



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 8 of 15: Ms. Dhaiya

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Dhaiya, 41, was born and brought up in village Baprario of Union Council Sarki, Taluka Diplo of Tharparkar district, Sindh. She was born in a poor family of a poor area, so grew up in extreme poverty. The landless family would do labour to earn livelihoods and meet their basic needs. The family lived in a single-room mud house and worked on a land owner's field as sharecroppers during the four-month rainy season. For remainder of the year, her father would work as shepherd for the livestock owning families on a meagre wage. The family owned a few goats and three cows as their sole productive assets that produced milk.



Dhaiya was the youngest of her five siblings; three sisters and two brothers. She was only one-year-old or so when her mother passed away giving birth to a stillborn baby. They lived with their aunt (uncle's wife) in a joint family. She said that her elder brother attended a government's primary school in Diplo while her sisters did the household chores and worked

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in agricultural farms. Soon after she reached a certain age and height, she was expected to undertake the routine work for her aunt. Dhaiya said, "By the time I was eight, my elder sisters were already married, I had to do all the household chores. While my aunt would look after her kids, I toiled fetching water from a faraway dug-well, collecting twigs to make fire for cooking purpose, weeding in agricultural fields. In return, my aunt would give me some food to eat. We used to have very basic food in meals, usually onions mixed with ground peppers."

Talking about the hardships that she faced, Dhaiya recalled that the family faced starvation in times of drought. The family was forced to migrate to Badin in search of labour on agricultural fields. "Life as migrants was even worst," she said. "We used to trek for miles to reach a suitable place for work. Then, we would build a temporary wall-less shelter by using twigs and straws. I and my brothers were young and energetic, we could bear the difficulties and even starvation. My father had become feeble, he suffered from sickness and became more vulnerable. We used irrigation channel's water for laundry and for drinking purpose too. We practiced open defecation and never took bath. We often felt insecure."

Dhaiya was 25 when her sister-in-law (brother's wife) arranged her marriage in her parental village in Sarki. Her husband was widower and had a daughter and a son from his first wife. At the time of marriage, her husband's family included her parents-in-law, four brothers-in-law, two sisters-in-law, and her two step children. All lived in two mud-huts. In a corner of one of the huts they had a traditional mud cooking stove and few utensils. Like her parents' village, there was no electricity, running water or a toilet in the settlement. There was no awareness about sanitation and they practiced open defecation. The family owned a plot of land that was now divided among the brothers of her father-in-law. Therefore, the family did shared cropping with the four brothers of her father-in-law. The harvest from their crops depended on the rainfall. Dhaiya said that her family's portion of the crop production was not sufficient. The stored grains were finished within few months after the harvest. Thereafter they had to work as labourers to earn and eat. Her younger brother-in-law was a shepherd for a local livestock owning family. Her husband, the eldest among his siblings, stitched clothes at a tailor's shop.

While family's menfolk did labouring work to earn some income, females undertook household chores and worked on agricultural fields. Dhaiya spoke about her daily activities, "We, females, used to wake up early in the morning. While my mother-in-law ground millet to make flour in a mechanical *desi* (local) flour mill to make flat bread, I would join my neighbours in fetching water from a far-away dug-well. It took us at least two hours to fetch a single *mutka* (pot) of water.

Almost 300 households in the settlement shared the sole dug-well to get drinking water. We would collect water on first come first served basis from the well. Sometimes when we would get late to reach the well, we had to wait for an extra hour for our turn. Therefore, we used to wake up before dawn and collected water when there were less people in the queue. These treks were the most challenging for us as we used to walk over sand dunes while carrying heavy pots of water on our heads. Then, we would collect twigs to put on fire to cook the morning meals. Men would take a hasty breakfast and make a quick leave for their work.

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Then, we would eat the leftovers and followed our men to agricultural fields. We used to miss our day-time meals and return back in the evenings to finish the household chores, before the menfolk would arrive.”

Dhaiya said that after one year of her marriage she had her first son. The other seven children including two sons and five daughters were born with the gap of one and a half year between each child. Talking about family planning she said, “I did not know about family planning and contraceptives until recently. We thought ‘the more children, the greater support in agricultural labour work’. My youngest son is now four years old. I have controlled child birth through contraceptives. I do not want to have more children. These contraceptives too can sometimes lead to problems. The birth control injections caused a reaction and I had to suffer from pain for six months.”

