A divorced woman, Zahida is no stranger to adversity. It’s made her a better leader. And she is putting her leadership skills to good use, improving her community’s environment and nutrition.

If there is one thing that Zahida is known for in Mureed Babar, a village in Dadu, it’s her passion and ability to take challenges in her stride and make things better for the people around her. That’s why it was no surprise she was elected president of her Local Support Organisation (LSO) when the SUCCESS programme helped the villagers in her region organise themselves and build their capacities to improve their lives.

Zahida’s strength didn’t come easy. Married off at a young age, she and her husband, a teacher at the local government school, quickly had a baby. Since the first baby was a girl, she was pressured into trying again for a boy. Her elation at the birth of her second child was short lived, however, when she was informed that due to the complicated delivery that nearly cost her life, she would not be able to conceive again.

Not only did Zahida’s husband use this as grounds for divorcing her, he also waged a custody battle for their two children. Zahida received no support from her brother, her only surviving family member. Nonetheless, she fought for her children, becoming a seamstress to provide for them. ‘All I wanted was for my children to have an education and for them to know the value of working hard to make things better around them’.

Zahida’s father was a more positive male role model. As she explains ‘My father was a social activist and my biggest inspiration. He made me realize that our purpose is not just to look out for ourselves but everyone and everything around us, even the environment’. This is why Zahida wanted to be part of the Programme for Improved Nutrition in Sindh (PINS) as soon as her LSO met with them. She was very interested to learn that one of the areas PINS would focus on was planting trees, especially Moringa trees, the benefits of which were discussed during the session. Zahida was intrigued to learn how chewing Moringa leaves worked as an accessible and effective nutritional supplement.
‘My father was a social activist and my biggest inspiration. He made me realize that our purpose is not just to look out for ourselves but everyone and everything around us, even the environment’.

Eager to make these available for her community, Zahida collected donations from the members of the community organisations to buy saplings that she could look after. She planted 7 saplings a matter of four days. ‘I don’t think I’ve seen my mother look so happy in a while,’ Zahida’s son commented on his mother’s new passion project.

But a few weeks’ later Zahida came to the LSO office to discover that someone had plucked her saplings. No one expected the usually soft-spoken LSO President to react the way she did. ‘You could see that my mother was visibly upset and brought it up during a meeting where some people were quite taken aback by her annoyance.’

When asked why she was so upset since they were just some plants, Zahida pointed out that she had planted them so that the community could use the leaves as a nutritional supplement. She reiterated their benefits for the community especially the women who had recently given birth. She reminded them of how important it is that they receive a good diet so they can take care of their children and raise them to be healthy as well. In the end, she convinced her fellow LSO members to work with her to plant more Moringa. Once again, her tenacity prevailed.

‘There’s definitely a spring in my mother’s step again! and I’m so proud of her. I’m also glad her work is receiving the recognition it deserves when the PINS team visit our village. It’s great seeing her contribute to making this village healthier which was not something we worked towards before our village was made part of PINS.’

SUCCESS and PINS are both funded by the European Union for a combined value of EUR 163 million. Rural Support Programmes Network is implementing both these programmes along with other implementing partners and partner Rural Support Programmes (RSPs)

More information about European Union is available on:
Web: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/pakistan/
Twitter: @EUPakistan
Facebook: European-Union-in-Pakistan

Find more about PINS on:
Web: www.rspn.org
Facebook: ProgrammeForImprovedNutritioninSindh