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“This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.”

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Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) Programme funded by the European Union completes its five years tenure in 2022 and is currently in its No-Cost Extension (NCE) Phase. In the inception phase, the Rural Support Programmes Network, (RSPN), the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), and the Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) conducted a widespread Poverty Scorecard (PSC) census which helped with the identification of the potential beneficiaries according to their poverty status.

The journey through these five years is documented in the form of stories from the field after multiple activities. These human-interest stories have been titled "The Insights of BRACE" which reflects the efforts taken by the community members and the implementing teams in helping each other tumbling their household-level issues and taking a step toward reducing the poverty in each district under the BRACE Programme.

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With its vast geography, Balochistan has abundant mineral and energy resources, untapped human potential, and offers opportunities to change the existing situation. However, Balochistan's population suffers disproportionately compared to the rest of the country. This is due to weak public policies, poor governance, the geopolitical situation, displacements and a burdening influx of refugees, but also due to extreme poverty.

The Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) Programme, funded by the European Union (EU), is a strategic government development initiative to alleviate rural poverty by building on community mobilisation and citizen empowerment. It is operating in ten districts of Balochistan. The Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) provide social, technical, and financial assistance to improve and expand income sources for targeted community households.

As the BRACE is focused on ten districts of Balochistan, namely: namely Chaman, Duki, Jhal Magsi, Kech, Kila Abdullah, Khuzdar, Loralai, Pishin, Washuq, and Zhob, this book caters to the stories from Kech. In collaboration with the NRSP, the beneficiaries interviewed under the BRACE programme in district Kech provided insight into how the idea of community-driven development is reflected and has benefited the people there.

The focus of BRACE is to enable poor rural women to reduce poverty at the household level through social organisations. This starts at a small level, organising Community Organisations (COs) among neighbouring households, and at the larger village level bringing them together into Village Organisations (VOs) to deal with village problems. VOs eventually gained enough momentum to establish Local Support Organisations (LSOs) at the Union Council level, some

Preface

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of which became a member of the Joint District Development Committee (JDDC) at the Tehsil and District levels in which there is the participation of the line departments and the district authorities which directly bring to the attention of local governments and negotiate with them. The insights of the BRACE programme bring a series of stories of the beneficiaries as well as the implementation team with a focus on the challenges they face during the execution of BRACE.
KECH (2017-22)

- Number of Households with PSC survey completed: 59,586
- No. of Households Organised: 35,328
- No. of Female COs (73%): 1,932
- No. of Female VOs (33%): 134
- No. of LSOs formed: 32
- No. of COs formed: 2,612
- No. of VOs formed: 406
- No. of community members trained in CMST: 3,567 (Women 77%)
- No. of Community members trained in LMST: 699 (Women 65%)
- Number of community members trained as Community Resource Persons (CRPs): 138 (Women 73%)
- No. of Individual Beneficiaries of Completed CPIs: 713
- Number of community members Trained in TVET: 1,295
- No. of beneficiaries received assistive devices: 764 (Women 531, Male 233)
- Total amount of CIF disbursed to poor households by VOs/LSOs (0-23): 137.5 million (PKR)
- Total amount of CIF with LSOs: 89.7 million (PKR)
5,104 Number of HHs Benefiting from Completed CPIs

29,536 Individual Beneficiaries of Completed CPIs

20.9 million (PKR) Total amount of sub-grants for CPI with VOs

3,608 Number of HH benefiting from CIF

713 Number of community members trained in TVET

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SOCIAL MOBILISATION
Zubaira Raheem a mother of two, and a resident of Kulber, Balicha Shirki in the Tump Tehsil of district Kech, got married at a very young age and had to discontinue her education. Right after her marriage, the 25 years old, Zubaira, like other women in her town would spend her time at home with her kids with most of her time spent on household stuff. Going out, meeting, and interacting with new people, knowing, or putting effort to solve the existing problems of the community was uncommon to her. She was living a simple life before she attended an introductory session about a new programme, i.e., Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) programme.

“In September 2018, I luckily attended an introductory session organised by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) about the fourth-coming programme named BRACE, funded by the European Union. I joined the programme as a member of Community Organisation (CO) Kulber Balecha Shirki. I took part in the Poverty Score Card (PSC) census too. After joining the BRACE programme, I took part in community engagement activities and started enjoying my work as such activities were new and exciting to me.” shared Zubaira.

