



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). In 2009, the Chief Minister of Sindh considerably agreed to support the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) to implement UCBPRP in Kashmore district. Under UCBPRP, SRSO 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 10 of 15: Ms. Mirzadi

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Mirzadi was born and raised in a remote village of Bux Bhayo Katcha in District Kashmore, with no electricity, no access to drinking water, no medical facility, and no sanitation. She does not remember her age, but she recalls her mother saying, "Mirzadi was only three months old when Bhutto came into power for the first time." So, she must have been born in 1970s, and is now in her late 40s. Her parents were sharecroppers, but flooding destroyed their lands and her



parents migrated to Wahid Bux Bhayo Pakky. Mirzadi said that she was the sixth out of her 11 siblings: two brothers and nine sisters. It was very difficult for her parents to feed the large family. They worked on others' lands and lived a difficult life. Although there was a government primary school in the village and it was free of cost, her parents were too poor

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to afford books and notebooks, and because of that she and other children could not attend school.

Mirzadi was only one-year-old when she was married to a man who was at that times in his 20s. Because Mirzadi had not yet reached her puberty, she was permitted to stay at home with her parents. Later when she was about 13 or 14, she had a rukhsati (departure of bride from maternal home) ceremony, held publically, to join her husband's family. Her in-laws lived in a joint family of 19 members in a single room-mud house.

Mirzadi's new family did not own any land or livestock. They were tenants. She said that the land where they worked was only suitable for rice cultivation. They grew rice but their share from the harvest was never sufficient for the entire household's annual consumption. In the years of bad weather and low harvests, the family suffered more, and even endured starvation. At times of food shortage, they borrowed wheat and rice from their landlord. Repayments, including interest, were made in-kind at the next harvest. Under this situation, the family was always in debt to the landlord. For other household needs, the family relied on the meagre salary of the father-in-law, who worked as a Beldaar (who looks after irrigation canals) of the Union Council. Basically, Mirzadi claims, "We lived a very basic life, with focus just on physical survival."

Mirzadi recalls that even in cases of serious sickness, the community females never visited any medical facility because of existing social norms that restricted their mobility. She recalled, "Once, my sister-in-law suffered from a severe abdominal pain during her pregnancy. She cried due to her pain and asked for help, but elders and males in the family took it very lightly. They claimed that she was lying and acting while her real purpose was to visit the town and roam around. They made fun of her from the beginning as she suffered from shabkoor (Night-blindness). Later, after a week of suffering, she had a miscarriage. I wanted to take her to hospital, but it was too far from our village. We were restricted to the household boundaries and fields. Females were never permitted to go to the hospital or market. We never had any social gathering. Our men used to do all the purchases for the household. After every other year, they bought a dress for each of us that we washed and wore for two years."

Mirzadi said that at the time of her marriage, her husband's family included parents-in-law, a sister-in-law, three brothers-in-law, husband's sister, and three children. After one year of her marriage, she had a son. Later, with the gap of one year between each child she had five children: three daughters and two sons. Talking about her children, Mirzadi said with a smile on her face, "I did not know about family planning until recently, people in our community think of family planning as a crime and a sin. Here, parents who have more sons are considered powerful. The ones who have only daughters, get married two or three times to fulfil their desire of having sons. Therefore, due to the desire of having sons, people usually produce more children."

Mirzadi said that one day she came to know that an organisation named SRSO had visited the village and met the community men in Autak (community meeting room for men). She said, "I was curious to know more about them and to meet them, but I could not because they sat

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in the Autak and it was only men's place. We used to wear burqa (veil) whenever we had to cross the street across the Autak. When my husband came home, I asked him about SRSO. He said angrily, 'they were some fraudsters. We have made them run away.' I could not ask more questions, because he was angry."

However, according to Mirzadi, the SRSO team kept revisiting the village. She had a hunch that the community men were mistaken about the organisation so she tried to meet them herself. Mirzadi said, "I wore my veil and waited in the narrow street near Autak. After meeting with the village men, the SRSO team passed by the street when I stopped them. I asked them why they wanted to work only with the local women and what benefits we would get if we, the women, agree to meet them. One team member replied, 'Local women will have to get organised in groups, they will discuss problems to find solutions so to improve their lives. SRSO will provide all the support if they convince their men and get organised in groups.' This response augmented my positive feelings for the organisation's genuineness as they did not want to work with individual women but with groups of women. The idea of groups enhanced my confidence since it assured me that I will not be alone to meet the outsiders. Thereafter, I spread this message between my relatives and neighbours. Initially, seven of us were willing to meet them. After some struggle, we finally convinced our men to allow us to meet with the SRSO female team members in a group. The very next day, we, the seven women, met the SRSO field staff in my neighbour's house. In the meeting, we learnt about the importance of forming our own Tanzeem (Community Organisation), planning at household level, and that SRSO will provide necessary support to us to generate incomes for our families once we fulfil the aforementioned tasks."