Dhaiya continued, “Although feeding them was not always easy. It was saddening to see our children crying out of hunger during droughts. We usually had food shortages and we often had hard time deciding who will eat and who will starve at home. We used to take loans from the local moneylenders on interest and still we could not fulfil the household needs. Every time, I gave birth to a child, I would become frail. Due to insufficient food intake, I could not give birth to healthy babies. Children were born weak and thin. They would often suffer fever, and diarrhoea. We did not have any basic health facility in the village, so we usually ignored their illnesses. We were not allowed to go out from the village, without a male family member accompanying us. So, even in case of serious sickness, we either ignored or waited for our men to take us to a health facility. It was very costly to travel to a town for treatment, besides unaffordable treatment cost.”

Dhaiya continued talking about the struggle of her life, “To reach a healthcare centre involved a long walk to the main road to use public transport, a truck. We had to travel hanging onto the door or sit on the roof of the packed truck. We would also walk to other stops in a hope that we would get a seat in the truck. We used to feel suffocation and nausea, loss of balance and even falling over others while standing in the fast moving truck... the conductor would keep on loading people to earn more money.” Dhaiya said that her husband, being the eldest in the family, had the responsibility of arranging marriages for his sisters and brothers. With the growing family size and responsibilities, family’s poverty situations worsened. She explained that for his sisters’ marriages, the family sold their goats and also took loans to make dowry. The growing interests on loans made them vulnerable and they worked for the moneylenders to compensate for the loans. Her husband continued working on a tailor’s shop in the town. They lived a very vulnerable life.

The family’s poverty situation began to change for good when Dhaiya decided to participate in Government of Sindh’s Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) introduced to them by the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) in 2010. She narrated, “One day a man visited us and conducted a survey. Few months after this survey, some outsiders visited our settlement and asked all the villagers to gather at Hasina’s house. Hasina’s father was a landlord. All females and men gathered in Hasina’s yard.” She vividly remembers the day when TRDP staff visited her village to introduce UCBPRP. “They

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announced the results of the survey that they had conducted previously. In results, they had categorised us [households] in four bands. The first category involved poverty scores from 0-11. They called the households that fell in that category as *Ghareeb Tareen*, extremely poor. The second category involved poverty scores from 12 to 18. They named this category as *Ghareeb*, poor. The third category started from 19 and ended at 23 and called *Vituala*, vulnerable poor. The fourth category involved households having poverty scores from 24 to 100, and named as *ameer*, rich. Then, each household was given their poverty score.”

Dhaiya continued, “They talked to our landlord who announced the women have to come together, get organised and set up their own *Tanzeem* (Community Organisation). Only then TRDP will work with and support the *Tanzeem* to help women in improving their families’ lives and livelihoods. Although we were hesitant to talk to the outsiders, we agreed to get organised in CO in the hope of changing our fate.” She remembers that while returning to home from the gathering, Dhaiya and her neighbours laughed discussing about the new word that they learnt, *Tanzeem*. All women agreed to get together on the next visit of TRDP field staff to their community.

Talking about her memories of CO formation, Dhaiya said, “We made small groups and started chatting. The Social Organiser, then asked us to sit in a circle. He asked us to tell our and our village’s names loud. We shied away, putting scarves on our faces. It was so awkward in the beginning because from childhood no one had asked our names. We were never heard. Only one female from our village talked with some confidence and gave answers to all questions. I stayed silent and just observed them carefully. However, after consecutive meetings with the SO, we got accustomed to the meeting rules. We gained confidence and started to share our thoughts. All 18 members attended the meetings regularly. We selected our president and a manager, who were confident and trustworthy. Once the leaders were provided with training, they started mediating the CO meetings. We started to meet on 16th of every month. Each of us started to save Rs. 20 every month in the meeting, and some skipped or saved less depending on affordability.”

Dhaiya said with a laughter, “We did not know the names of months until we made our CO. We only knew 14 August. This too, because people used to celebrate in schools and we would also participate to get sweets, without knowing what it actually meant. We took it as a phrase. We did not know about other dates and months of the year until we started meeting in our COs. When we were told that on 16 of a certain month we will meet, we used to remember the name of month. This way, over seven years, we have learned names of all months, dates and years.”

