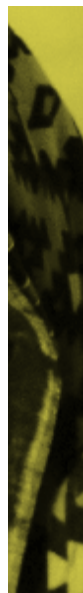
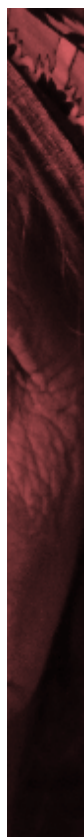
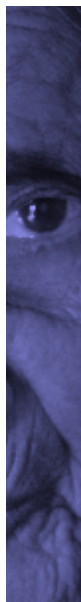
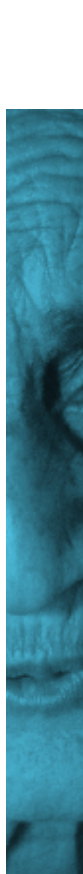




ECHES

J A M S H O R O

2018



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J A M S H O R O

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THE ECHOES OF SUCCESS

In 2018, as the European Union funded Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) programme nears its three-year mark, the project is already halfway through. When it began in 2015, the RSPs associated with it, National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP), Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), and Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), conducted an incredibly comprehensive Poverty Scorecard Survey to gauge the level of poverty, financial standing, and needs of potential beneficiaries.

Three years later, the SUCCESS team has conducted multiple activities to not only track the progress of the programme but also document the stories of beneficiaries from the field. This series of success stories titled 'The Echoes of SUCCESS' is a compilation of human interest stories which narrates the experiences of the beneficiaries and the implementing team regarding various interventions under SUCCESS in each district.

The SUCCESS documentation team at RSPN, in collaboration with the associated RSPs, have tried to talk to beneficiaries and their families to glean first-hand accounts of the changes SUCCESS has brought to these communities. These stories, more than any reductive method that measures only financial condition, allows a glimpse into the lived experience of women empowerment in the target areas of SUCCESS. In this regard, they are imperative to learn what empowerment in this context may look like and what processes precede it. These lessons will prove to be vital as SUCCESS forges its path ahead and prepares to wrap up later in communities that will soon learn to sustain themselves.

Preface

Poverty is, as Shoaib Sultan Khan once put it, a human condition that is lived or witnessed, and not defined. In the development sector, the word 'poverty' forms the rationale for interventions in the first place. Therefore, in order to facilitate a programme that is compact, precise and comprehensive, it is important that development practitioners and organisations understand the contours of poverty and the place of their programme in the landscape in which they operate.

The visit to Jamshoro was critical in helping us understand how poverty is borne, exacerbated, and how people's experience of lives is mediated by this human condition. The one striking truth about poverty is that it is not merely lack of income or a standard of living different from the one we experience – although these features are part of the experience – but it is essentially a stifling experience. Poverty suppresses hope and potential, it stalls progress of persons, households, and entire communities. For instance, a family we met in Berani had been displaced by the devastating 2010 floods. Although they admitted they lived as most village folk do i.e. simply, and often without amenities like electricity and internet connection, their lifestyle had not been as debilitating before. After the floods, the family had lost its home, its social network, and was not just severed from its source of income but also forced to travel to Berani in district Jamshoro from district Qamber Shahdadkot with meagre possessions to their name. This family, headed by the mother Sartaj, did not have a sturdy support system to rely on. Their poverty had only become more merciless with time.

Another woman we met was Mirgan. Mirgan's village, as her neighbours alleged, had long been ignored by the authorities. Before Mirgan worked with SUCCESS to install hand pumps, women had to travel miles to get water. Naturally, an exhaustion had set in. It was clear that poverty was both a communal and a deeply personal phenomenon. Poverty was the collective experience of Mirgan's village, but it also bred a cynicism in the lives of the individuals who suffered from it.

This study of poverty helps clarify the role of development organisations in this scenario, make connections between case studies, and provide a macro perspective. The poverty as experienced by Sartaj and her family had been exacerbated by the onset of modernity and breakdown of traditional sources of support. There has been a breakdown of traditional support systems such as family that could mitigate the effects of disaster – Sartaj said she had been abandoned by the children of her husband's other wife – and the arrival of the nuclear family. It is therefore important to introduce interventions that not only facilitate the beneficiary in reclaiming their space and dignity in the world, but also foster the diminishing values of collective action even as the conventional family begins to disappear. This is where the interventions of SUCCESS and the formation of organisation at each level to help empower individuals, households, and communities come into play.

Similarly, in Mirgan's case, poverty often stems from institutional negligence and bleeds into the daily lives of people. Here again, a network of social institution and a financial grant can help communities build their own path out of poverty.

Poverty is an ever-evolving phenomenon that demands variegated solutions and adaptation. It is unfeasible to think of poverty as a problem of money or resources that can be remedied by a one-size-fits-all plan, but rather as a condition that requires constant engagement and participation from those who undergo it to be understood.

