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OVERVIEW

This report documents the proceedings, reflections, and feedback of the National Convention of Local Support Organisations (LSOs) 2018.

The National Convention of LSOs is organised by RSPN and RSPs every year to promote the substantial contributions made by the LSOs in inspiring the community driven approach to sustainability across the country. Also, the convention aims to provide a platform to community groups to share their experiences, knowledge, and best practices at a national and international level, by participating at the convention which is attended by a wide spectrum of stakeholders. This year, the convention was held on September 12th, 2018 in Islamabad and celebrated a decade of LSO conventions organised by RSPN.

The efforts and achievements of community institutions were shared with the policy makers, donor agencies, government representatives, international and national NGOs, media, and over 100 LSO representatives from all the provinces and regions of the country contributing to a diverse group of more than 300 participants. The notable participation included Dr. Ishrat Hussain (Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Government of Pakistan), Mr. Milko Van Gool (Head of Cooperation, European Union in Pakistan), Dr Atta ur Rehman (Balochistan Madrasa Education Council Baluchistan), and Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan (Chairman, RSPN).

The convention highlighted the endeavours and best practices of LSOs in 35 years of promoting the CDD approach to social mobilisation in Pakistan. Various LSOs were selected from all over the country to present on their achievements. They reflected on their work on cross-cutting issues ranging from poverty reduction, formal and informal education, economic empowerment especially through enterprise and value-chain development, gender equality and working in challenging environments, promoting civic rights and youth empowerment through vocational trainings. The panellists at the convention encouraged the LSOs and gave suggestions to build capacities of the community members. Furthermore, they emphasised on the significance of political support to convert lessons into policies and policies into action to improve ground realities and promote sustainability and adaptive capacity to ensure alleviation, or at least reduction, in poverty at the households' level.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP

WELCOME NOTE AND INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The sessions commenced with the recitation of verses from the Holy Quran by Mr. Muhammad Ali Azizi, Social Mobilisation Specialist, RSPN. This was followed by an introduction of the participants initiated by the moderator of the convention, Ms. Filza Nasir, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, SUCCESS-RSPN.

Once all the participants briefly introduced themselves, Ms. Shandana H. Khan, CEO RSPN, welcomed the participants at the National Convention of LSOs 2018. She acknowledged and applauded the competent mechanism incorporated by the LSOs to tackle the dynamic and prevailing issues of the community members. She also talked about the partner organisations and the support they have extended to the RSPs to develop, foster and support LSOs in the field.

She said, "There has been a tremendous change in the lives of people and we appreciate the community institutions that the people have formed to bring about this change. We expect to see this positivity and progress being replicated throughout the country."

SESSION I: ROLE OF COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS' (COS/VOS/LSOS) IN PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN

Ms. Filza Nasir briefly illustrated the agenda of the convention and the significance of sharing the work of LSOs at this forum. The entire session primarily highlighted the work and progression of Community Institutions, especially the LSOs, in promoting the socio-economic development in Pakistan.

The panellists for the session comprised of Dr. Ishrat Hussain (Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Government of Pakistan), Mr. Milko Van Gool (Head of Cooperation, European Union in Pakistan), Dr Atta ur Rehman (Balochistan Madrasa Education Council Baluchistan), Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan (Chairman, RSPN), and Mr. Rashid Bajwa (Chief Executive Officer, NRSP). The representatives of LSOs from throughout the country also gave speeches and presentations during the session.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, stressed on the importance of social mobilisation and reaching out to the poorest of the poor households. He said that the RSPs approach complements the development agenda of the Government and is the missing link to increase the state's reach to the poor households.

