



Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme



## Case Study of Siddique Solangi



## **Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme**

### **Escaping the Mighty Man: The Long Struggle of Siddique Solangi from Bonded Labour to Freedom**

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## **Introduction**

This case study has been prepared under 'Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) programme funded by the European Union (EU)' to highlight the long struggle of victim of bonded labour to freedom. In this case study, bonded labour has been seen as a main cause of vicious cycle of poverty. After getting rid of this injustice, victim community took a sigh of relief but it is still facing menace of poverty. In this regard, SUCCESS programme has been launched in the area as it is based on the social mobilization approach to Community Driven Development (CDD). Social mobilization approach revolves around the central idea that poor people possess great potential to bring themselves up and they can manage their small resources well, if they are organized and provided with technical and financial support. Thus the RSPs under this programme extend social guidance, technical and financial assistance to the rural poor in Sindh.

## **Objective of the case study**

Through this case study, the main focus is on exploring household poverty dynamics in Siddique Solangi village in order to get an in-depth understanding about the causes of chronic poverty and escape from it. Therefore, the main objective of this case study is to find out that why this community is still at cross roads even after getting rid of bonded labour which was the main cause behind their extreme poverty. What are they lacking to reduce their poverty and how can they be supported to improve their quality of life?

## **Methodology**

This case study is based on primary data collected through the qualitative methods of transect walk, rapport building, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and quantitative data collected through poverty scorecard survey (NRSP, 2016). In total, 5 focus group discussions were conducted and out of them three focus group discussions included men and two focus group discussions involved females. While, total six key informant interviews were conducted and out of them 4 key informant interviews included men and two key informant interviews involved females in the different areas of settlement. Farmers, labourers, teachers, religious personalities and old aged people were among the participants in this qualitative research.

In key informant interviews and focus group discussions, the life history of Comrade Siddique Solangi and reasons of bonded labour were discussed by the participants. While the most important interview was with Comrade Siddique Solangi in which he shared his life history and experiences regarding his struggle for emancipation from bonded labour with the researcher. This case study of Comrade Solangi was conducted during the period of four months starting



from July to October, 2016 through field visits to Siddique Solangi village, union council Masoo Bozdar, district Tando Allahyar, Sindh on the sidelines of poverty scorecard survey, socio-economic survey and a few planned visits. The case study contributes to enhance the understanding about the issue of bonded labour in rural Sindh and how it creates and nurtures chronic poverty.

## **Bonded Labour: A Worst Type of Exploitation**

It was 1951, when the dusk was falling, the news broke out about the birth of a child in village Abdul Karim Laghari, Tando Allahyar, Sindh. After a few days, child was named as Siddique Solangi and when he became 7 years old, he realised that he was member of a poor family, which was busy day and night ploughing in the fields under the supervision of a mighty man. As time went by, he started noticing so many things.

Firstly, he saw his parents getting up early in the morning and going straight away for ploughing in the fields and then cutting grass and whatever the mighty man asked them to do. It was the daily routine work of his parents from dawn to dusk without any breaks. Secondly, they were living in the thatched huts without basic amenities of life. When he was 10 years old, he started to accompany his family and began working in the farm fields, initially by cutting grass and later by ploughing. For the first time, he realised how painful the work was that his parents were undertaking. He was so confused and unable to understand the gravity of situation that the family was facing. Around the age of 15 years, Siddique finally understood the reality of his family's situation that his family was victim of bonded labour and the mighty man was the landlord Khabar Khan.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO), "Bonded Labour is a special type of forced labour which exists mainly in Asian agricultural societies. Actually this type of labour mostly crops up in cases where monetary/financial deals occur such as loans, which if the debtor is unable to pay, he has to serve the creditor for some specified or unspecified term (Paycheck.pk, 2016)." As per the words of Siddique Solangi: "My relatives and parents had borrowed some money from the landlord for our livelihood as we were poor. To repay the loan we were compelled to work on his agricultural farm land. In this way, we continued working on the field day and night as bonded labourer for years and our payment was 7 to 8 sacks of grain per year. It was not sufficient for us. Many a times we faced grief as we went hungry. Sometimes we worked on empty stomach turning the soil and fainted many a times. Nobody was there to help us, we were treated inhumanely".

Bonded labour can be viewed as a phenomenon of glaring instance of persistent exploitations within agriculture in rural parts of Sindh. Basically, poverty is the root cause of the problem because in rural areas chronic poverty is deeply rooted and more pervasive. It is inevitable for poor people to take loan for fulfilling their basic, emergency and social needs, e.g. to borrow or

buy food in lean season to meet emergencies, and undertake inescapable expenses on social events such as death rituals, marriage ceremonies and some religious/cultural events.