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It was BRACE programme that made me come out of my home and meet new people. Almost every single person in the surrounding was unknown to me before the BRACE programme.
As a CO member, it was Zubaira's duty to go from one house to the other, from one village to another, and finalise the most deserving people for different interventions such as Community Investment Fund (CIF) an interest-free loan given to poor people to support and boost their already existing business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) a training that enables oneself to learn a skill, work and support his/her family. Income Generating Grants (IGGs) a grant that supports the poorest families in their income generation and Persons with Special Needs (PWSNs) where physically challenged individuals are identified and provided with different assistive devices to ease their struggles.

"I now can tell you on finger-tips, the number of PWSNs in my village", she challenged.

Besides her duty as a member of the CO, she has attended different workshops, training, and seminar on different issues. She, herself has organised different sessions regarding community empowerment since she joined the BRACE programme.

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Village Organisation (VO)

Badr Un Nisa
Balecha Shirki Mix, Shahap

"Progress without women is not possible". This statement is rightly proved by Badr Un Nisa. A government teacher and the general secretary of LSO Shahap, District Kech. She started her journey as a school teacher in 1993. She has got an image that can influence and attract others very soon, and that's the reason she was contacted and asked to join and work for a private sector organisation. She became the first female to work with a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in her area when she joined an organisation called Strengthening and Participatory Organisation (SPO) back in 1994.

In 2018, ten years later since Nisa left SPO, the BRACE programme which is funded by the European Union was introduced in district Kech by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP). She joined the BRACE programme as a manager of Community Organisation (CO) and ever since then she is playing an important role in the development of the community. She held sessions and meetings with people in the area and asked them to come and join the initiative taken by the BRACE programme. She is a teacher who manages her school and activities outside the school brilliantly.

Joining SPO was like inviting trouble. I had both my supporters and rivals within the boundaries. However, at home, I was supported by my husband but was opposed by my elder son at the same time. But nothing could force me to hold back.
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“My first opponent was my own son but the toughest one I felt was the Mufti (Mufti is a term used for religious scholars) of our masjid (Mosque). Because he could easily influence people and turn those who were supporting me, against me”, stated Nisa.

“You must be wondering how that Mufti turned from a rival into a supporter. So, I must add here that I went straight into the masjid and told the mufti please not oppose if you cannot support my cause. I guided him about the programme, made things clear to him, and finally managed to convince him”, shared Nisa with a smile on her face.

“No you know what's the rarest thing I have ever done?" Nisa queried us during the interview. "It was entering the masjid being a woman," she answered her question with a laugh.

It was Badr Un Nisa who opened the first Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills (ALNS) training centre in Balochi Bazar where she belongs, and it was the hardest thing to do in that area.

Nisa is conducting Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) sessions at her home including the sessions on community and women empowerment whenever she gets a free hour or two. As the BRACE programme is on its way to completion, she is confident and hopes she will continue the work and try to bear financial expenses if she had to, after the programme.

She concluded her story on a very lighter note with glee "I have collected too many certificates during my work that I may use to grab the attention of vote-casters and turn them in my favor during the elections if I plan to contest ever".

“I have been trying to convince parents to enroll their children in school as being a teacher, I know how important it is to get our children a proper education.

“I am sending my kids, a boy, and a girl to school so they can become better human beings which not only is good for themselves but also for the community they belong to.”
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Let us talk about social empowerment at the community level!

Adil, a resident of village Tump district Kech, is currently serving LSO Shahap as president. He is an activist when it comes to the betterment and empowerment of the rural community. He regularly attended Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) sessions on different issues and topics conducted by different organisations and started his journey with an organisation called Strengthening and Participatory Organisation (SPO) back in 1994. Later that year he joined National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and formed Community Based Organisations (CBOs) that dealt with the Community Investment Fund (CIF) disbursement till the mid-2000s i.e., 2004, when NRSP had to postpone and later cancel their activities due to uncertain circumstances in the area. When things got worse due to the refusal of community members to pay back the loan, NRSP had to withdraw from the area which resulted in Adil's lay off. Soon after he focused on his own business until august 2018.

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Adil, a young and energetic guy is a man of words. According to him, he chose to stay with his female colleagues and showed his support throughout as they too had to go through a lot of ups and downs while forming COs, VOs, or LSOs.

