



Programme Introduction

In 2008, Mr Shoaib 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 7 of 15: Ms. Ayesha

By Savaila Hunzai

Ms. Ayesha is 45 years old and resides in Karam Pur Village of district Kashmore in Upper Sindh. She grew up among eight siblings: five sisters and three brothers. Ayesha's parents were sharecroppers, working on a landlord's field and keeping a portion of the harvest. Ayesha said that, as was the norm in the village, like other girls in village she learned to undertake household chores at an early age and helped her parents in collecting cow dung, weeding the fields and cutting grass along the irrigation canals. Ayesha's social space was limited to the house and the fields. The conservative norms of the village did not encourage girls to go out, even for primary education.

Ayesha was 16 years old when her parents arranged her marriage to one of her cousins, who worked as a labourer on construction sites and earned a meagre wage. Her in-laws lived in a joint family of eight members in a double-room mud house. Ayesha said that the family did not own any land, but had some livestock. They were also sharecroppers. She remembers that soon after her marriage, she joined her elders in undertaking various farming activities including weeding, harvesting, cutting grass, etc. She used to wake up at six in the morning. After completing her household chores, she would spend the whole day in the fields. The family grew rice and wheat, and some vegetables. Ayesha remembers that while the family was quite poor, they at least had good and sufficient food to eat.

After one year of her marriage, Ayesha had a miscarriage and in the next three consecutive years, she gave birth to stillborn babies. She said, "There was no health facility in the village or nearby. Like our mothers and grandmothers, I was also expected by my family to show

August 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success III – UCBPRP Case Studies from Kashmore District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The%20Road%20to%20Success%20-%20III.pdf>



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



courage by giving birth without any support from a midwife. The ones who faced complexities during pregnancies and deliveries were considered as weak by the elder females and our men. I was even taunted by my sisters-in-law when I had three consecutive miscarriages. I faced the pain, lost my children, but we could not afford to visit a health facility. When my fourth child, a baby boy, was born and was healthy, I was so happy that all previous pains just seemed to vanish. For some time, I was the happiest mother in the world. But then about after a month, misfortune struck me again and this time with a vengeance. My son was attacked by tetanus and passed away. Losing my son was soul breaking. I cried for months and even now after so many years, I can feel the pain.”

Later, Ayesha’s husband found work as a gardener in a local government health facility, where he became aware about vaccinations for expecting mothers and new-born babies. Right after her next pregnancy, Ayesha’s husband took her to the facility for a check-up. Ayesha said, “In the beginning, my husband’s wages were very low; he received about Rs. 700 (USD 7) as his monthly salary. Even from this small amount, he saved money for my medical check-ups. With a gap of two years between each child, I had five healthy children; two daughters and three sons. The first thing that we did was to complete their vaccination courses.”

As Ayesha’s family was growing, there was an increased pressure on the family’s limited resources. Ayesha needed more space and especially more food for her children. This led to tensions, arguments, and fights within the joint family. When the situation became unbearable, her father-in-law decided to split the family. Ayesha and her husband were asked to set up their own house separately. They were given one wet buffalo and a single room-mud house as part of their inheritance. Burden of the family split fell on Ayesha. Before, all family members worked on the farm fields. With the split, while the husband went to the health facility to work, all farm work had to be done by Ayesha. Apart from farm work, Ayesha also had to manage the children, look after the buffalo, and the household chores. Ayesha said, “It was very difficult for me. Eventually, we had to give up sharecropping. Then, I worked on the fields as a labourer during the harvest season only. We were paid in kind, and of course this was never to last the whole year so obviously there came periods of time when we did not have enough to eat, and it was very painful to see my children crying with hunger.”

Ayesha said, “While working at the health facility as a gardener, my husband began to realise the importance of education. From this he developed a desire to send all his children to school, both sons and daughters. When the children were enrolled in primary school, some extended family members and village elders raised questions about sending daughters to primary school. They argued that this was against the social norms. Despite all these complaints, my husband and I decided to continue our children’s education. A time came when we had great difficulty to pay for their education. Luckily, our buffalo was wet and we sold the milk and spent money on our children’s education. With my husband’s meagre monthly salary, we kept going.”

Ayesha stated that having some productive assets such as a buffalo and some silver jewellery items were very useful as these helped the family during critical times. She explained, “When my eldest son suffered from Hepatitis-C, we sold our buffalo calf and my silver bangles (that my mother gave me as gift on my wedding) to cover the cost of his proper treatment.”

August 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success III – UCBPRP Case Studies from Kashmore District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The%20Road%20to%20Success%20-%20III.pdf>



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



Ayesha remembers that, in 2009, a team from SRSO visited her village and met with the menfolk in Autaq (a community meeting room for males). She narrated, "Our men did not fully understand the purpose of their visit, consequently misunderstandings developed. It was strange for the men to hear that SRSO only wanted to work with the community women. Some of our men believed that the outsiders might turn out to be fraudsters and that they might deceive the simple local women. Therefore, the men asked the SRSO team to leave the village."

After a couple of months, the villagers learned that SRSO has organised many women in their neighbouring villages. Ayesha and some of her neighbours sought to meet these women and learned that after setting up Tanzeem (Community Organisation) these women had been supported by SRSO to improve their incomes and lives. By the time, the village men had also learned that SRSO had visited other neighbouring villages and were working with the women there. Thereupon, the men agreed amongst themselves to invite back the SRSO team and allow them to meet with the community women.

