDP had not organised us, we would not have a good

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shelter to live, access to potable water and electricity for light. The CIF through the CO enabled me to accumulate productive assets, goats. I sold two goat kids and purchased a sewing machine. The tailoring training empowered me enough to earn livelihood and become self-sufficient. I am grateful to TRDP for empowering me to fulfil the family's needs independently.”

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