This situation leads to taking on more loans from the landlords and increasing indebtedness with the landlords. Generally, this debt is very expensive and many times interest rates are over 100% per year. This creates and nurtures the intergenerational vicious cycle of poverty. Bonded families are illiterate and hence cannot maintain the records of their debt. According to ILO, "Over 1.7 million people are estimated to be engaged in bonded labour in Pakistan, the majority of them are landless tillers ('harees') in Sindh (Ali, 2012)."

### Catalytic role of Education

Family of Siddique Solangi was facing detention-like situation during the time of bonded labour. Women and children of male workers were held in captivity so that nobody could escape. Therefore, it was a quagmire like situation for Siddique Solangi who was now 18 years old and married. He made a promise to himself that one day he would emancipate his family from the exploitation in the shape of bonded labour. However, he was facing so many challenges at that moment as he could not attend the school due to extreme poverty of his parents. The landlord also did not allow the children of farmers to go to school for getting education instead he wanted them to work on his agricultural farm lands. Ramzan, friend of Siddique Solangi, went to school regularly with whom he played in the streets of village daily. Siddique once asked his father to send him school with his friend Ramzan. His father replied him that if they got education who would give water to the donkeys of landlord?

Siddique knew the importance of education well and his interest of reading books increased after learning the Holy Quran at the village mosque. He also began to understand the Sindhi language. Later he learnt to read and write. Hence, he studied Sindhi books by himself and learnt from friends too. One day, he was reading a book in the farm field when landlord Khabar Khan saw him. After severely beating Siddique, he sent him home. It was very painful for Siddique that his family suffered from bonded labour but he was not in a situation to undertake any measure to mitigate this situation. He used to think about how can they get rid of this injustice and cruelty being faced by them, what was their crime and why were they being punished? It was self-education that raised his consciousness about the sad state of his family's reality.

Siddique Solangi was the elder child among 10 children. They were six brothers and four sisters in the family. All lived with their uncles and maternal uncles comprising eight families. They were working as part of bonded labour in the fields of landlord Karim. Siddique Solangi's family used to carry out a range of agricultural and livestock activities as bonded labourers such as rearing and caring of animals, harvesting, planting, grass cutting and ploughing in the fields

without enough food for longer periods. During this time, the family of Siddique Solangi faced a painful situation. They were not given due share of their work in the fields rather they used to be intimidated by the threats of bitter consequences if they thought of raising voice against the cruelty. It was always reinforced upon them that they were the slaves and it was their prime duty to serve their master in a better way or to be prepared for the punishment.

### Organisation Provides Strength: Linking up with the Sindh Haari Committee

One day, Siddique Solangi saw that the landlord was in the field during a day time and staring at the female workers of his family who were busy in their work. The mighty man also teased them. This situation became unbearable for Siddique as his family's honour was being attacked. Siddique took on the mighty man and made it clear to the landlord to keep away from the family's womenfolk and not to harass them. The mighty man's reaction was to again severely beat Siddique in front of his family members.

This incidence became a catalyst for change in Siddique's life. After this incidence, he joined the Sindh Haari Committee (SHC) in 1969 at the age of 18 years, and this strengthened his resolve to emancipate his family from bonded labour. He was very much impressed from the speeches of Comrade Ahmed Khan Laghari, an active member of SHC. He became disciple of Comrade Ahmed Khan Laghari and worked under his mentorship. As time passed by, he became more active in these activities and people of the area started knowing him as Comrade Siddique Solangi due to his aggressive style of speeches and protests against the landlords.

SHC came into being in 1930 in order to empower the peasants to raise their voice to get their due rights. In 1943, Haider Bux Jatoy resigned from the job as Deputy Collector under the British rule and he became secretary of SHC (Mughal, 2009). Under the leadership of Haider Bux Jatoy, the Sindh Tenancy Act was passed by the Sindh Assembly in 1951 which was a milestone of his struggle for the peasants' rights. It attracted many tenant farmers to join this organisation in order to raise voice against the cruelties of landlords through sit-ins and street protests. Siddique Solangi also began to participate in the protests actively and made speeches against the landlords and chanted slogans in favour of the peasant movement.

Landlord Karim closely watched his activities that were unfavourable to the landlords. He asked Siddique to stop agitating of SHC and for peasants' rights, otherwise his whole family will be punished and die of hunger. Siddique, however, did not stop and continued taking active part in the activities of SHC. The landlord even used physical force and beat up Siddique. But this only strengthened Siddique's determination to carry on with his efforts with SHC. As per the words of Hashim Solangi, uncle of Siddique, "Many a times we tried to stop Siddique from taking part



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in the activities of SHC against the landlords as we were afraid of threats but Comrade Siddique was firm to continue his struggle for our rights to get rid of bonded labour".

