



Rural Communities in the Fight Against COVID-19: A Case of Rural ICT

About the Training:

As per the collaboration between the Rural Support Programmes and government which started in May 2020, the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) initiated community mobilisation activities in rural Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The collaboration is between the District Administration of ICT and the NRSP, which operates in five rural union councils of ICT, having built up a strong network of five community-based Local Support Organisations (LSOs) in Islamabad's five rural union councils. NRSP's outreach touches 30,000 people in these Union Councils. The LSO is a federated structure, with Village and Community Organisations below it, hence extending its coverage down to households. In the five selected Union Councils of rural ICT under NRSP, there are 05 LSOs, 1,275 Community Organisations (COs), 48 Village Organisations (VOs) and 19,180 organised households. NRSP has linked these community institutions and their activists to the government primarily to spread awareness about COVID-19 (including what the disease is and the relevant precautionary measures to adopt in order to prevent its rapid spread) and assist the government in the Trace, Test and Quarantine (TTQ) strategy.

On May 11, 2020, a training of LSO Chirah was held in rural ICT. Officials from the Department of Health in ICT oriented participants, which included community activists and NRSP staff. This session included awareness about COVID-19 and its prevention measures and the identification and contact tracing of suspected cases, with method of referral of these cases to Basic Health Units. The training included 25 participants, 20 women and 5 men.

Case Study: Shabana Imtyaz, LSO Chirah, Rural ICT

Community Resource Person (CRP) Shabana Imtyaz belongs from Local Support Organisation (LSO) Chirah. This LSO is comprised of 245 Community Organisations (COs), 13 Village Organisations (VOs) and 4,330 organised households.

Shabana tells us of her experience of the training to combat COVID-19, facilitated by the officials from the Department of Health in ICT. Shabana explains, *"We have learnt so much from this training. There were so many things that we hadn't thought of before. The knowledge*



Figure 1 Figure 3 Shabana Imtyaz handing out IEC materials to increase awareness against coronavirus



from this training has now equipped us with the capacity to combat this pandemic properly. We have given extensive information to our community by explaining to them the importance of wearing masks, using sanitisers, washing hands, sneezing and coughing into your elbow, disinfecting houses and keeping social distance by remaining 6 ft away from others.”

Shabana has also been trained on the identification of suspected corona positive cases and how to report them. Speaking on the Trace, Test and Quarantine (TTQ) strategy, she said, *“We have been taught on how to identify people with coronavirus symptoms. Our proper protocols include identifying a suspected case, informing the competent authorities such as the government or an NRSP official, helping transfer a suspected case to a nearby Basic Health Unit for treatment and quarantine. However, we have not spotted a suspected case till now.”*

Shabana visits ten houses daily, as per the target set by NRSP, and within five days has approximately covered 50 households. *She explains, “Each CRP is awarded certain number of households according to the size of their village. Our village is comprised of more than 1000 households, as a Master trainer at my LSO, NRSP has awarded me a total number of 300 houses in my village to visit.”*

Shabana has also visited an Ehsaas Programme centre. *“I visited the Ehsaas Programme Centre and observed that they were not undertaking the proper protocols of social distancing. So, I had a small dialogue with them as well”, she says. Furthermore, she says, “We visit households in our area and impart the same knowledge that the health department gave us, such as, maintaining social distance, the importance of washing hands, wearing masks and sneezing and coughing into the elbow.”*

Speaking about the government support, Shabana expressed her satisfaction saying that the government has been supporting the communities not only through this initiative but also through caring for the disabled women and widows. She says, *“Government has given ration bags for more 50 women in my area for those women who are disabled or are widows.”*

She expresses her gratitude to the National Rural Support Programme, stating that, *“RSPN and NRSP are great organisations who have supported us and given us the much-needed confidence to combat this pandemic and raise awareness.”*