"Once I was forced to leave the village where I was on my duty to meet the residents for the Poverty Scorecard (PSC) Survey and talk to them about the BRACE programme, because people thought this is just a false survey and they are going to get nothing as an already completed survey by another organisation had disappeared." Adil shared this incident with a loud laugh.

After the formation of CO, he was selected as a manager and as a manager he had to travel to Turbat city constantly and attend training and meetings as per the requirement of the programme. With each meeting or training, Adil got new opponents for the same old reason.

Keeping his struggles in mind and acknowledging his efforts, Adil was later elected as president of the LSO Shahap. Adil like his other colleagues, wants the EU-funded BRACE programme to continue so the newly formed COs, VOs, and LSOs can benefit from it.

Adil shows a strong willingness to work voluntarily with the organisations already working in Tump, district Kech after the completion of the EU-funded BRACE programme. It's hard to find such people who are ready to serve the humanity without their own benefit in it.

The people of the area are not so welcoming when we talk about foreign-funded projects. I had to meet religious scholars, and elders of the village and try to convince them and lessen the number and intensity of my rivals.

No matter what, if the BRACE programme continues or not, I will keep working for my people's better future. My services are always available, and I will try to contribute as much as I can to my community.
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LEADERSHIP
omen struggle on daily basis to maintain fragile balances in society and within the family sphere, but the challenges are so numerous that all their efforts are whipped out. Being a government school teacher, a mother, and a wife, all at the same time has made life even more challenging for Zalya but it's the passion that keeps her going proving the saying “When going gets tough, the tough gets going”.

Zalya, being a Community Organisation leader, attended a three-day Community Management Skills Training (CMST) in 2019. She is now playing her role in the implementation of the BRACE programme funded by the European Union in Union Council Nasirabad of the Kech district.

Later, becoming the leader of her Village Organisation (VO), Zalya completed another training called Leadership Management Skills Training (LMST). She conducts meetings, and awareness sessions and keeps a record of her Community Institutions. She is also taking sessions on positive behavioral changes in the community.

“I was not sure if I should go for the training and work in an environment where there will be men too, but I found my male colleagues very friendly and supportive. I am enjoying the workplace and I visit with my male teammates. I no longer hesitate or worry about the Co-working environment”, Zalya shared.
Women struggle on daily basis to maintain fragile balances in society and within the family sphere, but the challenges are so numerous that all their efforts are whipped out. Being a government school teacher, a mother, and a wife, all at the same time has made life even more challenging for Zalya but it’s the passion that keeps her going proving the saying “When going gets tough, the tough gets going”.

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Zalya investigates other relevant matters too and coordinates with the Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and is responsible for the matters of her Local Support Organisation (LSO) too.

“I visit different schools along with the parents when they feel hesitant or whenever they come across any inconvenience throughout the admission process. The admission process is not something one should worry about, but most people do not have very basic documents required for school admission here in our area. I take residents to the National Data Base and Registration Authority (NADRA) to get them registered for their Computerised National Identity Card (CNICs), B-form/birth certificates of their younger ones, and Nikkah Namas of the couples so they have all the basic documents in hand when needed”, Zalya shared.

We all know women are change-makers and can play a significant role in the development of our societies if given leadership opportunities. Despite many obstacles, Zalya proved herself a true change-maker.

She further added, “I know changes take time and a lot of consistent hard work. To change things around, I have started with my own home. I have kept my door open and supplied water to those in need from my own personal water connection.”

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After the training, I was quite equipped with the concepts of Community Institutions (CIS) and how to run them. Today, I identify the deserving eligible for interventions like Community Investment Fund (CIF), Income Generating Grant (IGG), provision of assistive devices for People With Special Needs (PWSNs), and other interventions of the programme.

She agrees with the quote “To change the world, change yourself first.”
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
It's hard to be a woman and not an easy job in a patriarchal society especially if you are a working woman. In a man-dominant society, the society expects so much from women. Since childhood, young girls are prepared to get things done with a certain goal in mind. Abida Usman's story is relatable to it.

A resident of Kallag Saami, a village in Union Council Saami, district Kech, Abida lives with her husband Usman, and seven children. She and her husband bring wood from the mountains as much as a single man or woman can carry. After selling it to the local market, the amount they received was never enough for Abida and her family. Her son who is a driver risks his life and imports oil from Iran for a living as many of the residents do through the border trade. Apart from this, Abida would work as a maid to bear the daily expenses of her family of nine.