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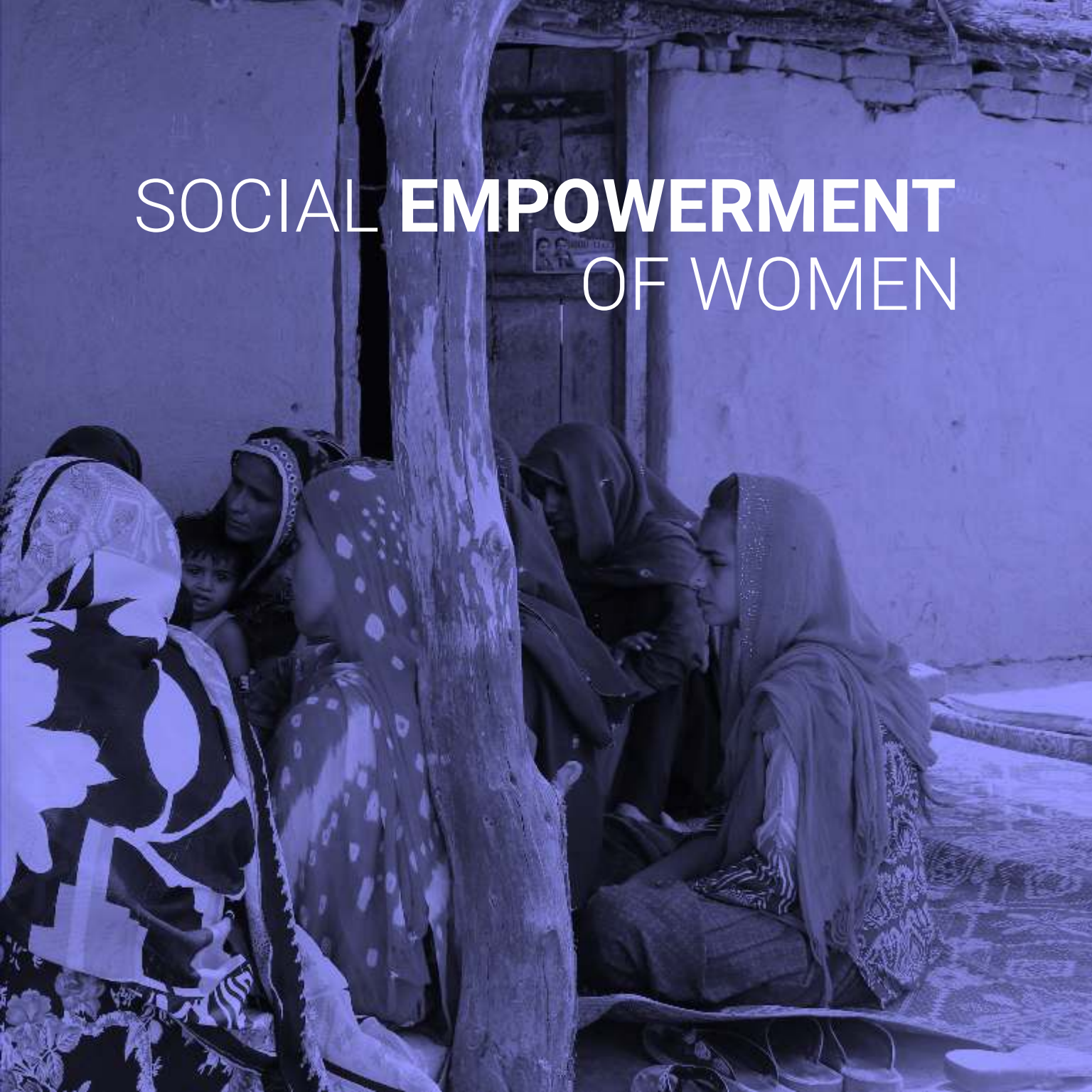
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SOCIAL **EMPOWERMENT** OF WOMEN







Community Organisation (CO)
Sakina
Zaini Sharif

“My name is Sakina and my tanzeem's name is 'Inqilab’”, a Community organisation (CO) in Zaini sharif, district Jamshoro, said Sakina introducing herself and the CO of which she was the president. As the name suggests, the Tanzeem aims to bring a social change in the society through small actions that lead to larger consequences. It was after the formation of Tanzeems that the women realised it is time to become a change agent and create a positive impact around their society. At times, we do not know what we want or what we are capable of achieving, so we require someone else to remind us about that. For Sakina, the formation of the CO has been a way of making society realise their needs and requirements - identify, prioritise, and then address them.

Of course everything was not very easy initially but, “we knew that it is high time we take matter in our own hands”, Sakina continued,

making the women realise what they were missing in their lives and also how they could take steps improve their quality of life and of the people around them.

Although some of the CO women were educated, they were never taught to voice their opinion let alone fight for the rights. For starters, they did not even know how and why to keep their homes clean, what affect it could have on their family's health - quite a little thing but of enormous importance. Explaining the positive impact of CO's formation in Zaina Sharif, Sakina gave an example of when mothers would unknowingly give their children expired medicines as they were not aware if the dates on the medicines had any adverse effect. After attaining knowledge about the concept of expiry through the health sessions introduced by the EU funded SUCCESS programme,¹ now the mothers check the dates or ask someone to check the expired date on the medicine before they expose their children to them. Moreover, family planning was an alien concept here too; nobody could fathom why the gap among children is crucial to both mother and child's health. Rather than

reaching out to the doctor on time, people would ask for help when they could no longer take the pain.

Sakina started with creating awareness regarding health and hygiene as this was the core reason most of the people were unhealthy and bore the social and economic cost of illness. These unhealthy habits would then lead to diseases and not everyone could afford to buy medicines, further deteriorating their life. The second step was to introduce the idea of preventing the people from getting infected by diseases in the first place as they say "prevention is better than cure". Sakina conducted sessions regarding the importance of immunisation of children and women and how they positively affect mother and child health care. She along with her CO members went to the government hospital - Sehat markaz- highlighting the fact that the health facilitators were not visiting the area when they should. "Thanks to this tanzeem we now know about our rights", and so when some women from the CO went to lodge the complaint as a representative of the whole population, "they listened to us and

the results were way quicker than they would have been otherwise,” expressed Sakina. It was after raising the issue that the doctor who was previously present only on papers, physically visited and provided vaccinations and so around thirty mothers and children were vaccinated because of this initiative. Further, by introducing immunisation cards the women made sure that they follow the schedule of vaccinations.

The women have now realised that they have to stand up for their own betterment, Sakina continued, “We ourselves were oblivious to the pros and cons of the health care system.” She further quoted an instance when a child was vaccinated only once until he turned a year old, “now you can imagine how ignorant were we regarding our own health.” Before it was just about taking the medicines when the pain was excruciating but now due to the awareness programmes they can now take informed decisions.

The CO inqilab is also doing great in their saving scheme. Within a year, they have saved around PKR 30,000, and plan on spending the money to further empower

the women of the area by giving out loans to start up business initiatives and income generating opportunities. In a Local Support Organisation's (LSO) meeting with the education department of Zaina Sharif, Sakina and her CO members raised the issue of having no school for girls in their area. Although some of the young girls study up to primary school with the boys, but to continue their education they have to go to a nearby village. Considering the prevalent culture where it is not encouraged that girls go out alone, the CO members demanded for a school in their own area where the girls can have easy access to education. There are many other challenges that the community is currently exposed to but they can now hope for a better future - a future where people are well aware of their rights and responsibilities.



“Everyone calls me their aunt now and I like it too since it denotes a blood relation and closeness between the two people,” said Allah Bachae Solangi, an elderly woman in her early fifties with round spectacles in contrast to her squared face. Although she had a short height with a thin physique, her thick and deep voice took me by surprise. “Be confident with your gift and continue to cultivate and nurture it because everyone’s voice will have an impact,” says Allah Bachae Solangi. Everyone has their own fair amount of distinctiveness and all one needs to do is to use that, being the Community Response Person of the village, Allah Bachae Solangi surely knew how to spread happiness to the people of the Village Organisation (VO) Roshni in Gul Mohammad Shah with raising her voice for the women.

