

A Brighter Future



Balqees Bano shares how her work as a CRP has benefitted her community and helped her business thrive as well.

The large mud walls on either side of the dusty, beaten path struggled to block out the sun’s unforgiving rays. The path led forth to tiny abodes nestled in the shade. The men, clad in loose white garments, braved the sweltering heat so their livestock could graze. The women, meanwhile, spent their afternoons indoors cooking over brick stoves, and fussing over the children yearning for their attention. The village of Sardar Rahim Khan was a far cry from the hustle and bustle of the main city, which was a considerable distance away.

Through an unassuming front door of one of the houses, one is met by a large wooden *khoka*, propped up on bricks. Embroidery for sale, saturated with shades of yellow, pink and blue adorned the *khoka*’s roofline and inner walls. A large sack of sugar, an assortment of spices and snacks, and common consumables like tea and cigarettes dominated most of the space inside.

This *khoka* belonged to Balqees Bano, an active and experienced CRP in the Union Council Kot Karam Khan. This 37-year old woman ran the *khoka* with the help of her husband. “Before I built this business, I was just a simple housewife. I was fortunate enough to get a decade’s worth of education, and I would continue to brush up on my knowledge with the help of my husband, a teacher in a local school. I was selected as a CRP in the summer of 2016. The RSP provided me with a box filled with contraceptives and some consumables, informing me this was a starter pack intended to help me build a business for myself. I managed to take that box and turn it into the *khoka* you see here beside me,” she said proudly.

“With the box and the basic social marketing training I had, I would go door-to-door and make some sales. I would put all my money back into getting more stock. After provide them counseling for family planning - a duty I perform to this day - I was able to establish a close rapport with my neighbors. They began to buy things from me at their doorstep as opposed to planning expeditions to the city for basic supplies. We started making some money. I was adamant about putting it back into the business, and I managed to buy this *khoka*,” Balqees beamed and said.

Balqees gestured to the embroidery draping her *khoka*. “I began to make things for people as well. These handicrafts would sell well. See here, this is a purse I made. It took me a week to make two, its twin sold for a handsome fee,” she said.

“The local Village Health Committee approached me when DAFPAK began, as they were aware of my previous work as a CRP in a prior project, back when I started my business. They asked me to work in a nearby village - a new area - which I accepted. This social work has been very rewarding. The women are very grateful to learn of their choices, and for the mediation I provide to bring the family collectively on board with her decision. It has also been beneficial for my business, as it is dependent on word-of-mouth. When this project started, I was only 3000 Rs a month from my *khoka*. Today, I am earning up to 12000 Rs a month. They visit my little *khoka* for their everyday needs. I also stock condoms and birth pills, which helps them reliably stay on a method and not experience an unplanned pregnancy”, Balqees emphasized. She gestured towards the corner of her *khoka* where contraceptives were discretely kept.

“It’s slowly becoming more socially acceptable to talk about birth spacing. My husband has always been there for me, and my 4 children were all planned. Not every woman is that fortunate. Hopefully with time, we will bring societal change. We are already making an impact day-by-day”.