

Breaking the Barriers

Sabiha, a mother of six children, lives in a remote village in union council Nodiz of district Kech in Balochistan. She appears to be an energetic and cheerful woman, who is content and happy in her life at the moment. Her contentment strikes one as odd, given that she is living in a remote village with minimal opportunities to earn, far from basic health and education facilities. However, she attributes this happiness to the opportunities provided to her by the EU-funded BRACE Programme.

She started her story by saying, “I felt fortunate when I learned that I was selected by the community organisation’s members for an Income Generating Grant (IGG). There are many deserving families in the settlement, but they know the hardship I was going through to earn two times of meal a day.” She whispered, “My husband is an addict. He does not care even if we starve to death.” Her poverty score is 16. Her eldest son dropped out from a school at the early age to earn living as daily wage labourer. The younger ones never got admitted.

In this backdrop, National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) under the IGG component of the EU funded BRACE Programme provided her PKR 33, 400, in October 2019, to initiate an income generating activity to improve her family livelihood. The IGGs are provided to poorest community members, especially women to use in a productive activity.

Sabiha says that she used to do embroidery work before, for villagers, and she had also learned stitching clothes from a neighbour, but she could not utilise these skills as she did not have a sewing machine or inputs for embroidery work. With the amount given as IGG, she purchased a sewing machine, an electric motor, a battery and solar panel to generate electricity. She says she started stitching clothes at home. “Fortunately the amount was enough to buy solar panel, battery and an electric motor with a sewing machine, which made it easier for me to stitch more dresses”, says Sabiha.

First, she sewed clothes for her children, and then she stitched a few dress for women in neighbourhood. She says, “I started to get more orders as they liked their design and stitching. I charge PKR 250 – 300 per dress as I know they cannot afford more than this. In wedding seasons and on Eid, I get more orders and I can stitch four or five dresses a day.”

The reason that Sabiha states for her contentment in life is her financial independence that she has gained through her own hard work, while using her existing skills with the support of IGG. She says, “They [NRSP] had also given me a three-day training [on enterprise development]. I was told not to spend all earning on daily consumption. I was advised to save profits. When I started to earn from stitching clothes, I thought why not open a shop at home. I gave PKR 15,000 from my earning to my son, who brought stock for a small grocery shop. Initially, I kept sweets, chips, washing powder, soap and other small items for sale. I am extremely happy to be able to earn and fulfill our daily needs. Today, I earn PKR 6,000 – 7,000 from stitching clothes on monthly basis and PKR 15,000- 18,000 from the home based grocery shop.”

Sabiha demonstrates her excellent entrepreneurial skills and shows us a lesson that everyone has a potential to do more and with the right opportunities such as the one Sabiha got through the BRACE Programme, men and women can achieve anything.