Comrade Siddique Solangi had promised to himself not to give up and continue to walk on the path of struggle till the freedom from the slavery of this landlord. Therefore, he actively participated in the gatherings of Comrades of this movement and raised voice against the cruelties and injustices done to them. Landlord started using different tactics to get rid of Comrade Siddique Solangi by threatening his family members of dire consequences. While the mighty man threatened Siddique and his family, he was also aware of Siddique's rising influence with SHC and with other peasants. The landlord realised that Comrade Siddique had become well educated and aware of the rights of peasants which posed threats to his fiefdom. He was now more fearful about the fact that if all the farmers demanded for their due rights of calculation of work, it would be a huge chunk of money to pay to all the bonded labourers. Thus, he made up his mind to release the families of bonded labourers in order to save himself.

In 1977, Comrade Siddique Solangi and his whole family including the eight families of his relatives got freedom from the slavery of landlord and bonded labour due to his struggle as landlord was compelled to set them free. The tenure of 20 years of bonded labour ended for the family of Siddique Solangi which was not less than a nightmare. It was a big relief for his family and now they were feeling like they were out of cage but poverty did not leave them alone and came along with them. In the words of Rashida bibi, a female relative of Siddique, "Even though we were free people after the bonded labour but we were hungry due to extreme poverty as we had nothing to eat but to look for the work somewhere else".

They migrated to Leela Ram village in 1977 and worked as farmers on the land of Leela Ram for three years where he gave them temporary plot for living and food for eating but did not give them any returns for their work. In 1980, they moved to Manik Lanjwani village where Haji Bux who had taken agricultural land on rent for four years from landlord Shafi and asked them to work on this agricultural land. As per his agreement with Comrade Siddique Solangi, over a period of four years, half of the sugarcane production from 60 acres would be given to Solangi and his family, in addition to receiving daily wages.

Siddique Solangi was hired as Jamadar (Supervisor) on this field and, during this period, he was also the president of SHC Taluka Tando Allahyar in 1983. Farmers grew wheat, cotton and sugarcane. Haji Bux gave them daily wages but seemed reluctant to pay them fully as per his word and kept on saying that he will settle all the calculation at the end. Comrade Siddique Solangi recognised that the landlord was very hesitant and unwilling to give their due share. Thereupon he lodged a case under the Tenancy Act at revenue court of Mukhtiarkar (Tehsildar) and for seven months case was pursued by Siddique without any result. As per the words of

Siddique Solangi, "Mukhtiarkar and landlord are the two faces of the same coin". Finally, the case was moved to court of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate<sup>1</sup> (SDM) Sohail Akbar Shah.

## **Justice Led to the Virtuous Spiral**

Comrade Siddique Solangi approached the local Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Wali Mohammad Walhari. MNA talked to Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and requested him to ensure that justice was done. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Sohail Akbar Shah called Haji Bux and locked him up. Then he called on the landlord Shafi and sought his advice on how the issue should be resolved so that justice is done. Each farmer was due Rs. 150,000. As a compromise measure, which both sides accepted, each farmer was given Rs. 80,000, and the case was amicably settled.

Comrade Siddique Solangi also accepted this settlement, and thanked SDM Sohail Akbar Shah for his judicial decision making. This one decision provided some financial stability to Siddique's family. In 1985, Comrade Siddique Solangi purchased four acres land for Rs. 48,000 and he set up a settlement on a piece of land under his name where he brought every family member to build their own shelter, and for the whole clan to live together. He wanted to see every child going to school but parents did not cooperate with him and kept their children out of school and working in the fields. Siddique however was able to successfully educate his son and three daughters. He is saddened by the fact that due to his previous dire situation, he could not educate his elder three daughters. His son is now a Hawaldar in Pakistan Army and he is currently posted at Karachi and one of his daughters is a Lady Health Worker in the Government Health Department.



**Comrade Siddique Solangi with his Son Hawaldar Mohammad Laksi in their Home**

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<sup>1</sup> Sub-Divisional Magistrate SDM is currently field appointment of Assistant Commissioner with combined roles of SDM and Assistant Collector (Land Revenue)

## Struggle for Success is On

Comrade Siddique Solangi has 3 acre agricultural land and some livestock for his livelihood. He is spending happy life now and always takes part in protests against the landlords who do not give due share to any farmer. He is still member of Sindh Hari Committee and actively participates in all its functions. People of the area know him very well and come to him with complaints to seek his advice to solve them.