Abida was introduced to the Income Generating Grant (IGG) in the routine meeting of her Community Organisation (CO). Abida with a Poverty Scorecard 15 became eligible for the grant. She received an amount of PKR 33,400 with a three-day Enterprise Development Training (EDT) where she along with other IGG beneficiaries, was trained on how to start, maintain, and extend the business. I bought two goats with the IGG amount and that's how my business started. I was so passionate about the business that I started to take care of the livestock by myself. They grew up to eleven out of which I sold two to meet some expenses. Today I am left with a trip of nine goats.
It's hard to be a woman and not an easy job in a patriarchal society especially if you are a working woman. In a man-dominant society, the society expects so much from women. Since childhood, young girls are prepared to get things done with a certain goal in mind. Abida Usman's story is relatable to it.

A resident of Kallag Saami, a village in Union Council Saami, district Kech, Abida lives with her husband Usman, and seven children. She and her husband bring wood from the mountains as much as a single man or woman can carry. After selling it to the local market, the amount they received was never enough for Abida and her family. Her son who is a driver risks his life and imports oil from Iran for a living as many of the residents do through the border trade. Apart from this, Abida would work as a maid to bear the daily expenses of her family of nine.

Abida was introduced to the Income Generating Grant (IGG) in the routine meeting of her Community Organisation (CO). Abida with a Poverty Scorecard 15 became eligible for the grant.

She received an amount of PKR 33,400 with a three-day Enterprise Development Training (EDT) where she along with other IGG beneficiaries, was trained on how to start, maintain, and extend the business.

"I bought two goats with the IGG amount and that's how my business started. I was so passionate about the business that I started to take care of the livestock by myself. They grew up to eleven out of which I sold two to meet some expenses. Today I am left with a trip of nine goats."
Abida shared, “I no longer travel to the mountains or to the local market to sell the wood. I am making enough money that I am sending my little boy to school and paying easily for his education.”

“I want women not to rely on others, specially men, and to take responsibility and do whatever they can on their own.”

“I am going to sell another goat to buy my son's school uniform and shoes, and this will be the first time in many years that he will put on a new pair of shoes” expressed Abida with a spark of pride in her eyes.
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I want women not to rely on others, specially men, and to take responsibility and do whatever they can on their own.
Imagine a remote village in Kech district of Balochistan, with half fallen huts and mud houses, bumpy roads, and children playing in sand. An unhappy picture? Not for Iliyas. “Those days were the happiest,” she says, “as we would play in sand from dawn to dust. I cared less about how I was provided food to eat and clothes to wear.” Iliyas was one of the children, who never attended a school. His father was a daily wage labourer, who barely earned two times of meal for the family never imagined his child to attend a school. He said, that his childhood life changed for the worst when his father suffered from an illness and stayed bed ridden for years. Iliyas, being the eldest among his siblings, was sent out to work and earn for the family.

At the age of 13, Iliyas started to work as daily wage labourer. Later, he found an opportunity to work as a helper in a barber shop. He said, ‘On a meager wage, I worked at the shop for eight years. I learned to cut, style and shave boys’ and men’s hair and beard.” Iliyas served the customers with care and respect and they appreciated his skills. However, the shop owner disagreed to increase his wage. ‘It was very difficult for me to fulfill all the needs, as I had a wife and three children by this time. Inflation increased but my earnings remained same for years. I wanted to provide a better future for my children, but that was just a dream,’ he says. His wife and their three children (two sons and a daughter) lived in subsistence.

The family’s life changed for better when Iliyas’s wife, Lal Jan, became a member of a community organisation (CO) in the settlement. She actively participated in the CO meetings. In one of the meetings she learned that her household poverty score is
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**Income Generating Grants (IGG)**

Lal Jan  
District Kech
eight and she that she is eligible for a grant under European Union funded BRACE Programme. After getting grant support of PKR 33,400, in December 2019, with Lal Jan’s consent, Iliyas rented a shop and bought basic tools for a Baber shop. He said that he also took a loan of PKR 20,000 from a neighbour and furnished the shop with mirrors and chairs. With a satisfying smile on his face he said, “I opened my own business on the new year 2020. The customers who liked my service in the previous shop, now visit here. I earn PKR 800 – PKR 1200 on daily basis and PKR 25,000 a month. On the events such as Eid, I get more work and earn even more…I have recently renovated my house and bought a motorbike. Now, I can see my dream come true. I am able to provide better food and clothes to my family. My eldest son, 6, now attends a formal school.”

