



Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme

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# SUCCESS Sakafat Mela

# 2018



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## OVERVIEW

Conventionally, organising social and cultural events have been the sphere of developed nations, but over the past few decades, a huge number of developing countries have recognised the potential of such events which act as catalysts toward their path of development.

In view of RSPN-SUCCESS's wide range of components, one of its key targets is to design diverse activities which could highlight and bring forward the work undertaken by the rural communities of Sindh under the SUCCESS programme. Such events can generate a raft of benefits due to the fact that they involve a lot of different stakeholders. In light of this, RSPN participated in a cultural event, SUCCESS Sakafat Mela 2018, held on Sunday, 24 June 2018, at Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad. The one-day event, in collaboration with Sakafat, managed to showcase artifacts, handicrafts and food stalls from all over the nation, which included Sindh Rural Support Organisation's (SRSO) Sartyoon Sang as well.

Sartyoon Sang, meaning 'together with friends', was established by the SRSO in 2011 with the aim of providing a market linkage to the artisans of rural areas, especially women, slowly and gradually targeting to work at an international level. It is a beautiful blend of innovation, tradition and workmanship coming together to evolve into a unique brand, simultaneously, improving the living conditions of the unfortunate and disadvantaged artisans. Reaching out and promoting their skills and crafts, like making Rhillis, embroideries, pots, jewellery and much more, Sartyoon Sang has a reach of more than 10,000 women artisans. Their aim in a nut shell is to bring out the capacity of the skilled artisans promoting their expertise and making the best use of it for their own betterment.

Apart from the stalls, RSPN also held a seminar on the topic of "Poverty Reduction through Women Empowerment", where a panel with diverse backgrounds was present to instigate a strong discussion regarding the potential and limitations of the 'social capital' of women to reduce poverty through women empowerment. Among the panelists were Ms. Vivien Rigler, EU Head of Rural Development and Economic Co-operation; Ms. Shandana Khan, CEO RSPN; Ms. Rehana Yaqoob, Deputy Director, Ministry of Human Rights; Mr. Ghazan Khan, Head of News One Media Islamabad; Ms. Fouzia Danish, President Local Support Organisation (LSO) Chirah. Sharing their views on numerous facets of women empowerment, these experts also proffered their valuable opinions and particularly focused on generating strategies for further improvement.

The evening concluded with a blend of cultural performances, music and a theatre play. The event did not only serve its recreational purpose, rather it also inculcated admiring and encouraging cultural diversity as well as women empowerment. By the end of the evening, the audience was left with a memorable and deeply educated experience.

## PROCEEDINGS AND REMARKS BY PANELLISTS

The seminar titled “Poverty Reduction through Women Empowerment” stimulated a very important discussion pertinent to how the society limits the social and economic development of women, which in turn, affects the ability of every household to cross the poverty line and thus remain subjugated to oppression, violence, illiteracy, and subordination of women in all walks of life. The seminar highlighted concepts of social mobilisation, community-driven development, gender equality, economic empowerment, access to decision-making, and most importantly, what women empowerment actually means.



The seminar began with a short video of the European Union’s work and interventions in Pakistan driven towards improving the socio-economic conditions in rural areas, and this was followed by a video documentary of the SUCCESS program implemented by RSPN, SRSO, TRDP and NRSP, in collaboration with the government of Sindh, with financial support of the European Union. After the videos, the moderator, Aliya Qaiser, introduced every individual panelist and these included, Ms. Shandana Khan, CEO

RSPN, Ms. Vivien Rigler, EU Head of rural development and economic cooperation, Ms. Fouzia Danish, President LSO Chirah, Ms. Rehana Yaqoob, Deputy Director, Ministry of Human Rights, and Ghazan Khan, Head of News One media Islamabad.

The first panelist, Ms. Vivien Rigler, highlighted the true meaning of women empowerment and how gender equality and barriers of women economic empowerment remain among the biggest challenges to the achievement of global commitment of inclusive growth. She emphasised on the fact that the top management of the enterprises includes many men and women represented are only 6%. She added, “Of course there is a lack of equal pay, so women are paid significantly less in general.” According to her, economic empowerment would mean access to productive assets, resources, services like education, infrastructure, and most importantly, access to decision-making from the household level to the level of the government. With regards to this, she talked about how the European Union has supported Pakistan and said, “the EU focuses on the framework of gender equality and women empowerment, which is strengthening of the woman voice and participation, economic and social empowerment, combating violence, and a priority on development which specifies that when the EU works with third world countries, we look at how various programs are affecting women and girls and we define priorities that are the most relevant.” She also added that in order to incorporate gender into all their various programs, it is included into the monitoring and

evaluation of the programs along with a gender analysis. Ms. Rigler ended her discussion by expressing how the EU has promised to remain a strong supporter of Pakistan in this regard.

Ms. Shandana Khan, with over twenty-five years of extensive experience in rural development in South and Central Asia, elaborated further on the work of her organisation towards empowering women and reducing poverty. She gave the example of Nadia, who was one of their beneficiaries as part of the SUCCESS program, and how her life completely changed from being disempowered to coming out of her house, making her own decisions and travelling internationally to Brussels to attend the prestigious event called the European Development Days. Moreover, Ms. Khan spoke about what the SUCCESS program is and how this is the only program in Sindh which tries to reach and impact every household. She added with a strong emphasis that their approach is that of partnership and accountability and she said, “We and the government have the same stakes and interests and we have to work together.” Lastly, she thanked the EU for their support and expressed how it is their goal to facilitate women and mobilise them because everyone has the innate potential of developing and improving their conditions, but they only need the resources to do so.