Initially it was not an easy task to mobilise women and form these Tanzeems, as their culture which mainly revolves heavily around family and caste systems is also rooted in strong patriarchal norms, where the oldest male makes most of the decisions for the family. These elders of the families operate with a rigid mind set mostly and consider the women as birds meant to be caged. However, with great efforts a total of seventeen Community Organisations (CO) are formed under the VO Roshni.

For the Village Development Plan (VDP), the VO had three main areas that needed the most focus. The foremost importance was given to drainage systems as soon after a rainfall, the community has to deal with the stagnant water on the streets. The rain water would rise up to knee

level and the transportation system would halt, leaving zero chances of mobility for the people. The stagnant water brought all kinds of water-borne diseases, especially affecting the children, newborn, and the old.

It was in a Joint Development Committee (JDC) meeting that this issue was put forward with the request for a proper drainage system for the village and fortunately “the work has now been completed”, rejoiced Noor Jehan, another member of the VO. The local landlords were against all the upgrades and criticised the new drainage changes in the town saying that they could have done a better job than this and advised to destroy and reconstruct the pipes all over again. “It was all a public stunt,” said Allah Bachae Solangi, “They wanted votes from us in the upcoming elections but we told them straight away that this was our win and that we, women, had accomplished this on our own. We waited twenty years for them to take some action but finally it was us who actually brought this positive change.” The community members are happy that their drainage problem has been solved

and are now looking forward to bring changes - positive changes.

Human beings have the ability to project an image or an idea of what they want for the future. Through identifying areas in one's life for improvement, one can create an image of that longing and start working towards it. Just like that, in Village Development Plan (VDP), the VO members have enlisted the problem of electricity. The unavailability of electricity has negatively impacted the community's growth, especially of the working women, “women cannot work on the sewing machines and their business is negatively impacted,” added Noor Jahan, “We are working towards assisting these women and are planning to build solar panels for continuous availability of electricity.” The VO women have faith in their ability to achieve it and are receptive to that image, creating power.



“Ready your guns, I am coming back home,” Naseem had said on the phone.

The man on the other end of the line was her Mamoo, her maternal uncle, who had just vowed to murder her for crossing the boundaries of the village, unaccompanied by any family member. He had tried to stop her from leaving the village; spoke to her lovingly, cajoled her, and then threatened her with death. Naseem had remained unfazed; she was no longer willing to allow anyone to be in charge of her life.

Her story begun in 2016, when Nasim from Sonu Khan Zardari was elected in the Local Support Organisation (LSO) Ajrak. While others believed change could only be gradual, Naseem disagreed. She refused to go gentle into the struggle. Change had to be public and visible. When her LSO wanted to talk to their people about the effects of climate change, Naseem decided to take a different route. She used her LSO



AJRAK

Local Support Organization



training to contact government officials and was able to procure seeds from the Agriculture Department. She then took out a rally to commemorate “Green Day”, planted the seeds with other women from the village, and then talked about the importance of plantation. Her LSO's approach to go into any issue with all guns blazing rattled a lot of people. During their first LSO meeting, women complained about the crumbling water connections to villages which the Union Council Chairman promised to fix (and did fix). One LSO member took him to task, asking him why he never did anything for them before.

“He said he could not know on his own if we needed something,” she said. “He was insistent that we should contact him for our problems.”

What he said struck Naseem. She had known it was important to demand facilities, like a proper school, from the government, but she now came around to the idea that the demand would only have traction if the entire village stood behind it. However, she did not expect many villagers to throw their weight behind her demands for a better school. It was time for another rally.

She, along with members of the LSO and various Community Organisations (CO) took out a rally, and went from one door to another, talking to families about the importance of education. As a result, she said, even people belonging to castes whose women were forbidden to set foot in school, enrolled their girls.

When Naseem's activism was thriving, she was called to Islamabad for the LSO Convention 2016. Naseem had never been happier.

“I had never even been to Karachi and now I was going to see Islamabad,” she exclaimed.

Naseem, in her untainted joy, went out shopping to Hyderabad to prepare for the trip. Her uncles, who lived in the neighbourhood, became suspicious of the girl who was now, more than ever, going out without inhibitions. One day, one of Naseem's younger siblings let slip that she was going to Islamabad. News travelled fast in Sonu Khan Zardari, and soon, it reached her Mamoo's ears.

“He called to tell me that what I was doing is 'namanzoor' (unacceptable),” Naseem said.

Naseem's response to this mounting objection was, surprisingly, indifference.

“It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me, I could not waste it because other people could not digest my victories.”

Soon, she was in Islamabad. Her uncle continued to call her. He would admonish her for travelling alone in cars with men, he accused TRDP of leading women in his family astray, and he questioned her character. Annoyed by his unrelenting interference, she got into the habit of turning off her phone during the day to concentrate on work. Her uncle then complained to an LSO member that Naseem had not gone with TRDP, but at the behest of someone else. When nothing seemed to work, he made a final call.

“He said 'Now that you have gone, don't come back' but it did not scare me,” Naseem remembers. “He told me he will shoot me himself if I show my face again.”

Naseem told him to keep his guns ready. “Those who bark never bite,” Naseem said with a chuckle.

It has been around two years since Naseem visited Islamabad. As she recounted the anecdotes to us, her face was enlivened by an unforgotten joy and her entire being swelled with excitement. The LSO convention had been a life-altering experience. While in Islamabad, she had explored the city on her own, stood up on a stage and addressed the audience. The LSO experience had reaffirmed her belief in her potentials, and in the belief that sometimes, it was dangerous to surrender your agency to other people to keep peace. This is the attitude she brought back to the village, and this is the attitude that seems to be working for her people.





WOMEN LEADERSHIP



Since 1980, Liaqat Ali has been working tirelessly for his village in UC Jhangara. He sees his work as less of a burden and more of a responsibility as one of the few educated men from the village. He had worked with Thardeep Rural Development Program, the Aga Khan Foundation, and various other entities from the development sector. A traditional, mirror-worked cap on his head was his only protection from the ruthless Jamshoro sun. Every day, Liaqat Ali would shuttle between whatever cause had taken his time, and a shop where he worked as a bookkeeper to take care of his family. Throughout the years, he had navigated a frustratingly baffling bureaucratic system to get a school approved for his village. In 2004, he again had to advocate for girls to be admitted to this school. However steely his resolve may have been, a person's

noble intentions sometimes wear them out. Luckily for Liaqat, he now has someone to shoulder the responsibility, another person who shares his vision, his daughter Sajida. Sajida began to teach voluntarily in the school her father had painstakingly built and, in his footsteps, joined hands with Thardeep Rural Development Program for the SUCCESS programme.