On asking about how income generating grant supported, he said “it was a way to take life in your own hands – to become independent, finally able to support your own family, and to plan a better future for the children.”

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Working in the fields as a farmer has never been an easy task for women as they must go through gender-specific obstacles. Women have been entering the labour market despite all the challenges they face.

Salma, a resident of village Kallag Saami, district Kech has been through such circumstances as she shared her story with us.

''My day starts there (pointed to the fields) and ends there. And at times, I don't even get time to prepare and send my daughters to school. Salma would leave for work early in the morning with her husband Jamil, where they shared a piece of land with five others and come back in the evening. Working women in society are not appreciated and have faced resistance from society always.

''I am fortunate enough that I have a husband like Jamil'' she narrated with pride and a smile. Besides helping her husband, Salma would sew dresses for a minimal amount of her free time at home. She hardly earned around PKR 5,000 a month and the money earned was later to be spent on her girls' education. Despite working all day, could not ease her problems both, in the fields and at home.

We, I and Jamil, don't get paid promptly, we must wait till the end of the season. The profit at the end of the six months season is divided among all the partners and we would get our share of PKR 10,000-12000 which seemed insufficient for our family's needs.

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One day, during the routine meeting of the Community Organisation (CO), I came to know about the interest-free Community Investment Fund (CIF) through the BRACE programme which is funded by European Union. As I am a member of the CO Hironk and I scored 18 on the Poverty Scorecard (PSC) which made me eligible for the loan, I received PKR 50,000 and attended a three-day training at one of the centres by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) team.

“I shared the news with Jamil and asked if we could open our own small tuck shop at home, as this is the way I can spend more time with our daughters. And with excitement, Jamil replied, “What else would one wish for?”

Now I am spending more time with my girls as well as running my own Tuck shop at home. We started our business with very few basic grocery items. Jamil would go to Turbat city and purchase the stuff needed for our shop at a very reasonable price.

“This shop earns me and my family an amount of PKR 8,000 a month, which is sufficient for us”, shared Salma.

According to Salma, the good thing is that today she is her own boss and does not have to wait months for her share of earnings.

Now, she is trying to expand her business as much as she can so they can send our daughters to cities like Quetta for quality education.

“I want my girls to study and work hard for their bright future. I would never want my girls to go through what I have been through”.

Life is better and peaceful when you don’t have to think about too many things at the same as I had to a few months back. Earlier I could concentrate on my work as would keep thinking about things back home and of course my kids too but now I don't have to worry about anything as I no longer go to the field, it is courtesy of this Community Investment Fund (CIF) by the BRACE programme.

Salma and Jamil together have set an example for society and proved what a man can do, a woman can do, and maybe even better. An empowered woman can play a very important role in the development of the family and Salma is already doing that.
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32
Be a strong woman so your daughter will have a role model and your son will know what to look for when he's a man.

This is the purpose of a thirty-five-year-old lady from a village called Kolwahi Bazar Absar situated in the district Kech of Balochistan.

“I have lived half of the life I was given, the rest of my life is dedicated to my family specially, my kids”, said Naseema, a young energetic, and supportive wife, and a caring mother of four.

Being a resident of an underdeveloped village, like most of the villagers Naseema too lives a life full of struggles. She along with her husband Ishaq worked on daily wages for the survival of their family. Despite working away from them, Naseema had to perform her duty as a housewife at home and in her free time, sew traditional Balochi embroidery dresses so that she can earn proper three times meals and meet her daily needs. She and her husband together could only manage to earn an amount around PKR 5,000 a month and this amount wasn't sufficient for the family.

Her fellow Community Resource Persons (CRPs) told her about the Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET) component under the European Union-funded BRACE Programme. TVET is basically a two to three months technical and vocational training provided by NRSP under the BRACE programme funded by the European Union. This training not only trains
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an individual but enables oneself to establish and run a small-scale business. Naseema was selected for the said training where she chose to learn a new skill called 'Multani Embroidery'. As she was already handy with traditional Balochi embroidery, she felt this could be helpful for her in the future.

As the training center was located far away from their home, both Naseema and her husband were worried about traveling to and from the training center but soon they were relieved to know that the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) will pay for the traveling. She completed the two-month training successfully and got a complete toolkit for her use.