With the passage of time, Dhaiya learned many things from attending CO meetings including importance of savings, health and hygiene, child care, children’s education, time management, sanitation and Community Investment Fund (CIF). She spoke about her learning experience with a smile on her face, “They developed trust and confidence in us. We started to share our household problems as well.” Dhaiya said that her poverty score was 7 out of 1002. Observing her household poverty, her CO members selected her to receive an Income Generating Grant (IGG). She said, “In 2011, I was given a grant of Rs. 15,000 (USD 150). With

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the money, I purchased four female goats. As goats are small livestock and they produce offspring in only six months, I preferred to raise goats. My son had dropped out of school because we could not meet his travelling expenses. The only government school was in another village and it took two to three hours to reach there. When TRDP provided me with the grant, I thought I would sell baby goats and send my son to school, but it did not happen. Heavy rains in the same year hit us eroding our existing endowments. Three of the four goats that I received as grant died and my hut was destroyed by the rain water. We took refuge on an elevated piece of land and made shelter with *rillis* to protect our children from harsh weather. Entire village was flooded and our huts were not even visible. We were given emergency food aid by different organisations. We survived through those painful days.”

Dhaiya continued, “When rains were over, TRDP team revisited us. They conducted a survey of the village. We requested them to provide us shelter, but they said, the previous places of huts were not suitable for shelter. We had made our huts in an inappropriate place, where rain water passes eroding the land. TRDP asked us to allocate a suitable place to build shelters, only then they could provide financial support. We got together and walked to our landowner requesting him to allocate another place for our shelter. He was kind to allow us to build huts on a higher land. TRDP engineers conducted a survey and finalised a secure place to build our shelters. Later, through its Low Cost Housing Scheme, TRDP provided its technical and financial support and we built our safe and secure shelters. We have now cemented floor and walls that do not leak anymore.”

Meanwhile her husband worked as labourer on construction projects and earned some money. Also, he continued working with the tailor master when they had excessive work load. Although their house was better and secure now, their poverty situation did not change. On the days, when her husband did not get any work, the family had to starve. Dhaiya said, “We were helpless as we had nothing to generate income from. Then, in one of our CO meetings, I heard about Community Investment Fund (CIF). I filled a Micro Investment Plan for my household and applied for a CIF loan. I received a loan of Rs. 12,000 (USD 120) from my CO in 2012. With this money, we opened a small cabin where we kept snacks, sweets, *spari*, and cigarettes. As the cabin was located besides the tailoring shop, my husband also continued stitching clothes. We saved money from selling goods and returned CIF loan while half of the goods at our cabin were still to be sold. After returning the first cycle of CIF, I applied for another loan. In 2013, I received Rs. 15,000 (USD 150). We increased inventory of the goods. We added tea, soaps, sugar and other small amounts of grocery. We deposited the loan by monthly instalments. The profits from this shop enabled us to meet our household’s basic needs.”

Dhaiya said that in 2014 her CO members selected her household for another grant from TRDP. “The CO members kept an eye on how everyone in the CO was flourishing economically. As I was still living a poor life and my PSC was very low, I was asked to make Livelihood Investment Plan (LIP) for my household. I proposed that with the grant, I would buy fabric from a wholesaler. I said to CO leaders that since my husband is a tailor he could stitch clothes and we could sell finished products on higher prices. This would allow us to reinvest in the enterprise and scale it up from the earnings. They accepted my proposal and

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purchased fabric worth Rs, 50,000 (USD 500) for our family. I was told that this grant was provided by Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF). My husband kept cloth in the tailor's shop. The villagers purchased the cloth from my husband and asked him to stitch clothes for them.”

Dhaiya's husband previously stitched clothes with a master tailor because he could not afford a sewing machine. The master tailor would give him a meagre wage. With improved income from the sale of fabric and stitching clothes, he purchased a sewing machine for himself. He opened his own shop where he kept cloth and also did stitching. Apart from the profit from cloth selling, Dhaiya's husband would charge Rs. 350 (USD 3.5) per suit as stitching charges. By reinvesting their profits, more cloth was purchased and more stitching was done. As a result, the new enterprise became the main source of family's income. Now, Dhaiya's husband has two shops: one tailoring shop and one cloth shop.

Apart from CIF and PPAF grant, Dhaiya was provided with a five-day long vocational training by TRDP. In this training, she learned making embroidery items such as pillow cases, bed sheets, head scarfs, etc. She also learned attractive colour combinations for making embroidery on children's and women's clothes. On returning from training sessions, she purchased inputs to make embroidery items at home. While she practiced and made some for her household, TRDP linked her with a skill training institute in Karachi that further polished her skills in making embroidery on fabric. At the end of the training session, all participants were evaluated and Dhaiya was selected as one of the top 20 adroit embroidery art makers.

