

Goodness is contagious
or
Maha Bibi's journey from a helpless to a helping hand
By
Rahim Khetran, Bilal Gichki & Samina Mengal

It was not long ago that Mah Bibi and her family were living hand to mouth. Mah Bibi lives in a mud (*kacha*) house along with her husband and three daughters in a village called Yar Muhammad in district Khuzdar, Balochistan. None of her family members have ever been to school. Without any formal education, skill and the resources, her family was trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, and suffering from all the pain this brought to her family members.

Mah Bibi's life began to change for better when she attended a community dialogue led by a Social Organiser from the European Union supported Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) Programmeⁱ in 2018. The Social Organiser had talked about the approach of the BRACE programme that is based on the belief that 'every household has the potential to improve their own poverty status'. Mah Bibi was inspired by this and decided to become a member of the local Community Organisation (CO). Over the next weeks and months, Mah Bibi also became active in the local Village Organisation (VO) and the Local Support Organisation (LSO). A key pillar of the BRACE programme is to foster community institutions in line with one of the programme's specific objectives:

'To empower citizens and communities and provide them with means enabling them to implement community-driven socio-economic development interventions, and increased voice and capacity to influence public policy decision making through active engagement with local authorities for quality, inclusive, and equitable service delivery, and civic-oversight.'

The BRACE programme is designed to contribute to reduction in rural poverty and improvement in livelihoods by employing a holistic participatory approach. The programme is helping increase the assets and incomes of the rural poor by supporting the provision of Income Generating Grants (IGG) to the extremely poor (0-11 category on the poverty score card) and small amounts of capital from the Community Investment Fund (CIF) for the poor (0-23 category on the poverty score card). IGG and CIF are interventions provided for income generating activities that the households themselves identify in the Micro Investment Plan (MIP). IGG and CIF are used by households for micro businesses, purchase of livestock assets and agriculture inputs. Another important intervention of the Programme is to provide Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) to the members of poor households so that upon completion of training they are gainfully self-employed and are able to diversify and increase their household's income.



Mah Bibi prepared her household's MIP along with family members. Mah Bibi identified the rearing of goats as a potential income generating activity. Maha Bibi was familiar with goat rearing as many other households in the village had goats. Fodder was also available. However, her main constraint was that she did not have the capital to purchase goats. Mah Bibi said that if she could access capital then she could begin to harness her potential to increase her economic assets, increased income and could improve her household's condition. Mah Bibi's MIP was reviewed by the LSO and given that her family was in the poorest poverty score category Maha Bibi was given IGG for goat rearing (worth Rs. 48,000).



Mah Bibi got IGG grant in 2019 in kind and received three female goats of Rs. 50,000 worth. The happiness of the family doubled when the number of goats literally doubled after breeding of their goats in a couple of months. So their resources multiplied and nutrition of the family also improved as they now had abundant milk in their daily meals and the family felt more empowered as it now they own adequate resources.

Mah Bibi's life began to change for the better because she is a member of the network of community institutions led by the active, dynamic and deep rooted Local Support Organisation (LSO), working in the Union Council Abey Noghey of district Khuzdar in Balochistan.

The LSO was established in 2009 under the European Union supported Balochistan Community Development Programme (BCDP) and named

Guwarkh (name of an indigenous wild flower) aiming to add beauty and fragrance to the lives of the people they are working with. Master Sana Ullah, LSO President, has devoted his life for the wellbeing of the community members. He and his LSO members have established strong ties with the district Government officials and local representatives and are doing their best for the development of their Union Council. The LSO members have taken over 65 self-initiatives for the development of their areas. These initiatives are in the fields of health, education, infrastructure, livelihoods, environment, women empowerment, employment and so on. It was because of the genuine leadership, pure volunteer and philanthropic work and better service delivery of the LSO that it got awarded with the 'Best LSO in Balochistan' in 2014 at the Annual Balochistan LSO Convention at Quetta. LSO Guwarkh has distributed IGG grants to 42 households in the Union Council under the BRACE Programme; identified 36 households for livestock rearing, bought three sewing kits and opened three small shops in the village.

It is the beauty of the three-tiered social mobilisation approach, that Once the poor communities are organised in to their own institutions, they finally become as empowered as to help others around them. In this respect, Mah Bibi set another example of helping others. One day when she was milking the goats to feed her children, she thought of Bibi Amna, another poor lady in the village whom she had met couple of times during the CO meetings. Mah Bibi donated one of the goats to Bibi Amna with the intentions that one day she will too have the milk and be able to feed her children. Following this exemplary action of Mah Bibi, 14 other women in the village have also donated one goat to the neighbouring poor families. This example of Mah Bibi clearly shows that goodness can be contagious.

¹ The five-year European Union supported BRACE Programme is implemented in nine districts of the Balochistan province by the Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) and the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP). Further information about the Programme is available at: <http://www.rspn.org/index.php/current-projects/eu-rspn-balochistan-rural-development-and-community-empowerment-programme-brace/>