In the government school that Liaqat Ali had advocated for, Sajida is an embodiment of a self-assured woman who is astonishingly young for the responsibilities she has undertaken. At 19, she had completed her Intermediate exams, was working as the Community Resource Person (CRP) for her Community Organisation (CO), and had taken Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) lessons and subsequently conducted sessions for her CO. She had

also taken Community Management Skills Training (CMST) to help mobilise the women of her community. Despite the many responsibilities she had taken on, Sajida had managed to salvage a sense of touching childish naivety to her. She spoke with a kind of eager joy afforded only to youth. This lingering childishness is probably why her father hovered protectively around her, although he took care that he does not hijack the conversation while his daughter talked.

The three-day CMST session can be intimidating for many: A lot of content is covered in a short span of time. Sajida, we noticed, was focused on remembering by heart not just the mere technicalities of her work, but also the idea behind them. "It was in the CMST training that I learned why it was absolutely vital to save," she said. "When women have their own money, they can use it to spend it on themselves, on stuff they want to spend on."

Sajida's wisdom belied her age. Yet, it seemed likely that many women who took CAT sessions from her or were instructed by her to save, did not feel slighted about being taught by a girl much younger than

they are. Sajida insisted that everyone has been kind and welcoming to her.

"Actually, not many women are allowed to go out the way my daughters are," Liaqat Ali explained. "They did not mind Sajida giving the sessions because they knew she was the only woman who could do it."

Sajida, it seemed, had been a natural at mobilising people. Her time spent organising people and helping them manage collective resources had awakened in her a desire to continue doing something similar. She now wanted to be a politician. Her father who, until now had supported her, was reluctant to allow his daughter into the notoriously dangerous profession. Nevertheless, he told her that if she really wanted to get a glimpse into the profession, she should get her hands dirty in some of the ground political work. This year, as Sajida cast her first vote, she also worked as a polling agent. When women from the village saw her at the polling booth, they gravitated towards the party she was representing.

"Later, candidates from other parties started bickering with me," Liaqat recalled

with a laugh. “They accused my daughter of swaying the vote away from them.”

Sajida had been talking to women from different COs and discussing matters important to them for a long time now. Yet, her enthusiasm had refused to wane, and her smile did not dim. She said she wished to become a doctor. And a politician. And she hoped to teach as well. This may seem a little too ambitious but, for someone as talented as her, the sky is the limit.

A strong wind had picked up by the time we met Gulzar in Unarhpur. Gusts of winds whipped up the sands of Unarhpur into a frenzy and swirls of dust clouded our vision. In her house, Gulzar quickly began to set things right when she saw us approaching. It was a neat, sparsely decorated room with two charpoys and a rug. On one of the walls, delicate trinkets were set on a rack. My teammate complimented Gulzar on her taste.

“Oh, they are just covered in dust today,” she said, setting one of them straight.

When we met her, Gulzar had recently completed her Intermediate. She seemed self-conscious at first, as she mindlessly straightened the bedsheets or tugged at the helm of her dupatta. But we had met enough social organisers to know that most

mobilisers do not fit the cookie-cutter personality I had unconsciously made in my mind. Like many others, Gulzar had brought her unique sensibilities to her job as a Community Resource Person (CRP).

Her journey started in 2016, when Village Organisation (VO) Sindhu was formed. Gulzar had seemed like a suitable choice to the members of her Community Organisation (CO) and VO. She was one of the few girls in the village who had completed Matriculation. Even though Gulzar rarely ventured out of her home before becoming a member of the CO, her parents were relatively at ease with allowing her to conduct training sessions in the village. The first few weeks were spent understanding what her job entailed. She took the 3-day training in Jamshoro and took her time



understanding the twelve lessons she had to conduct sessions on. Even then she could rattle off the lessons she took from memory. It was when she entered the field to work that the challenges began to rear their heads.

“In one of the COs, CO Awaz, the women just would not save,” she recalled, “They said, we can only save PKR 10 or PKR 20, that kind of money does not make a difference.”

Gulzar soldiered on, urging them to at least take the initiative and see where it took them. After a while, one of the CO members contracted Hepatitis and had to be rushed to the hospital. This time, her family did not have to ask the feudal landowner for the PKR 5000 that had to be paid to the hospital. Instead, they could use their collective savings. In another instance, when a woman from the CO required PKR 10,000 to buy farming implements, she, too, could access money in a more dignified way.

There were other successes, too. Gulzar had felt that, too often, families gave birth to children without really considering whether they had enough resources to

bring up those children. More worryingly for her, the health of women never really featured in these discussions. The Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) sessions were the perfect opportunity for her to have open discussions with women about the endurance of their body and how multiple childbirths maybe straining them physically. The women seemed to have found a confidante in her, and before long, many in the village were flocking to her to discuss the method of family planning most appropriate for them.

For Gulzar herself, her job as a CRP has also been an entryway into progress. Her older sister's educational journey had come to an end after Matriculation. Even the most supportive of families in her village did not allow their daughters to continue schooling past that age. When Gulzar became a CRP, she convinced her parents to let her continue her education since she was going out already and had never once breached their trust. Her parents saw the logic in her argument and agreed. Now, Gulzar has her eyes set on an undergraduate degree.

While she talked to us, Gulzar said her role as a CRP had “paved the way”, for herself and for women like her to get ahead in their lives. The way has been paved, and Gulzar is ready to take the journey forward.





A man in a dark shirt is counting money at a stall. The stall has various items including a stack of round goods, a box of Gluco biscuits, and a scale. The background features a decorative wall. The entire image has a green tint.

ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN

Being able to look at future has its own charm, you can not only hope for good things but also plan for them. Sakina's family is an example of how financial security changes one's life and is important to lead a happy and prosperous life. Despite belonging to such a remote area, Zaini Sharif in district Jamshoro, Sakina speaks with such confidence that you would think she is someone from a developed area. And according to her, all of this was possible because of the Community Investment fund (CIF) that she had received.