According to his words, "Landlord is still strong and the tenant farmer is weak and until there is no balance, the problem will never solve. Law exists but it is not implemented in letter and spirit. Checks and balances are needed so that nobody can violate the law and everybody can get justice as his/her basic right. In my case, Haider Bux Jatoi gave me awareness about how to empower myself to get rights and Sohail Akbar Shah gave me justice which made our life better. I would like to request Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) to arrange a visit of Sohail Akbar Shah to Siddique Solangi village in order to see the fruit of tree he planted many years back in the shape of justice. My struggle would not have succeeded if both of them had not been there".

On the rights of farmers, Dr. Hari Lohano said that about 70% of our income is generated from agriculture but unfortunately the peasants are deprived of their basic rights (Tribune, 2016). While, as per the words of Haris Gazdar of Collective for Social Science Research, "Organisations for female peasants should be formed since 70% of agricultural workers are women (Tribune, 2016)."

According to National Rural Support Programmes' Poverty Scorecard Survey (NRSP, 2016), there are total 36 households with total population of 240 in Siddique Solangi's settlement. Out of this total population, 115 are male members and 125 are female members and the average household size is 6.6 persons. In addition, total number of school age children (5-16 years) is 88 children and out of school children are 49 in which 21 are males and 28 are females. Main sources of livelihood of dwellers of village Siddique Solangi are working as farmers on own land (14 persons), tenants/farm labourers (16 persons), unskilled labourers (21 persons) and government jobs (2 persons). Children and old people are 116 persons. Since different households have different socio-economic status, the Poverty Scorecard Survey (NRSP, 2016) allows households to be categorized into various groups showing the probability of their poverty status. The table below shows the distribution of village households by poverty score categories. Over two fifths of the households are in the poorest three categories (0-23).

**Table 1: Distribution of households by PSC category**

S. No.	PSC Category	# HHs	% HHs
1	0-11	2.00	5.6
2	12-18	7.00	19.5
3	19-23	6.00	16.6
4	24-34	16.00	44.5
5	35-59	4.00	11.1
6	60-100	1.00	2.7
	Total	36.0	100.0

Comrade Siddique Solangi and other people of the settlement do not know about the concepts of Community Organisations (COs), Village Organisations (VOs), Local Support Organisations (LSOs) and generally about the social mobilisation process. However, NRSP has plans to introduce the Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme in the village. NRSP will hold a programme introduction meeting with all the community members. At this meeting, NRSP will explain the philosophy of social mobilisation, objectives and methodology of the SUCCESS programme. Subject to people's willingness to partner with NRSP, further meetings will be arranged where the processes of social mobilisation will be explained in detail.

Siddique Solangi is likely to become a key activist to support the social mobilisation agenda in the village as well as in the Union Council. In the months ahead, this community will be revisited for follow up visits to see how the social mobilisation process is moving forward and how various interventions are supporting the poor community women to improve their livelihoods and lives. The journey of empowerment of Siddique Solangi and his fellow community members is about to take a new and exciting turn.

## Conclusion

This case study shows that bonded labour in the agriculture sector affected the life in leaving miserable impacts on the well-being of Siddique and his relatives. For 20 years, they faced worst exploitation in form of forced labour which was the main cause of their extreme poverty. Education played vital role in creating awareness which implied Siddique the path of concrete struggle towards success in setting free his all relatives who were suffering from this injustice.

Sindh Hari Committee also performed its role in an effective manners to help Siddique to stand up against the cruelty and to raise voice for his rights. Sohail Akbar Shah (SDM) gave justice to farmers which helped them to purchase their own land and to make their houses. In this way, Siddique Solangi and his relatives got freedom from the bonded labour but poverty did not leave them alone and came along with them. Siddique has 3 acre land so he has made upward mobility but some of his relatives are still landless which is a key problem behind their poverty.

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They are also lacking the facility of education and other public services like hospital and school buildings in the village. They also do not know about the importance of social mobilisation which can support them to tap their potential in order to reduce their poverty to great extent. Therefore, it is recommended to initiate the process of social mobilisation with this community so that they may get benefit from the SUCCESS programme. In addition, government must look into the matter of landlessness which is a key problem in the rural set up of the area in order to save the tenant farmers from the worst exploitation in agriculture sector. It must ensure the implementation of tenancy act and land reforms in letter and spirit so that no one can be the victim of bonded labour in the future. Apart from this, skill is very important for this community so that it can also earn from alternative sources of agriculture in order to improve the quality of their life.



Figure 1: Inside view of House of Comrade Siddique Solangi



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SUCCESS Programme is based on the Rural Support Programmes' (RSPs) social mobilisation approach to Community-Driven Development (CDD). Social Mobilisation centers around the belief that poor people have an innate potential to help themselves; that they can better manage their limited resources if they organise and are provided technical and financial support. The RSPs under the SUCCESS Programme provide social guidance, as well as technical and financial assistance to the rural poor in Sindh.

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