Today, she has started working at home and uses this newly mastered skill along with her old skill of traditional Balochi embroidery by working on purses, table sheets, and mobile phone pouches.

"I am so proud of myself, at the stage where I am today", she added. "My kids are going to school and are trying to fulfill my wish. My daughter recently cleared her exams of intermediate and I am planning to send her to Quetta for higher and quality education, where my son is already studying", uttered Naseema.

Naseema wants to transfer her skills to as many women as she can, so they can work independently, and this would not have been possible without her dedication and her husband's support.

I am not only working now for my family but also for the community. I teach this skill voluntarily to other females of the community at her home and have ten-twelve students. All these struggles and difficulties I have been through are for the better tomorrow of my kids. I would never want my kids to fight the odds, I had to.
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Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Let reality be a reality because you can't stop the future and you can't rewind the past. Yes, no one can stop the future neither can one rewind the past because life's not a reel.

“I wish I could go back to the past and live the life I was living back then though I know it’s not going to happen ever” stated a man of strong character, Naseer.

A forty-eight-year-old gentleman, Naseer lives in Meerabad Gharbi, a village in the Tump tehsil of district Kech, Balochistan. He is a multi-talented man and was living a life full of peace. Naseer by profession was a driver and besides driving, he had mastered the skills of welding and electrician too. Naseer would spend the first half of the day driving and would go to his welding shop in the second half of the day. Meanwhile, he was available to work as an electrician on demand and as per one's need.

One afternoon, Naseer came home so he can have some rest for a while before he could go to his shop in the second half of the day a man came and gave him a piece of shocking news, but he couldn't even imagine what was coming his way next.

“A man came and asked me to disconnect the electric supply from the transformer as a house in the neighborhood has caught fire due to short-circuit. I ran without thinking for a second and tried to disconnect the wire to stop the electric supply from the transformer. I took a long breath in and I cannot remember what happened next”, he paused.
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honored man, I can't just sit at home and rely completely on my brother who himself earns a very little amount."

It was nothing less than a shock as Naseer shared, "I leave for the Iranian border in dark and come back late in the afternoon with a minimal amount in my hands. Border trade is considered one of the toughest and riskiest thing to do especially for a person like me."

Naseer is a sign of resilience, dedication, and inspiration for all of us. People like him deserve a better place, a community with better and more flexible opportunities. Sometimes, I get beaten by the border control corps and sent back empty-handed, but I have no other option but to bear such hardships until I don't find other options. Despite having knowledge of an electrician, Naseer lacked awareness and a safety toolkit which caused him to lose his leg and was two years later replaced with an artificial one, courtesy of the EU-funded BRACE programme.

An ordinary afternoon changed things upside down in Naseer's life. Life didn't stop there, he is specially abled, and still was the only hope for his family, the only bread earner started looking for help here and there but nothing seemed helpful. Upon asking how he manages the daily or monthly expenses of his family, Naseer shared, "One of his brothers is a labor in the United Arab Emirates Dubai state and sends him PKR 15,000 a month. Being a modest and self-

I was taken to Turbat city and was later referred to Karachi, a city in the Sindh province of Pakistan for treatment. The next six months were very hard not only for me but also for my family and after a long battle, I gave up hope and the doctors decided to operate and cut my left leg apart below the knee level.
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LEGAL EMPOWERMENT
Noor Jahan is working as a Community Resource Person (CRP) under the EU-funded BRACE Programme implemented by National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) in village Srikin, district Kech. A thirty-year-old Noor holds a bachelor's degree in Arts and is currently doing bachelor's in education from the University of Balochistan in Quetta.

“I had to work part-time to be eligible to bear the travel expenses from Kech to Quetta as well as my university fees”, she shared. She not only had to look after her expenses but also had to play her part in the household expenses. She would work, study, and look after her father's herd at the same time which shows how mentally and physically strong, she is.

Noor started her journey with the BRACE programme with a survey named Poverty Scorecard (PSC) in 2018, which was conducted by the NRSP team. She went from house to house for the survey and collected data and the process wasn't easy as there were security threats as well as poor and broken roads.

Later, she attended training by NRSP on Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) and how to form Community Organisations (COs). Noor Jahan told us that the CO formation looked quite difficult at the start of the journey as it took me some time to get people on board.

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“As a CRP, my job was not the formation of the COs or VOs, but to attend meetings and deliver the CAT sessions. People are suffering from malaria, dengue, and other fatal diseases and there is no one educating them on how to prevent themselves from such diseases”, added Noor Jahan.