Dhaiya said with some pride on her face, “After selection, I was provided with raw material and tools to make embroidery for them. I started my home based embroidery work and did finishing of women's *chadders* (shawls), suits, bed sheets and pillowcases. As they provided me the requisite raw material, I charged Rs. 500 (USD 5) per piece as my labour wage. Since then I have been working and have improved my living conditions. I suggested my husband to save profits made from the shop to buy more products while I took responsibility of the household needs. Also, I enrolled my children in school. Now, my eldest son studies in grade eight and we look forward to support his higher education. Other four children are now studying in a government primary school after graduating from Early Child Education Centre provided by TRDP. The younger three children have not yet reached the school going age, but we desire to educate them.”

From the earnings of the shop, the family has accumulated more productive assets. Dhaiya said proudly, “Penny by penny, we saved money and purchased assets for our family. Now, I own four sheep, seven goats and a cow that produces milk. My husband and I have our individual sewing machines and irons. We have two mobiles: I keep one and my husband keeps the other one to communicate. We have built a new concrete room with a toilet. Like others in the village, we used to do open defecation, but through TRDP health and hygiene sessions, we learned about latrines and now every household in the village has a latrine. For their efforts in making our village an open defecation free settlement, our CO and VO leaders have won an award as well.”

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Dhaiya further narrates, “Every household in our settlement had seen improvement and we had started to accumulate more assets. But, our biggest issue of accessing drinking water was still there. We wanted to solve this problem as fetching water wasted four hours of our productive day time. We [CO members] discussed the problem with TRDP field team who asked us to pass a formal resolution highlighting the problem and submit it to TRDP. We requested a man, who could write and read, in our village to help us in writing the resolution. TRDP accepted the resolution and installed 10 water hand pumps in our settlement. Now, we have access to drinking water at our door step. It has made our lives easier and saved our time. We use this time in productive activities such as stitching clothes and making embroidery art pieces for sale. Above all, while working at home, we keep an eye on our children. We take care of their health. Unlike before, we do not leave them alone playing in sand.”

Improved income flows have also led to improvement in the family's diet. Through a training session by TRDP, Dhaiya and her fellow CO members learned about kitchen gardening. As she had a hand pump at her door step for water, she made a small kitchen garden for her family. Dhaiya said, “Earlier, I used to cultivate *Palak* (spinach), and *tori* (ridge gourd), now I have cultivated water melons, *Guar* (beans), *tori*, *gardiyara*, and *teendy* (round gourd). We do not waste water and have the waste water flow into our kitchen garden. Now my family has access to variety of food items, both from the kitchen garden as well as the purchases from the market.”

After getting access to water through the resolution, the COs in the settlement gained more confidence to participate in communal activities. Dhaiya said proudly, “CO became our strength. We were so happy having access to water. On the day when TRDP engineers visited the village and installed water hand pumps, all females rejoiced and celebrated the achievement. Our men were equally amused and amazed by our achievement. In the same month, we passed another resolution for a link road to the village. We did not have any source of conveyance in our village. The village was far away from the main road. Especially in sickness, we had to carry the patient on shoulders and walk through sand for hours to reach the main road. We had many cases when patients could not reach hospital on time and died on the way. Our men had never thought about this problem because they were busy in other towns working as labourers. Therefore, we passed a resolution to TRDP and they financed the link road construction. My words are not enough to express my gratitude for all their support. TRDP appeared in our lives as support from the God. Now, we have easy access to main road through the link road. Our children can easily go to their schools every day.”

Dhaiya concluded her story by recounting the improvements and transformations in her family's lives. “Our lives are easier now. Now we have a safe and secure shelter to live. We have access to road, drinking water and electricity. Our children do their homework at night as well and we do our embroidery work day and night. We once survived on boiled onions; now we have milk, meat, vegetables, grains, beans and many other food items. Previously we used to hide ourselves from outsiders and we did not have confidence to talk to men. Now, we collaborate and communicate with village men and also outsiders. CO has empowered us to become vocal, and enhanced our ability and bargaining power at the household and

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community levels. We go out with our children and do our shopping without the men accompanying us. Through CO, we have developed the habit of savings for our future needs. I want to thank TRDP for showing us the right path to improve our own lives. Now we are in a position to plan for a better future for our children.”

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.

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