"There was no fabric shop in the village and I always wanted to do something related to fabric" said Sakina. When the tanzem conducted its very first briefing and spoke about how the women could get help through various initiatives i.e CIF, "I knew what I could do to utilise this opportunity," Sakina

narrated enthusiastically. She started her journey and embarked on her new venture of selling fabric. "I have a room in my house and from there I deal with my customers," explained Sakina. She has been quite fortunate to have been blessed with a family who are exceptionally supportive. Her husband travels with her to Hyderabad every now and then buying the required amount of fabric. Sakina started her business with an investment of PKR 20,000 and makes a profit of PKR fifty to one hundred on every dress fabric that she sells.

She tries to save as much money as possible for reinvesting it in her business, as her first investment was of PKR 15,000 and now it has increased by PKR 5,000, hence trying to invest in more and more each time her husband buys the stock. Sakina further





shared how she has been thinking of increasing it for the upcoming Eid al-Adha (Muslim Eid Festival). The fact that there is no other fabric shop in the village has made it easy for her business to flourish and Sakina has grabbed just the right opportunity, "Women are happy to be able to buy from me because of the proximity of my shop," she explained. Also, they are thrilled to choose from the designs and variety that Sakina offers.

The shop has really helped Sakina with her finances as before that she would be depressed thinking about impending expenses, "Children's books, copies, shoes, pens, and pencils, these all are expensive if you think about it. My children would wish to eat different dishes and want clothes to wear so it got quite difficult to manage." She is optimistic for her children and it was mostly because of them she took the decision of opening a shop and finance their educational expenses. "My eldest daughter wants to be a doctor."

"This tanzeem has not only brought financial stability to our area but also awareness among the women too" expounded Sakina. The idea that they could earn themselves and improve the

quality of life of their family was never known before, they feel a sense of pride now as the ability to earn and support the families has made them a truly equal counterpart in the family system. "At times men do get annoyed when they are asked to refrain from something they could previously do," narrated Sakina while giving a victorious grin, but at the same time they are happy that the women are playing a positive role in the family and joined their hands to make our family live a better life.

Now Sakina's children do not have to wait long for basic necessities rather only look towards a brighter future. She is a mother of five children and two of them are currently attending school, a daughter and a son. Her daughter, Arifa wants to be a doctor and serve the people of her village. Seeing educated girls, she wants to be like them and provide her family with quality life. "It is because of the CIF, we can look at future with certainty and hope," beamed Sakina.





Technical and Vocational
Skills Training (TVST)

Majida
Chavra

Imagine being only eighteen years old girl and sharing the responsibility of supporting the whole family on your shoulders. At this age most girls from the privileged families are only concerned about getting admitted into prestigious universities for attaining higher education. Unluckily, being from a destitute family in Chavra, Majida could not fulfill her desire of completing her studies and going to a university but rather was burdened to support her family get out of the impoverished state.

Her two brothers are labourers and therefore have no fixed amount of income. This uncertainty of whether her family will be able to at least afford a single time meal felt burdensome and hence forced her to start tailoring at an early age. The penurious years had forced Majida to start sewing neighbour's cloths to earn at least some money, at the expense of her studies and future. But the decision seemed to be the only

way out of the misery her family was going through. Majida's family was not a small one either, a total of thirteen family members were relying on her as well as on her father, who is only a minor electrician with a meagre amount of income.

Now that Majida has taken the Technical and Vocational Skills Training (TVST), where her sewing skills were further polished, the villages were giving her more dresses to stitch. One thing that Majida wishes was that the duration of the trainings was longer so that the participants had more time to practice and learn new designs and trends but overall she well-regarded the initiative. After the training "Stitching two suits on a single day is no big deal for me now" says Majida and charges around PKR 200 to 300 per suit, providing a good source of income for her family.

Majida is engaged and will marry her cousin in a year or two. Showing concern towards her family, Majida deliberated how she has already taught sewing to her two sister-in-laws as well. The thought behind this act is to secure her family's future prospects when she marries and leaves the house, "They will look after the finances

and be a helping hand," Majida expressed. Capable of fulfilling the basic household necessities, Majida wishes she could stay a few more years with her parents and keep supporting them with the finances. The two sister-in-laws were sitting on the charpoy, caressing their newborns. They both had a look of admiration towards Majida as she introduced them, while her mother proudly looked on.

"Now my daughter has this skill and if she ever faces a grim situation she would surely make her way out of it, even at her in-laws," hoped Farzana, Majida's mother who is also the president of the Community Organisation (CO) Khushbu. Stressing further, how the training has benefitted Majida, her mother proudly said that Majida has returned the PKR 6000 she borrowed from her elder brother to buy a sewing machine. Now that she compares her present situation with that of the past, she sees a huge change, "We make clothes for ourselves as well without getting worried about the budget" narrated Majida. She sees the household situation improved and hopes for even a better future.



Income Generating Grant (IGG)

Sughni

Village Saharabad

When Sughni got her Income Generating Grant (IGG) of PKR 22,000 in January 2018, she did not wait a single day to put it to use. She sent her husband off to buy everything that people in her village would need, from the little packets of snacks that children gobble up on their way back home from school to the smooth bars of soaps that the young, newly self-conscious teenagers would ask for. Within a couple of days, her shop was set and ready to conduct business.

Now, Sughni's shop easily sells groceries worth PKR 1,000-1,500 every day. Sughni and her family manage to set aside PKR 100 as savings daily and can save up to PKR 3,000 every month. This, however, was not always the case. Before Sughni became a member of Community Organisation (CO) Om Ganesh, the family could barely scrape enough money to make ends meet. What most would think of









as tough, had become the mundane in Sughni's life.

"The times were all rough," Sughni reminisced. "When you have more children and less money, the times are all difficult."

This is not the only change brought to Sughni's life. Sughni has also been given a Micro Health Insurance (MHI) card. She intends to use it for her son's nose surgery so he is able to breathe conveniently and live a normal life.

Sughni's story is another example of a family being stuck in what economists define as the vicious cycle of poverty. In the lived experience of these people, the cycle just means the continuity of tough times without any respite. Poverty, coupled with even the slightest threat of a health shock, drags people back from any progress they may have made. This is why initiatives like the IGG work. Women like Sughni may not have much mobility – Sughni admitted that she did not buy the groceries herself – but a grant like IGG still gives her a chance at increasing the family's income. She now has the liberty to set up a business that would help her family without requiring her to go too far away from home.