The CRPs conduct different community awareness sessions on a weekly as well as monthly basis. They try to educate the people about how to take care of their hygiene, what the precautionary measures a mother needs to follow pre- and post-pregnancy, and awareness about other necessary SOPs that one should keep in mind to keep the community safe and clean against unwanted incidents.
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Dilshad a young gentleman is serving BRACE as a Senior Programme Officer (SPO) in district Kech for five years. He explains his journey “Before the EU-funded BRACE programme I was working as a Social Organiser with the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) in the poverty reduction project namely Pakistan Poverty Reduction (PPR) an Italian-funded project in district Kech. One thing I like about BRACE is, it covers the whole district whereas the programme I worked earlier for, just covered a few union councils of the district.”

Dilshad heads the Community Investment Fund (CIF) component of the programme. “So far along with all other beneficiaries, twelve hundred and ninety five Persons with Special Needs (PWSNs) are entertained in district Kech which indeed is a good number,” says Dilshad.

“I consider myself lucky enough to be part of an educated community. Being able to work without any hesitation is the privilege of belonging to organised people who not only encourage our activities but also support our teams. Although security had been an issue, in the beginning. We felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence both on and off the field because of some nasty incidents that happened to our team members earlier. Those incidents didn't bother us much because we knew what we were or what we are doing didn't harm anyone but benefited many,” shared Dilshad.
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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Pakistan, like the rest of the country, the people of Kech were badly affected too. With the lockdown imposed and businesses turned down, the CIF beneficiaries found it difficult and almost impossible to pay their monthly instalments on time. To minimise the risk of defaulters, I discussed the issue with my seniors and suggested that we could give the beneficiaries as much time relaxing as possible, so they don't have to worry much about their installments and my seniors agreed. “This not only made the defaulter beneficiaries mentally relaxed but, it encouraged them to pay back their installments as they were able to.”

As the BRACE programme has an impact on the livelihood of the beneficiaries, supported and empowered them with not just an amount, but with skills and start-ups till now, it may better be able to serve the people of Balochistan in the future and the community is hopeful and looking forward for further interventions and advanced training. “we would love the BRACE programme to continue its services in future so the people do not have to struggle for survival as they are doing at the moment” Dilshad concluded.

I must admit it personally so far, I have learned and gained totally different experience with BRACE. I am aware of the people and can better understand their psyche than anyone else and that's how I have managed Community Investment Fund (CIF) defaulters during the COVID-19 pandemic.
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When women rise, the world is a better place. The strength and resilience of women are real. The willingness, capability, and eagerness to strive, to be successful, to find joy, and to drive women to overcome incredible challenges.

“At some point in our lives, we all struggle with something. When life hits us from any angle, and we aren’t sure how we are going to manage it. I had no idea how to manage my personal and professional life as I entered the last few weeks of my pregnancy”, shared Gul Afroz, an inspiring, resilient, dedicated, and brave lady from National Rural Support Programme (NRSP).

Gul belongs to Kech, an underdeveloped district in the southwest of Balochistan province. She has been working with the development sector since 2005. She joined NRSP in 2005 and since then she has worked on many projects by being in different positions. The period from 2005 until now has been full of ups and downs but nothing bothered her much even the incident of their car being snatched at gunpoint by unknown assailants while going for fieldwork.

“I joined the Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) programme because of its Socio-economic approach towards the community and it focuses a lot on the participation of women and their empowerment,” she explained.

NRSP introduced the BRACE, an EU-funded programme in 2018 and Gul Afroz joined it as the District Programme Manager for district Kech. In a society that is completely dominated by men, she was the only female in the team that would not only look after the office holds but also had to frequently go on field visits, which not only seemed inappropriate to the society but also unacceptable to her family.
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exposure trips to other districts so they can meet new people and enhance their skills.

“73% of the institutions consist of women, and the number of women who benefited from interventions like CIF and IGG is greater than the number of men. 100% of the beneficiaries are women and now working independently. Women are involved in decision-making, they lead the whole process of Community Physical Infrastructure (CPI) schemes from approval to completion, from hiring laborers to purchasing materials and every relevant matter. It all becomes possible because of the BRACE programme and that is the reason I joined it”, she added with confidence.

At the workplace being the boss, she feels she has still to be totally accepted as in the society she belongs to, men cannot easily accept women in dominant positions meanwhile she is enjoying working in a co-working environment.