He said, "There is common thinking that only the Government can uplift poor households, but that is not the case. We need to involve the communities, focus on enabling them to help themselves. Social mobilisation - building the institutions of the people - is the central piece of development; it provides an extensive reach to households and reaches the people, which the Government departments cannot." He presented an action plan for the achievement of Prime Ministers 5-years targets to Dr. Ishrat Hussain. The action plan included the following key elements:

- 1. Poverty Reduction through Social Mobilisation**
- 2. Contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

- Health (improving access to potable drinking water, immunisation of children and women and distribution of Health Insurance Cards)
- Sanitation and safe disposal of solid waste
- Education (enrolment of out of school children, Smart Schools, provision of missing facilities at schools and training of SMCs in government schools)

3. Low Cost Housing for the Rural Poor

4. Youth Employment

5. Making Climate Change People Centric

6. Community Physical Infrastructure

7. National Policy Framework for Community Driven Development (CDD)

The presentation of Shoaib Sultan Khan was followed by presentations and speeches from the LSO representatives:

Ms. Zarina Buriro, LSO Nai Roshni, District Jacobabad, shared her experience of being a part of the community institution of her area, their achievements, and the challenges they have faced. She was proud of the women of her area who have become successful entrepreneurs and have led to the economic empowerment of the community overall. She said, “We were in a really poor situation as if we were lost. As the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) approached us our lives shifted completely, we now have education, good health services, and more. SRSO also encouraged us to think out of the box and create better lives for ourselves; they also gave us CIF. Now, women in my area run their own shops and some have their own small embroidery businesses as well.”

Mr. Gul Muhammad, LSO Abseen, District Kohistan, talked about the challenges faced by his community before the formation of community institutions in Kohistan district. He was thankful to Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) for their continuous support in enabling the people of his area to help themselves. He said, “Before we were organised into community institutions, our concerns and issues were not given due attention, due to remoteness and backwardness. But now the villagers come to VOs and make mutual decisions that have made and continue to make their lives easier and better.”

After the experience sharing of the LSO representatives, Dr Rashid Bajwa, CEO NRSP, talked about the efforts undertaken by NRSP for social sector through the Water, Immunisation, Sanitation, and Education (WISE) programme. He said that the LSOs are an integral part of WISE programme and highlighted how NRSP is undertaking WISE programmes for social development. He said, “The question is what is next after forming COs and VOs. We should now challenge the communities to take over some of the key challenges like water immunisation, sanitation, and access to education, and work towards them on their own. This would be the real achievement!”

While focusing on access to education nationwide, the students enrolled in Madrassahs must not be ignored. Dr Atta-ur-Rehman from Balochistan Madrassahs Education Council talked about how his organisation is endeavouring to mainstream Madrassahs in the province. He said, “We had the Madrassah Educational Council recognised in collaboration with Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP). We started in three phases, increased the number of Madrassahs in our fold,

imparting formal education, benefitting 21,000 students. We are mainstreaming the Madrassahs in Balochistan so that these students are formally educated as well, and hence progress!”

In light of the presentations and speeches by RSPs and LSOs’ representatives, Dr. Ishrat Hussain, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for institutional reforms and austerity, talked about the importance of LSOs and the social pillar. He pledged to support the RSPs and RSPN in their efforts, especially in Balochistan. He also commended the WISE programme of NRSP. He further requested RSPN to focus more on FATA since it is undergoing a major transition and requires support of all major organisations, especially the ones working at grassroots. He said, “The knowledge of the grassroots exists at the grassroots. It is important to gather this knowledge and bridge the gap between the local governments and the community institutions to benefit the people of Pakistan. I am delighted to see how the RSPs, through their extensive network, have reached out to the remotest of areas, especially by covering the Madrassahs in Balochistan.”

After the heartening message and commitment made by Dr. Ishrat Hussain, the LSOs’ representatives continued to share their experiences and lessons from the field with the participants of the National Convention of LSOs 2018.

Rozeena from Gilgit Baltistan talked about the initiatives undertaken by her LSO Rahimabad to improve the status of women and involve them in local businesses. Women from all across Pakistan are working day and night to support, not just their families, but their entire region. She said, “We have a major problem of youth unemployment in our area. Our organisation is spending day and night to take care of the prevailing problems. To resolve the issue, we are working to improve Domestic Farming, Honeybee keeping and have introduced off seasons vegetables as well. These initiatives have immensely improved the livelihood conditions of the women of our area.”