Ayesha said, "It was first time in our lives that women visited and sat in the Autak, a place where the menfolk sit and make decisions about the village issues. The SRSO team asked us to sit in a circle on Rillis. They asked us if we were willing to get organised in our own organisations and discuss common problems and find solutions to them. We agreed that we wanted to improve our situation and our lives. Therefore, we agreed to set up our own Tanzeem with 18 women members. We selected our president and manager. The newly established CO was named as Haideri after the name of our landlord, on whose land we lived and worked. We started to have meetings in the CO. We usually met in the manager's house, where every member was comfortable in visiting. Initially, we learned to introduce ourselves. We were very shy. Gradually, as we observed that every member in the CO was given equal opportunity to talk and our opinions were respected, so we let go of our shyness and started to discuss our problems. We learnt about savings and sanitation at the household level."

Ayesha remembers that in one of her CO meetings she was provided with the score from the poverty scorecard survey that SRSO had undertaken. Her family's poverty score was 15. The CO manager and president asked Ayesha if she wanted to avail a loan from Community Investment Fund (CIF) managed by the local Village Organisation. Initially Ayesha agreed, but later refused when she learnt that she is expected to return the CIF loan amount after one year. Ayesha said that she was not confident if she would be able to return. However, when she observed eight other CO members taking and utilising CIF loans for income generating activities, she also applied for the CIF loan.

In the Micro Investment Plan (MIP), Ayesha had identified to buy a sewing machine since her daughter had stitching skills. Ayesha said that in 2009, she received a CIF loan of Rs. 7,000 (USD 70) with which she bought a sewing machine for her daughter. Her daughter stitched dresses for fellow villagers and charged Rs. 150 (USD 1.5) for simple ladies dress and Rs. 250 (USD 2.5) for fancy dresses. Ayesha said that during the marriage and celebration seasons, many orders were received and that her daughter was earning well and contributing to household income.

August 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success III – UCBPRP Case Studies from Kashmore District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The%20Road%20to%20Success%20-%20III.pdf>



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



In the summer of 2010, the village was hit by super floods and everyone had to be evacuated to Kashmore town. Refuge was found in an emergency shelter in Shikarpur, where they were given food by different aid agencies. After a month, Ayesha's and other families returned to their village. They found that their homes had been destroyed, and whatever items they could not carry away at evacuation time were stolen, including household utensils and Rillis.

Ayesha said that after their return to the village, the community was supported by SRSO. Food aid was provided by SRSO for four months. Her husband and her father-in-law were forced to take loans in order to put up a mud hut to shelter the family. Ayesha states, "That year was the worst; even our livestock suffered from starvation and diseases. My buffalo grew thinner and ceased to give milk. This dented the family's income. However, my husband found work at reconstruction sites, and this way we were able to barely survive. Due to financial crises, my sons left their education and looked for labouring work in Kashmore town. My second son, who had learnt some tailoring skills from his sister, started working with a famous tailor in Kashmore and earned some wages. He helped me in returning the CIF loan that I had taken in 2009."

In 2012, Ayesha applied for another CIF loan and received Rs. 7,000 (USD 70). She sold her sewing machine for Rs. 5,000 (USD 50) and pooled this amount with the CIF loan and purchased another sewing machine with an electric motor. She said that for one year, her son stitched clothes for men, women, boys, and girls. He worked very hard and thus Ayesha was able to return the CIF loan within six months.

Sometime later, Ayesha's son partnered with another tailor and opened up a tailoring shop. They shared the rent but dealt with customers individually. He was able to stitch four suits in a single day using the electric motor based sewing machine. In 2015, once again Ayesha applied for a CIF loan and received Rs. 7,000 (USD 70). Adding her savings with this amount, her son bought a Joki sewing machine to make designer dresses, from Karachi.

Ayesha said proudly, "My son now has two electric machines. Now he is very famous in Kashmore town. The Joki machine stitches a simple dress within half an hour. In the wedding season and on celebrations, e.g. on Eid, my son earns at least Rs. 15,000 (USD 150) per month. In normal months, he earns around Rs. 8,000-10,000 (USD 80-100). With the passage of time, my husband's monthly salary also increased. As income increased, we also increased our savings. With these increased savings we were able to build a three-room concrete house and left the mud huts for our livestock. I have two buffaloes now. We use its milk for household consumption and sell out the surplus milk. Now my husband earns Rs. 20,000 (USD 200) as his monthly salary."

Ayesha continued with her story, "I have married off my eldest son who, after completing his Bachelor's degree in science, has opened up a Public Call Centre in our village. He also keeps cards to upload balance for mobile phone users. He is able to educate and take good care of his family now. My youngest son studies in grade nine."

Talking about her two daughters, Ayesha said proudly, "I have married off both my daughters. The elder daughter has completed her Bachelor's degree in education and now teaches at a

August 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success III – UCBPRP Case Studies from Kashmore District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The%20Road%20to%20Success%20-%20III.pdf>



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



Non Formal Education centre established by BRAC Pakistan. She earns Rs. 6,000 (USD 60) as her monthly salary. Thanks to Allah, her parents-in-law are very happy with her contribution to her family income. She is respected by her family as well as by the community members. The other one has completed her matriculation (grade 10) and is a housewife.”

Ayesha concluded her story with a contented smile, “Looking back, I have witnessed many sorrows and shocks in my life. But today, I am happy. This happiness is due to the support of my husband and the work of our Tanzeem. Today, the role of women in our community is visible and appreciated. We have demonstrated pathways to breaking the cycle of poverty. We are no longer seen as a burden, but as partners in working to improve our families’ lives. I am now confident that our educated and healthy children will have much better lives.”

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

August 2017

To access complete publication The Road to Success III – UCBPRP Case Studies from Kashmore District, please visit: <http://www.rspn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The%20Road%20to%20Success%20-%20III.pdf>