She added with a smile, “Some of my male colleagues are so caring and supportive, they backed me throughout my pregnancy as well as the pre-natal and postpartum phase. It was not easy to work and attend meetings in that phase.”

Believing in gender equality, for which she has struggled and is still struggling, BRACE is a platform Gul is using wisely for equal opportunities for women, providing her team especially female team members with exposure trips to other districts so they can meet new people and enhance their skills.

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My family had always pointed out to me that I cannot leave home early in the morning and come back late at night, why do women have to go on field trips with unknown men, why is it so necessary for you to go out in the field, etc., but with the passage of time, I made them understand my role.

While being extremely supportive of her district team, Gul has always been equally empathetic to her field teams which play their part in burning the midnight oil to make the BRACE programme a success.
“We need to compensate our teams equally as they are the ones who struggle at the frontline. I am hopeful and eying to achieve the milestone of providing opportunities to the field staff like salary increments, exposure and learning visits, and training, for value addition in their career”, Gul expressed.

Women like Gul are an asset and inspiration for society. They are an opportunity away from showcase their importance. If provided a platform they can inspire and bring positive change in just a matter of days and become role models for the generations to come.
Excited to know about a dedicated lady who never said NO to her destiny and kept on struggling forever? Then, you are exactly at the right place!

This is a story of an untiring soul with a wish of getting higher studies but due to the darkest hour in her life, she could not manage to make it true. Her family went through tough times which compelled her to freeze her journey as a student, yet she managed to get a master's degree in linguistics.

Humaira, a Social Organiser (SO) of the BRACE programme in the Social Mobilisation Team (SMT) Hoshab in Kech district of Balochistan.

Humaira was registered for the master's degree in Balochi from the University of Balochistan when her father, the only breadwinner of the family was diagnosed with a fatal disease, cancer. This news changed things upside-down, and the aspiration of her further studies seemed impossible.

Recalling a memory keeping her emotions controlled, Humaira shared, “I told my father, we will fight against cancer together and will be on the victorious side. He tapped me and said you must fight for your family as I will be gone soon, and they will have no one to turn to but you”.

Though Humaira was already involved in household stuff and was paying for her brother's school expenses who studies in Quetta.

Unfortunately, her father lost the battle and died leaving Humaira and her siblings behind. She, being the elder, took charge and responsibility for her family and started
Humaira Bint e Faqeer Muhammad

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looking for jobs here and there and joined National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) in 2009 as a Junior Social Organiser (JSO) and nine years later in 2018, as a Social Organiser, joined the BRACE programme which is funded by the European Union and implemented in district Kech by NRSP. She so far as a SO has formed nine Local Support Organisations (LSOs).

"That was the time when I felt life could be so unpredictable, things may change after this incident and we may never visit this place again, the people here may not benefit from our community development schemes, why should the residents pay for an expulated crime? And that happened, we had to abandon our activities in that area, not only this but the area was also declared as a red zone for all existing as well as forthcoming projects”, uttered Humaira.

She told us how she and her team copped with the challenges both on and off the field especially the disbursement of the Community Investment Fund (CIF) and Income Generating Grant (IGG) was not as easy as she would have thought. Everyone considered himself eligible for the grant and wanted to just grab the amount at any cost.

Humaira once identified a poor family (a mother with her nine daughters and a son) and recommended an Income Generating Grant (IGG) for the lady being a member of the Community Organisation, which was later approved by her Village Organisation. The woman was living a miserable life and with the grant, she not only managed to send her boy to school but also established a tailor shop for her son, who would spend his time after school in the shop.

Those were my early days when I was on a field visit to an area called Balgathar when an incident occurred. Our car was snatched by unknown assailants, they took our car away and warned us not to visit Balgathar again.

It is a hectic process, but it is worth it as far as it's benefitting my people.

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Humaira has always been against early or forced marriages and has convinced a couple of parents already. She shared a story where she successfully resolved a conflict between two families which had led to the separation of a husband and wife. After her efforts and a series of meetings with both parties, she helped the separated couple to rebuild their relationship.

The courage and dignity of the women like Humaira are exemplary and such steps can be taken by anyone of us if we really want to bring change in our society.

“You can assume what I am capable of”, Humaira concluded with a burst of laughter, and we could not agree more.
“This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.”

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- EUnPakistan
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