Ms. Fouzia Danish was also part of this esteemed discussion and she shared her valuable and inspiring experiences from being incapable to voice her own opinions, to successfully being the president of her local support organisation in her village where women seek her help and support. She expressed how women suffer through

social conditions and how they have improved these conditions through their own effort and hard work. She added with confidence, “Men considered themselves privileged to abuse women and keep them under their influence and pressure. But, now people come to women instead of men.” Her LSO trained a lot of households, gave loans to start businesses, taught women the importance of saving, developed a clean water scheme, and much more was done to empower women and bring them alongside the status of men. Therefore, she believed that a lot has changed in her village through such communities and institutions.



Ms. Rehana Yaqoob shed light on the work of the government towards women empowerment and explained how their work was driven towards increasing awareness about human rights in all areas of Pakistan. There have been a lot of promotional campaigns run especially for women’s rights and she strongly stated that an increase in awareness will enable women to move forward and gain empowerment.

Lastly, Mr. Ghazan Khan contributed to this discussion by commending the experiences and efforts of Ms. Fouzia

Danish and expressed that this is how a human being is empowered, be it a man or a woman and that Pakistan can only grow if opportunities are given to the women of Pakistan.

Ms. Shandana Khan ended the seminar by saying that there were a lot of challenges

faced by them in running a program that was fully run by females, but the results have been very encouraging and from every batch of trained women, they motivated more women that were driven to change.



## CONCLUSION

The panelists were thanked for their deep insights and this was followed by an engaging round of questions and answers. It was pointed out by one person in the audience how difficult it is to bring such change in the society to empower women as a lot of women still stay with abusive

husbands. Ms. Rehana answered that it is the people themselves that can bring about this change and not only the institutions alone. Ms. Shandana also added that there were a lot of systems that created social pressures and more support is needed to eliminate these social issues.





## THEATRE PLAY

After the seminar, there was a theatre performance, 'Roshni', for the audience where it was exhibited how women increasingly face significant challenges for participating in economic activities and the subsequent problems of early marriages.

The play consisted of five characters namely Farkhunda, the main character, her parents Asghar and Neelo, her husband and a neighbor, Taskeen. The stage looked like a real village setting and the performers seemed equally realistic. The play started with showcasing the restrictive social norms that limit women's choices and access to opportunities. Taskeen tries to convince Farkhunda to utilize her sewing skills and help her husband earn money, but her husband opposes this decision and does not allow her to work, despite being on the verge of extreme poverty. Additionally, the play highlighted another dilemma of rural societies, which is that of early marriages. Farkhunda was shown as a victim of early marriage, mourning and complaining frequently about how her parents have restricted her freedom and self-growth. Neelo and Asghar witness their daughter's poverty stricken situation and realize their mistake as well, but they simply blame the society further for their reckless decisions.

The play depicted how women in the society, especially in rural areas, are subjugated by men and are held back from pursuing better paid and more productive jobs or from any work opportunity that they might come across. It is not considered that women, too, can be a helping hand towards generating income and resources for the household. The

thought that women are only for and should be restricted to housekeeping is deeply embedded in the mindset of the rural areas of Pakistan and even the thought of going against it shakes and upsets the men of that area. The same appalling situation was executed and very well demonstrated by Farkhunda's husband in this play, where his continuous nagging restricts Farkhunda to change her deprived household condition.

The story also revolved around how the main character, Farkhunda, gets the benefit of the Health Card (issued under the programme of SUCCESS) and savings, after getting involved with a community organization. Therefore, the main purpose of this play was also to outline how the SUCCESS Programme was intervening in rural areas with a realistic and holistic approach, which allowed the audience to actually see what the programme aims to do and positively change.

Fruitfully, this theatre display debunked the norm of seeing women as an outcast and rather concluded that empowering women and giving them a chance to showcase their abilities and participating in economic activities can really help strengthen the financial standing of any household. Farkhunda's husband recognizes her importance in decision making and his new journey to advocate about giving value to women's dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners was one of the highlights of the show. In the end of the play, Farkhunda's husband realizes his mistake of overseeing Farkhunda's abilities and happily allows her to carry on with her tailoring work. He also thanks Taskeen for

enlightening him and being a ray of hope for them, to which Taskeen responds, 'Dear! Now it seems like you have understood that men and women have equal rights'. Hence, this marked a blissful start to Farkhunda's new journey.



## CULTURAL DANCE PERFORMANCES

Khanzada Asfandyar Khattak presented a beautiful fusion of Kathak and Pashto folk dance. Mr. Khattak is the great-grandson of Khushal Khan Khattak, the "father of Pashto literature" and the national poet of Afghanistan. Mr. Khattak, just like his great-grandfather, continues to struggle for human rights and peace through his dance performances. The evening was spent rejoicing his scintillating performance by the audience and everyone praised his moves and expressions which were finely tuned with the Pashto music.

Followed by the Kathak dance, another mesmerizing cultural dance performance, known as Attan, was also showcased at the Sakafat Mela by a group of young Pashtun men. This is basically the national folk dance of Pashtuns and has long been customary in the Pashtun lifestyle. The audience surely had a diverse and peculiar flavor of the Pashtun culture at this event.



## **SUFI NIGHT AND CONCERT**

The Sakafat Mela ended with a concert, where two bands were invited to light up the moods of the audience with their live show. The musical evening started with the performance of Jahangir Niazi and Akbar Niazi, the grandsons of the legendary Pakistani folk singer, Tufail Niazi, followed by the natural musicality of the Bakshi Brothers, who have performed all over Pakistan and got more recognition after their appearance on Coke Studio.







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