Mirzadi and her neighbours who attended the first meeting talked to other females in the vicinity about SRSO and its approach and work, and as a result 13 more females agreed to join them. They formed the CO, and named it 'Ali Ayuob' after one of Mirzadi's sons. A president and manager for the CO was selected, somebody who they unanimously thought were honest and active. Mirzadi said with a laugh, "Initially, in meetings, we all spoke at once and it created a mess. We gave them (SRSO field team) very tough time. The Social Organiser from SRSO taught us about speaking in turns and we practiced what she instructed. We usually sat on Charpais (traditional beds) in lines just like the way we sit in marriage ceremonies, but SO instructed us to put Rillis on the ground and sit on it in a circle so that we can see each other while speaking. Everyone was given a chance to share their opinion. Each of us shared the issues we faced at household level as well as community level."

Discussing the issues, Mirzadi said that the local women highlighted one important issue – the need for hand pumps. The women had to spend lot of time fetching water from hand pump located away from the settlement. Mirzadi said, "It was an exhausting job for us to walk the long distance and stand in the queue to collect a single pot of water. We used to have arguments over our turns. Also, it was time consuming. Therefore, we requested SRSO, through a resolution, to support us in resolving this issue. SRSO conducted a survey and provided 11 hand pumps to our village. Now, each household uses its nearest hand pump to fetch water for household consumption."

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Mirzadi continued, “Within the same year of CO formation in 2009, each CO member was given a result from the Poverty Scorecard Survey that SRSO had conducted. My poverty score was 9. At meeting, the SRSO team asked us, ‘What we wanted to do next?’ We said we wanted to improve our living conditions. Each of us shared our potentials through a Micro Investment Plan (MIP). We mentioned our skills and what we wanted to do. I had learned stitching from a neighbour, but I was not an expert in stitching. I thought if I will have a sewing machine I can learn from her and practice at home. Therefore, in MIP I mentioned that I wanted to purchase a sewing machine. I received a loan of Rs. 10,000 (USD 100) from the Community Investment Fund (CIF). I bought a sewing machine and related materials with this money.”

In 2010, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority announced flood warnings and asked the villagers to leave the area. Some of the villagers shifted their families to safer places but most of them were assured that the flood water would not reach their village until the Irrigation Department broke Tori Bund (protection barrier) to save the city. Mirzadi said, “We were safe until they broke the Tori Bund. To save Khandkot town, they broke the Tori Bund and destroyed our area, our fields, and our huts. We hurriedly took some of our belongings, but most of our household items were left behind. We saved our lives and took refuge in an emergency camp. After a day in the camp, the army warned us to leave the camps as water was rising up. We migrated to Kashmore town and took refuge in government hospital ground. We stayed there for six months in miserable conditions.”

After six months, the family returned to their village. They were shocked to see that their huts and mud houses were destroyed by the flood waters. Many agricultural fields were still inundated. Pathways were muddy. Mirzadi recalls, “The whole hamlet was like one huge pile of mud.” Soon after their return, SRSO teams reached the hamlet and, after a survey, provided them with financial support to rebuild their houses. Mirzadi’s family was also provided with a two-room shelter under the Low Cost Housing Scheme of the Government of Sindh. Mirzadi said, “SRSO had already won our men’s trust, and our men allowed us to meet and collaborate with the organisation to get more support. SRSO and other NGOs provided us food items including rice, sugar, flour, ghee, tea, and daal (lentils), etc. However, once we settled down in our new houses, all NGOs left us. Our men found work as labourers during the reconstruction phase, working on housing and roads. They earned money to feed our children and meanwhile SRSO provided us vocational training. I learned about stitching dresses, making pillow covers and bedsheets, and making attractive colourful combinations of fabrics for Rillis (traditional wall/floor coverings).”