The most overwhelming colours in Mirgan's village were shades of beige. From the brown sands rose kucha huts - the colour of mud. The place was lit by the sepia-tinted pallor of the sun that is especially merciless on this tract of desert-like land. Jamshoro was characteristically hot.

In the midst of this landscape, Mirgan sat on a charpoy with another woman from the village. Around them, goats and dogs lounged drowsily under the afternoon sun. Mirgan looked tired. Her hands, covered in their entirety with white bangles, rested limply in her lap. Her face was aged by worry, and not by years. The woman next to her was considerably older - silver had seeped into her hair and her back was bent over.

Mirgan, along with other women in this village, have lived a tough life. Water had

always been scarce in their village. For their entire lives, some of these women had made it a part of their routine to carry buckets and matkas (earthenware pots) to the feudal landowner's house nearby and come back with the full pots weighing them down. The water was always rationed and the source never really belonged to them.

Two years ago, Thardeep Rural Development Program (TRDP) started work in the village under SUCCESS programme funded by the European Union. The women formed a Community Organisation (CO) and then a Village Organisation (VO). When the VO had its first meeting to lay down the Village Development Plan (VDP), most of the members were adamant that something needed to be done about the water problem in the village. It was decided that the VO should use its Community Physical







Infrastructure (CPI) scheme on remedying the water problem in the area. The VO had PKR 40,000 to spend on each hand pump and has since, successfully, installed two handpumps in the village, while four others remained.

In the future, Mirgan hopes to work on the unpaved roads leading to her village as well. The first impression we had got from Mirgan's demeanor was of an almost cynic reticence; she had not seemed excited to talk about the achievements of her VO. But it soon became clear that, as someone who had struggled as much in life as she did, Mirgan believed more in dogged determination than in exuberant joy.

Ruksana is a mother of nine children consisting of eight daughters and a son. In a society where women are pressurised to have a son, Ruksana kept on giving birth until her ninth child was a baby boy. Without a son, family in Ruksana's community is considered incomplete, and for the same reason, Ruksana's desire for a son further deteriorated the poor lifestyle her family was having. Her ninth baby boy made her feel as if finally life was blessed and that she could have a happy ever after, but fate had something else planned for her.

In 2007, Ruksana was left devastated when she lost her husband, the only breadwinner of the family. Shattered by the loss and with the responsibility of feeding the nine children her husband had left her, Ruksana tried every possible way to make the ends meet but they were merely forlorn attempts to escape poverty. Yet again she had to bend down to the fate when the catastrophic





floods in 2010 left her without a shelter. Without any other option, she had to migrate to Berani in district Jamshoro with her children from district Qambar Shahdadkot.

Life has not been so fair until now but she has somehow managed to make the ends meet. In Berani, Ruksana now works as a maid in a school and the same school has enrolled her only son as well free of cost, who is her only child to get schooling.

Living a life of poverty often makes one more resilient to pain and Ruksana's life has been a testament of resilience. One painful episode after another, she must have been quite used to it now. While they were travelling in a rickshaw to get food from a relative, the rickshaw could not maintain its balance while taking a U-turn and hit the road uncontrollably. Four people had boarded the Rickshaw and everyone got a scratch or two but Ruksana's daughter, Sartaj, could not stand up on feet and she was rushed directly to the nearest government hospital. There the doctors informed that Sartaj's leg needs to be operated on, as it was swollen and blood

was clogged in it. Ruskana returned back, "We left the hospital due to compulsion, otherwise we would have valued to get her operated," her first instinct was to avoid the doctors as she knew she would not be able pay the hospital bills, "I left the hospital immediately when they informed me about the need of surgery" said Ruksana. While Ruksana dreaded the bills of the never-ending list of medicines, Sartaj was afraid of the operation. Soon Ruksana realised that she has the Micro Health Insurance (MHI) card and could get her daughter operated without giving a single penny and yet could provide quality health care. Also, the facilities in the government hospital were almost non-existent and the service delivery system was extremely time consuming as well, with zero care towards the patients. Ruksana went on further complaining, "If we had gone for the government hospital, after paying the expenses, the worst part would have been purchasing the medicines from a pharmacy outside, adding more financial burden on us."

Sartaj was later admitted to Bakhtwar Hospital, which was on the panel of the MHI card and had a successful operation. “Thanks to the MHI card, I did not have to worry about the charges as everything was within the limit, even the medicines,” Ruksana said expressing delight. Not only was she satisfied from the facilities at the partner hospital but also the way the doctors treat the patients was also very empathetic.





**LEGAL
EMPOWERMENT**



In a government school in UC Jhangara, one of the classrooms was full of women. They had rearranged the desks and sat in a circle. Some of these women had brought their children with them: the toddlers strayed away from their mothers to play in the heat outside while the mothers pulled the babies closer in a protective embrace. There was a din of voices as young babies wailed, children shrieked with joy outside, the women began to talk all at the same time, and then broke into laughter together.

We had traversed a particularly torturous road that had been as difficult for our car as it was for us. On many occasions, the poor vehicle had sputtered and lost all will to move. Thankfully, we were finally here. While the car got some much-needed rest outside, we revelled in the delightful chatter inside.

The women sitting with us were from different Community Organisations (CO), some said they were from CO Rabia, others from CO Shazia. They had all taken the Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) sessions from Sajida, the Community Resource Person (CRP) of the area. The CAT sessions covered 12 topics broadly, comprising of education, sanitation, family planning and more. The purpose behind delivering the CAT sessions is to create awareness at grassroots about topics, which affect the daily lives of the people.

The women began to talk all at once about the benefits they had reaped from the CAT sessions delivered by Sajida. This was a gathering comprised mainly of young mothers. It was therefore not surprising that most of them seemed eager to talk about

what they had learned about children's health.

"We learnt that it was important to boil water for children..." one began.

"...and to cover food after it is cooked..." another interjected.

"...and to make children wash their hands when they come home from school..." a third one noted.

It may seem that the women are being instructed in the most mundane tasks, and that this is unlikely to help uplift women in any way. However, it must be remembered that good health of their families and themselves (which is one of the main elements of CAT sessions) frees up time for women to do other tasks. That day, as women talked about how their children now are less likely to fall victim to flu and dysentery as they had agreed to get vaccinations and adopted hand washing and other sanitation habits, they also discussed the ambitions they had for their future. One woman said that she hoped to open a shop with the Community Investment Fund (CIF) she was going to receive and has opted for family planning

so she could focus more time, resources, and energy on her existing children. Another discussed her hopes for the future, saying she could concentrate wholeheartedly on the education of her children now, and wanted to see them get all the benefits of a good education.

