



## 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 9 of 15: Ms. Parveen Khatoon

*By Savaila Hunzai*

Ms. Parveen Khatoon, 23, resides in Village Sherdil Pathan of District Kashmore. She was the third out of her six siblings. Her parents worked as peasants for a local landlord to make ends meet. Parveen recalls that many a time they did not have sufficient food to feed all family members. She said that until quite recently, there was no awareness about the need for girls' education in her village. Like other village girls, Parveen also did not attend any school. All that she learned was doing the household chores.



Traditionally, girls in Kashmore are married off at a young age. Parveen was only 14 years old when her father decided to marry her off to a man of her village. After one year of her marriage, she had a daughter. Later, with the gap of one year between each child, she had a

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son and another daughter. Parveen is expecting to have many children, regardless of her health or ability to provide for them, for as she said, "Children are a blessing from Allah and the more kids we will have, the more blessings will come to us." Parveen's three children were born in her straw hut with the support of her mother-in-law, who was a local midwife. She said that there is no medical facility in the vicinity. Parveen has observed maternal mortality rate due to delays in treatments and not being able to reach the hospital on time.

Parveen said that at the time of her marriage, the joint family of 12 members shared one straw hut. Her husband was a part-time student and took his grade 12 exams privately. Apart from working on the landlord's fields, her father-in-law worked as a carpenter and earned Rs.200-300 (USD 2-3) per day.

Parveen said that much of her time was usually spent walking to collect drinking water, gather cow-dung and dried branches. At times she could use the household donkey to carry water but mostly she had to carry them herself. Parveen also undertook household chores and took care of her children at home. She lived her life with few physical comforts, dependent on her husband's family that she did not choose.

One day in 2009, Parveen's husband and father-in-law asked her to join the Community Organisation that the local women were going to foster. Family's men had previously formed a male CO and had knowledge of how SRSO operated and what benefits it could provide. Parveen said, "As our men had good experience of working with SRSO, they allowed us to participate in their activities in the village."

Parveen and other females in her neighbourhood attended a meeting mediated by a female Social Organiser from SRSO. In the meeting, she learned that if the females get organised in COs and discuss their issues in harmony, SRSO would support them to improve their lives. In 2009, Parveen along with other 20 local women agreed and formed a CO and named it as Rehmat (blessing). The newly established CO started to have their weekly meetings, where they got awareness about health and hygiene and also discussed their problems and ways to solve them.

Talking about the issues the CO members discussed at the platform of CO, Parveen explained, "All females faced problems regarding open defecation and lack of drinking water. For safety and privacy reasons, we used to go in groups to defecate in open fields, which were neither private nor hygienic." She further explained, "We used to roam around barefooted. In rains, it would become even more difficult and unhygienic to go out for defecation. We used to get infections, which we never discussed with anyone before the CO's formation. Also, we spent much of our productive time in fetching drinking water from the only hand pump in the village. Therefore, we passed a resolution to SRSO to support us in resolving these issues. SRSO team visited the village, conducted a survey, and accepted our resolution. Soon after, they provided 18 water hand pumps and 18 latrines for the villagers."

Parveen claims, with pride on her face, "Now, we are contented and feel secure to use latrines. We now know that we must wash our feet and remove all dirt before we enter our homes. Also, the hand pumps have made our lives easier; we spend our time productively on

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other activities.” In the same year of CO formation, SRSO undertook the Poverty Scorecard (PSC) census in all rural areas of Kashmore District under the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) of the Government of Sindh. The poverty scores were then shared with the individual households. Parveen said that her household’s poverty score was 18. Under the UCBPRP, SRSO provided Community Investment Fund (CIF) to Village Organisations to give interest free loans to CO members whose poverty score was less than 23. CIF is provided to remove the financial constraints of the poor households so that they can initiate income generating activities that they themselves identify and can undertake. Parveen did not have any technical skills, e.g. sewing, stitching, embroidery, etc., But she was familiar with raising livestock. Therefore, in the Micro Investment Plan (MIP), Parveen identified the potential for raising a goat. Parveen applied for and received a CIF loan of Rs. 9,000 (USD 90), and bought a goat. After seven months, the goat produced three kids.

However, the floods and heavy rains in 2010 compelled villagers to leave the village. Although the flood water did not reach their houses, heavy rains destroyed their huts. Parveen’s family migrated to Khandkot to seek refuge with their relatives. The family returned to their village after a month. SRSO and other organisations provided them food for six months. Parveen said that the newly born goat kids died and she sold the milk giving goat for Rs. 20,000 in Kashmore.

Narrating her misery, Parveen said, “Our fields were filled with water and we were unable to feed our livestock. My husband took a loan and bought hay for our buffalo. Due to starvation and diseases, the villagers’ livestock became weak and died. It was a very stressful year because it destroyed all our assets.”

A local NGO provided the villagers with two-room shelters. Parveen said, “We too received the shelter but we had lost all sources of livelihood. The lands were still not ready for cultivation. Therefore, our men sought out labouring work during the reconstruction phase. Sometime they could not find work. When they did, the wages were very meagre, e.g. Rs. 200 (USD 2) per day. With this small income, we managed to just eat basic food and survived.”

Parveen said that the CO members came together in these stressful days to help each other to survive. She said, “We discussed many things, including what to do for our remaining livestock. My husband was able to read and write; he helped writing a resolution to SRSO. Also, when SRSO team visited us, we shared our problems with them that we had lost our productive assets, much of our livestock due to diseases. Later, my husband, being the only literate person, was selected by SRSO to attend para-veterinary training course at Tando Jam University outside Hyderabad. After attending a month-long training course, he returned to village as a Community Livestock Extension Worker (CLEW). Since then, he spends most of his time treating livestock in the Union Council. His services are now recognised and valued, and his earnings are an important source of income for the family.”

Parveen was confident that she could raise a buffalo since her husband was a CLEW. In 2011, she applied for a CIF loan and received Rs. 20,000 (USD 200). With the money she bought a buffalo calf. Parveen looked after the calf for a year and then sold it at a much higher price. After repaying the CIF loan, Parveen saved the profit.

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Seeing that her husband was earning income from using his veterinary skills, Parveen also developed a desire to gain skills to supplement her husband's income. Parveen said that in 2012 she attended a vocational training provided by SRSO. She learned stitching clothes. Since Parveen did not have a sewing machine, she borrowed one machine from her neighbour to stitch dresses for fellow villagers. Later, seeing her work, her husband bought a sewing machine for her. Now Parveen charges Rs. 100 (USD 1) for a simple dress and Rs. 150 (USD 1.5) for fancy dresses. Parveen proudly said, "Previously, I solely depended on my husband's earning. Now, I am able to contribute to the family income." Recently, Parveen applied for and received a CIF loan of Rs. 20,000 (USD 200). Adding more amount to the loan from household savings, she bought a buffalo calf. She said that she is making all efforts to take good care of the animal, for she knows that it will be sold on a very good rate.

Parveen concluded her story by saying, "Thanks to Allah, who sent SRSO as a blessing to us. SRSO contributed to rebuilding our livelihoods after the floods. My children are young now, by the time they grow up and need more resources, the buffalo will be helpful. My dream is to educate my children, for education will not only open their minds but also open new doors for them." Parveen's husband added, "Other NGOs also worked here, but they come here for very short periods. SRSO alone has set up a network of COs/VOs/LSOs; these are our own organisations. We will all work to strengthen these organisations so that we can continue to improve our confidence, our resources, and our lives, InshaAllah."

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