Mirzadi’s eldest daughter also attended the eight-week long tailoring training course organised by SRSO. Mirzadi said that her daughter stitched dresses for the villagers and with the money earned, the CIF loan taken in 2009 was returned. To utilise her skills more productively, Mirzadi applied for another CIF loan and received Rs. 10,000 (USD 100) in 2012. She bought inputs to make embroidery and appliqué work on head scarves, bed sheets, and Rillis. Mirzadi said, “Each appliqué chaadar (head scarf) cost me Rs.400 (USD 4) and I sold the final product for Rs.1000 (USD 10). I saved the profits and returned the CIF loan. From my savings, I bought more fabric to continue my work.”

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Mirzadi said proudly, "One day, SRSO contacted us (CO members) to place an order worth Rs. 45,000 (USD 450). They provided us inputs and we, 20 members, worked for a week to complete their order of making handicrafts, appliqué and embroidered items. Observing the quality of finished products, SRSO placed another order. We received Rs. 55, 000 (USD 550) for our work. Apart from input cost, we charged Rs. 700-1,000 per appliqué suit. SRSO requested us to make 70 suits and provided us the inputs. We made suits in one month and each of us received a handsome amount. We utilised this money to purchase household items that we had lost during the 2010 floods."

Mirzadi continued with her story, "The increasing demand of our work and our earnings enhanced our confidence to also work independently and start home based enterprises. I am very good at appliqué work, so I focused on making appliqué items including table clothes, pillow cases and bed sheets, female suits, purses, shirts, and Chaadars. My husband was very happy with my achievements and participation in household income generation. Before, he used to be a little harsh in communication, but now he is kind and listens to me. Taking benefit from this changed behaviour, I expressed my desire to get education. He agreed to let me study as a private student, and I completed my matriculation (grade 10)."

In 2015, Mirzadi applied and received another CIF loan of Rs. 10,000 (USD 100). She added more saved money to this loan and bought fabric to make more appliqué items. She said that she made 75% profit from this amount. She returned the CIF loan and bought more inputs from the savings that she had made. She stated that the profits from her home-based enterprise helped her to pay for her children's school fee and household expenses. She wants to educate her children further. Mirzadi tries to save whatever she can so that she can meet her targets.

In 2016, Mirzadi took another CIF loan of Rs. 10,000 (USD 100), and this time she purchased a buffalo calf. Mirzadi wants to raise this calf properly and is hopeful that one day this buffalo will be worth more than Rs. 100,000 (USD1000). This will give her options in the future; to keep it for milk and calving or to sell it. Depending on the situation at that time, Mirzadi will make the appropriate decision.

Apart from being involved in various income generating activities, Mirzadi of has been actively engaged in social work as well. She narrated, "We had been facing problems regarding acceptance of polio drops in our village. When I learned about its importance, I made my CO members understand the importance of polio drops as well. I made efforts that every member should vaccinate her children. In one of our VO meetings, one president from a neighbouring CO told me that, in her CO, females hide their children when polio teams visit them. They refuse to vaccinate their children. She also told me that recently their men warned and made the polio teams run away from the village. I became concerned about the issue because I knew that vaccinations were crucial. I voluntarily visited the households, who avoided polio drops and vaccinations. I observed that people had misconceptions about oral vaccine and they even said that some Americans have made these drops to kill our children. Also, many said that the drops were made of some haram (forbidden) material that is forbidden in Islam. I told the local women that if drops were haram, then why would the government allow them here? Also in big cities, big Mullahs are supporting polio campaigns. I told them that their

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children could be in danger of contracting virus and diseases if they will not act right now and allow polio teams to do their work.”

Mirzadi continued, “For couple of years, I voluntarily monitored the houses and reminded females that next round of routine immunisation was due for their children. Learning about my voluntarily services, the District Commissioner of the area called me for a meeting and gave me permission to start a polio campaign in the whole area. Now, I am appointed as a Lady Health Worker with a monthly salary of Rs. 15,000 (USD 150). I vaccinate 475 children in four days during every campaign. I keep visiting the households, raising awareness about maternal and child health.”

Mirzadi concludes her story, “I am the only government employee who reaches every household in the community. This has only happened because of SRSO. If SRSO had not visited our hamlet, perhaps we would be carrying on like our previous generations, living miserable lives without any energy, ideas or plans. Now that we are organised, we have our own organisations, we have gained confidence, skills, resources, and most importantly, we have aspirations for a better life for our children. Women’s role and the importance of their contributions have been accepted. Before, I never had the courage to talk to men in the family but today, I can speak on public forums. I make significant contributions to the household income. I have voice and resources and now I can make decisions. This revolution has happened because of the Government of Sindh’s support to SRSO to support us, the poor women of rural Sindh.”

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