Women are being supported, promoted, and encouraged throughout the country by the RSPs and the Community Institutions. Farzana Kausar from Punjab lost her father when she was young. It is never easy to cope up emotionally with the loss of a parent, let alone take care of the sudden financial constraints by losing an earning member of the family. Through the support of Institute of Rural Management, Farzana became an entrepreneur and is now earning a substantial amount to support her family. She shared her heart-wrenching story with the participants of the convention. She said, “When my father passed away, we were devastated. I did not know what to do. But then I became an entrepreneur by learning from IRM and have now become a son to my parents. I earn 14000-15000 rupees per month and thankfully my mother does not have to work anymore.”

Learning a skill and then being able to use it for earning in real life is a skill in itself. Shah Khalid is another beneficiary who has proven that once you have been trained in a demanded skill - you can accomplish anything in life. He said, “I took the course of building electrician, with the help of that I went to Saudi Arabia and worked there. Within two months I got a raise in my salary all because of my hard work and newly acquired skill, Thankfully, I was able to pay off all the debts on me and today I am a self-earning man who is proud of how far he has come!”

When referring to challenges being faced by beneficiaries throughout Pakistan, it is hard to miss the challenging situation that the residents of FATA region are in currently, especially during their transition phase. FATA is a very challenging environment to work in, especially for women. Ayesha Israel, an SSO of SRSP in former FATA shared her experience of working

in difficult conditions for promoting access to basic necessities of life. She is an embodiment of women empowerment and is an example for people of Pakistan to follow to help themselves. She said, "Movement for women is very restricted in former FATA, but SRSP has supported us to progress throughout and not just tackle the prevailing problem. People in FATA are unaware of their basic necessities like education, health, sanitation etc. They do not have opportunities, and where they have an opportunity, their mobility restricts them. It is an extremely challenging environment but we still work."

The LSO presentations under session one came to an end, on this note the panellists not only commended the work of LSOs but also gave an instructive insight on exploring an array of possibilities to strengthen the framework of social mobilisation.

Mr. Milko Van Gool, Head of Cooperation at European Union in Pakistan talked about the development perspective of the EU, and how he believes the approach towards development of RSPs, RSPN, and the Government of Pakistan are the same as EU. He was pleased to see the efforts and achievements of the community organisations at grassroots and expressed his wish to visit the LSOs himself. He said, "I feel content to see that the RSPs and the Government of Pakistan, represented by Dr Ishrat Hussain, have the same views regarding development as the EU. I would like to visit the LSO members and see their work at the grassroots myself. I feel proud that we are investing in human capital in Pakistan and are encouraging the voice of the people to surface – they are the key element!"

SESSION II: COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS' (COS/VOS/LSOS) ROLE IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

This session highlighted how the community institutions have contributed towards promoting Gender Equality. The LSO members of Sindh shared their stories from the field on achieving gender equality in their respective villages.

Covering miles to reach the convention, Kamla Devi from LSO Parker of Tharparkar, voiced the challenges she and her LSO members have faced and the way they have achieved success in spite of the difficult operating conditions. She claimed that the Community Institutions are a ray of hope in midst of the desert sands and an opportunity for the people of her community to learn and progress. She said, "Belonging to the far-flung area of Tharparkar where the basic necessities of life are hard to get. It was for the first time that we women participated in elections with the highest turnover in the country, considering the backwardness. And now that I am standing here in front of you all, it is only because of the *tanzeem*."

Maria Partab, representing LSO Digh Mori from Tando Muhammad Khan at the National Convention of LSOs, mentioned how her LSO covers 8 VOs and 107 COs. The LSO achievements include successfully providing IGG to 40 households, CIF to 110 households and currently working on 7 CPI projects. She also provided a detailed account of all the interventions successfully achieved under the WISE programme implemented in her district. She exclaimed at the event, "it is heartening to see people from all across the country are participating in this convention and supporting the efforts of Community Institutions, especially women."

The session also included a video human diary, a video jingle, and documentaries prepared under the European Union funded SUCCESS programme.

SESSION III: PANEL DISCUSSION ON FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Agha Javad, General Manager moderated the panel discussion of LSO representatives. He said, "It is imperative to realise what resources we have and how we can efficiently utilise them. Adequate use of available and limited resources can help achieve desired results." The ensuing discussion focused on efficient use of resources and the way forward.