Most people we talked to in this trip had a very different start in life; they did not have the privileges of wealth or urban living. It is easy to be hardened by cynicism in this case. However, as women from these COs showed, sometimes it takes only a little help to awaken dreams.



“It has been a great journey, TRDP literally has lifted us from a dark corner,” proclaimed Noor Jehan Solangi, member of a Local Support Organisation (LSO) Doha in Union Council (UC) Channa, “it has been two years since then,” she recalls. Noor Jehan was a stay-at-home mother before she joined the LSO in 2016. Her husband is a dispenser. She has four children, two sons and two daughters: the eldest is enrolled in Matric while the youngest is in nursery. At the beginning, she had no idea what it was all about but gradually she learnt more and more about the tanzeems and their primary functions.

Some women from Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP), under the SUCCESS programme funded by European Union had visited Noor Jehan's community and tried to convince the women to

join their hands for a prosperous future. As the Community Organisations (CO) were forming, Noor Jehan was requested to become the president, since she was literate, a Matric certification holder, everyone willingly agreed to it. “I did not know anything even after joining the tanzeem, I only knew about saving,” said Noor Jehan, and after some time she was asked to attend the CO training where she was assigned to become the manager of the Village Organisation (VO) too. “And soon after I became the president of the Local Support Organisation (LSO) as well, which has twelve community organisations (CO) under it,” she added.

“It was not easy joining these tanzeems,” asserts Noor Jehan but she did not have to struggle to show others what capabilities she possessed but rather her momentous actions

s t u v w x y z



clearly showed. Starting from the very scratch through joining the CO and attending the trainings, now she was determined to join politics in the future and had laid out plans too. For showing such ambitions there is a famous saying, 'Sky is the limit'.

As a president of the LSO, Noor Jehan was supposed to attend the Joint Development Committee (JDC) meetings too, she recalls being frightened about attending her first ever JDC meeting in 2017. Though she had been attending meetings every now and then but the JDC meeting was something huge for her, "To tell you the truth," revealed Noor Jehan, "I was terrified to attend it." She laughed while describing her panicky situation at that point in time, as she knew the meeting will consist of renowned Government personalities and other important stakeholders and the thought of appearing in front of them with her demands scared her.

In the first JDC meeting, the community women demanded for issuance of CNICs for the people and asked for National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to visit the area with the whole

setup so that the people were facilitated and were left with no reason to back out. When the team visited, around five hundred new CNICs were issued for the women throughout UC Channa.

In another JDC meeting of 2017, Noor Jehan had highlighted the need for building roads and to date, efforts and coordination is underway to construct roads but due to Elections 2018, the process was slowed down. Nevertheless, Noor Jehan plans on giving them a reminder if it gets delayed any longer.

Noor Jehan and her community women further requested for provision of proper vaccinations for the women and children of the area, as no one paid any heed before. Hence, in the JDC meeting they requested for a solution and consequently, the government officials took notice and a lady health worker was appointed who now regularly visits the areas every month or two depending on the need of the people.

"Now we are focusing on building latrines for the citizens," Noor Jehan continued highlighting the changes that she wants to see in her village. Open defecation is one of

the main factors leading to health and hygiene issues and Noor Jehan intends to raise the issue in the upcoming JDC meeting.

Noor Jehan does not fear attending JDC meetings, forming connections, and talking to political personnel. Her desire to join politics in the long run will be a challenge for her nonetheless but she has faith in the support of her fellow villagers and claims that she can truly help her people as she is one of them and has a clear understanding of their crucial problems.

As positive thoughts move you closer to your positive desires, Noor Jehan's past thoughts and experiences have shaped the world she wants to live in today, and the thoughts she is thinking today are gradually shaping her future.

HYDERABAD CLUB



PEOPLE BEHIND SUCCESS





Unfortunately, we are a part of a patriarchal society where everything a woman does has to be approved by the males first. It is often considered shameful if a woman in a family goes out to earn livelihood. Not realising that if both men and women would work together, they can improve the quality of life to a greater extent. "I was among the few lucky girls who got access to education," said Baby Naz - a Social Organizer (SO), who got married after completing her BA and now has two children.

However, the first challenge that she had to face was from her family who were not comfortable with the idea of going out on field visits and meeting different people and become engaged in taboo conversations too. "But I made it a point to convince them that I want to be more than just a

daughter, to have my own individual identity," expressed Baby Naz and she knew really well that this was only possible by getting out of her comfort zone and working hard to make a good name for herself. Fortunately, they did allow her to work.

That was just the beginning of a difficult journey where she had to convince people every day to change their behaviour. As a SO, she had to face opposition from men as well as women. Baby Naz narrated an incident where once on a visit with her team, all the men and women were ready with stones in their hands and chanting slogans to leave their village immediately, "We were shocked and scared to see them but did not give up rather requested to engage in conversation before being thrown out of their village." It turned out that there was a

rumour circulating in the village about a group that kidnapped young children. Perplexed to hear this, the team assured the villagers of their identities and affiliations and also explained to them that they were there to help, on the contrary. "I told them the office's address and also my home address so that they could be sure that we were not into some shady business," which helped to gain their trust.

Even when Baby Naz asked women to form tanzeems they had to convince the men first to allow their women to interact and be a part of the change the team was striving hard for. "They would often quarrel stating why should they trust me and where was I exactly taking them to for the trainings" and Baby Naz would tell them they can drop their women to the venue if they want and see it for themselves. "Initially in a gathering of fifty women, forty men would be present to observe what we were up to," asserted Baby Naz and fortunately there came a time when the men actually took their side and agreed to work together. She claimed, "Unfortunately, previous NGOs did not deliver what they promised which created more problems for

us." She added, "However now, the situation has totally changed and people now approach the SO team through telephone asking for help whenever needed."

This is no struggle when compared to what actually she had faced in her personal life. Back in 2000 when Baby Naz was jobless, her husband quit working because he had gotten sick and could not work anymore, they were penny less with two infants to feed and take care of. Life was miserable and she could not even afford to provide them three times' meals, "I would cry day and night asking God for help and to show some hope," said Baby Naz, almost sobbing. "I had no option but to ask help from my parents," her family started to depend on her parents for meals. She would think about the uselessness of getting education if she could not even utilize it at her critical time and change the standard of her family.