Abdul Qayyum from LSO Tameer-e-Millat, talked about education and the importance of school infrastructures. He said, "We are focusing on improving school infrastructures for easy access. Women LSO members are also encouraged to teach to improve their income levels."

Maria Partab, the iron lady from LSO Digh Mori, Tando Muhammad Khan, talked about linkages with the Government and the importance of the presence of Government Representatives at such events. She said, "The presence of Dr. Ishrat Hussain at this convention shows that the government is supportive of these community initiatives."

Muhammad Shabbir from Skardu talked about spreading the benefits of networking and working in community institutions at a great level. He said, "We are trying to focus on giving CIF to the poorest of the poor and to broaden our network by affiliating with other organisations around us with the same aim as to spread out benefits at a greater level with sustainability."

A passionate leader from District Swabi whose powerful words stirred the emotions of the audience, Sana Ullah from LSO Aman, has worked in fields of education, health, environment sustainability and has gathered funds to contribute towards Diamer Dam amongst other things. He said, "It is great to see Pakistani women working diligently for their communities and I salute Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan for his constant efforts in bringing people out of poverty in Pakistan. Personally, I have had an opportunity to work in the field and grasp ground realities which has motivated me to work hard to bring about positive change."

Fauzia Bibi from LSO Chirah, Islamabad, stressed on the importance of education and entrepreneurship for progress. She is an empowered woman and works to give confidence to other women of her community as well. She said, "I am working towards empowering women in my community. We have distributed many sewing machines so that women can be financially independent. They now contribute towards their children's education and health."

Chairman LSO RDSO, Muneer Qureshi from District Mansehra, talked about how important the element of trust is in order for the community institutions to progress smoothly. Without trust, it would not be possible to keep the bond between members intact. He said, "It is essential to build trust with the community members. Once established, only then can we bring about positive change."

Haider Zaman from LSO Itman Welfare Society talked about the link between CIF and basic necessities like education, income generation, and women empowerment. He said, "Women are now more empowered in our community. Also, the educational institutions have improved. This is all because of the CIF which has had a tremendous impact on our lives."

The importance of introducing diverse services in the community and ensuring that there are multi-talented people present in the team can ensure that an LSO is not just versatile but also inclusive. Sher Ahmed Awais of Inqilab Welfare Foundation under Punjab Rural Support Programme, talked about the importance of diversification. He said, "We have tried our best to introduce diverse

services in our community. For instance, two people have been trained to give medical check-ups to the villagers' cattle and the entire village has thus benefited."

Daulat Khan from Balochistan talked about sustainability of LSOs without any external intervention by organisations and donors. He shared the recipe of success being followed by his LSO Paasban. He said, "The real question is how to sustain the LSO without any external support. We believe in financial independence, technological advancement, and savings."

Open Discussion and Q&A Session:

Women who could not previously talk to other women of their community with freedom, have now travelled all the way from Larkana to Islamabad to participate in the LSO 2018 and voice their opinion. A lady from Larkana said, "We were not allowed to talk to other women in our neighbourhood. But with the presence of the community organisations, we have more freedom to network."

A brave lady from Malakand stepped forward to share how she has worked in her community to support women, "We try to help women who have been a victim of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the disabled women of the community, to help them get opportunities to progress in life too."

After listening to the queries regarding CIF and other interventions, Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman RSPN, said that the most important factor in CIF management is the decision regarding who will receive the loan, and this rests with the Community Institutions. Ensuring effective monetary resource management and human capital development will reap maximum benefits. He said, "Distribution of finances needs to be done diligently. All monetary transactions should be monitored and resources should be channelled effectively to reap maximum benefits."

CLOSING SESSION

After the discussion, a shield-distribution ceremony was held where the notable guests handed shields to the representatives of LSOs who had presented at the Convention.

To conclude the LSO Convention 2018, Mr. Khaleel Ahmed Tetlay, Chief Operating Officer, RSPN, gave the vote of thanks. Mr. Tetlay said, "I thank all the participants of the LSO convention for attending this event and making it a huge success. From the organisers to the presenters and to the participants, it would not have been possible without you all! It is heartening to see the active participation of young people in helping the LSOs raise their voice. I hope to see the same, if not more, engagement in the future as well!"



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