Living on the margins of survival and struggling to buy food, Baby Naz desperately needed a source of income. The situation was so grim that, "I could not even feed my two babies so my brother

would buy two sachets of Nido milk and mix a lot of water,” recalling that the sachets were for PKR 12 each, only, Baby Naz also showed with her hand how small the sachets were, half the size of her palm! Most nights, she had to listen to her children cry themselves to sleep from hunger. By now, she had watery eyes as she went on further talking about her struggle's before reaching her present state.

Fortuitously, Baby Naz got her first job in a school with a salary of PKR Thirty five hundred which was quite a handsome money for her to bear her expenses, “I was happy as now I did not have to ask my parents for financial help again.” More doors started to open for her as she got to know about more vacancies around her, during the flood relief work she also worked at a Child protection program by TRDP in 2010. “As I did not have my BA documents back then so I was offered a salary of PKR 10,000 and I could not honestly contain my happiness when I got to know about the salary,” and it was then when she realised that she could help people more through serving in the social

sector.” She added, “I joined Thardeep Rural Development Programme as a Social Organiser on 28th June 2016 and have never looked back since. I work hard to change the lives of people in need,” because she knows exactly how it feels to be vulnerable.

Hasina still remembers the date she joined Thardeep Rural Development Program (TRDP) - April 25th, 2016. She also remembers the first time she was told about the place she was being sent to: Thana Bulla Khan.

“When I was told my job would be in Thana Bulla...I just went quiet,” Hasina reminisces.

She had good reason to be worried into silence. Thana Bulla, a small settlement on the Super Highway, was approximately an hour away from Jamshoro, where Hasina's office was. She knew the journey would drain her more than the actual job would. More than that, Thana Bulla had gained a notoriety for being unsafe for women: Hasina had heard rumours about the various kidnappings of women in Thana Bulla. It would have been easier to refuse to work in this place, but

Hasina, was not one to cower down.

“I thought to myself, I am denying myself the opportunity to meet new people because of what others say about them,” she said. “I have never been to Thana Bulla myself, how could I judge them?”

Hasina decided to, as she put it, “make the impossible possible,” and ventured into Thana Bulla. The only person accompanying her was the driver who was also going to Thana Bulla for the first time. It is in these situations that fate is tempted to test the courage of people. As they drove onto Super Highway, clouds brimming with rain darkened the horizons and plunged Thana Bulla into an all-engulfing darkness. The rain came down the scraggly hillocks that surround Thana Bulla like a “waterfall”. On the road, Hasina and her driver



began to confront the reality that they were completely lost.

“We could only see what was immediately ahead of us because of the headlights of the car,” Hasina recalled. “The rest of the area was completely invisible.”

Hasina had gone to Thana Bulla careful not to run into any miscreants and encountered unlikely messiahs instead. Her driver, completely clueless about directions, decided to steer the car towards wherever they saw a glimmer of light. The light was usually coming from the motorcycle of a man heading home around Thana Bulla and, one after the other, men from Thana Bulla led her safely to her destination.

“The way we encountered an almost fatal situation on our very first day, and the way we were miraculously led out of it by men many thought were not trustworthy... it just completely took away all my fears.”

While this was happening in Thana Bulla, news had reached her colleagues in Jamshoro about a car accident near Thana Bulla. Frantically, they called her, but were unable to reach her due to the shaky network in Thana Bulla. They prepared themselves for the worst.

“When the calls finally reached me, I assured them that I was safe,” Hasina said. “Some other car had had an accident, and even they had only been mildly injured.”

Hasina was an essentially social being who was also keenly aware of cultural sensibilities. In Thana Bulla, she completely immersed herself in the life of the place. This sometimes meant not being able to see her family for weeks on end. Most other days, it meant drinking water that had been muddied by impurities.

“When you are a social organiser...,” Hasina pauses before resuming, “you don't really have an option, do you? You have to live with the people, and you have to eat and drink like them. It is offensive to the people if you do not. In Sindh, we say such a woman thinks she is a 'Mandam' (a localised version of Madame).”

Hasina was never bothered by these mundane problems. The only thing that concerned her was whether the people would take kindly to her message. The response was better than anything she could have imagined. Within months of organising themselves, the women of Thana Bulla began to assert themselves in the public sphere and remedy their

problems. One of the Community Organisation (CO) members confronted a “ghost” teacher at a local government school, and told him that, from now on, if he planned to be absent from school, he would have to submit an application to her first. The men, instead of restraining their women, joined them in their struggle and took out a rally to open another government school that had fallen victim to negligence and had been shut down.

Hasina is a rare soul. Unlike other people, she is not intimidated but emboldened by challenges. Her sole purpose to not say no to a job opportunity in Thana Bulla was to experience the novel, however dangerous it may be. People do not expect a woman to be so uninhibited, which is probably why the residents of Thana Bulla said, “I was not a woman but a man, but I corrected them that no! I am a strong woman,” she told me with a chuckle. Hasina may not be the demure woman our culture holds as the standard, but she is the ideal social organiser and a very talented, strong, and dignified woman.

JAMSHORO 2016-18



78,198

Households Covered by
Poverty Scorecard Survey



47,881

Organised
Households



2,953

Women Community
Organisations (COs) Formed



309

Women Village
Organisations (VOs) Formed



24

Women Local Support
Organisations (LSOs) Formed



5,337

Women CO Members
who received CMST



601

Women VO/LSO Members
who received LMST



229

Community Resource
Persons (CRPs) Trained



13

LSOs/VOs with Community
Investment Fund (CIF)



1,847

Households Benefiting
from CIF



29.1 million

Amount of CIF (PKR) given to
LSOs/VOs





14,378

Women Insured



12,231

Men Insured



54,306

Children Insured



23

Community Physical Infrastructures
(CPIs) Schemes Initiated



10.6 million

Cost of CPIs (PKR)



3,170

Households benefiting
from CPIs



6.7 million

Cost of Income Generating
Grants (IGG) (PKR)



358

Households Benefiting
from IGG



36

Village Organisations (VOs)
Benefiting from IGG



12,643

Households Insured through
Micro Health Insurance



667

Beneficiaries of Technical and
Vocational Skills Training (TVST)





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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."



SUCCESS

Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme

SUCCESS is funded by the European Union

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