



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: ShaguftaShaheen, LSO Chirah Rural ICT



Figure 1 ShaguftaShaheen handing out IEC materials to raise awareness against COVID-19

ShaguftaShaheen, an activist who is a Community Resource Person (CRPs – are outstanding activists in villages, trained by the RSPs to undertake specific tasks e.g. spreading messages to other communities) from LSO Chirah was part of this training. LSO Chirah is comprised of 245 Community



Organisations (COs), 13 Village Organisations (VOs) and 4,330 organised households. After the training, Shagufta started visiting rural households in the community, going door-to-door to iterate the proper precautions needed to combat COVID-19.

Speaking about her work Shagufta said, *“I have given this training to numerous houses in my community by going door-to-door. I try to visit at least 4 households daily, while keeping my own precautionary measures in place such as wearing a mask, washing my hands and keeping a 6 ft distance”*.

Under this initiative, the CRPs are also working with mosques to ensure social distancing. Speaking about the trained male CRPs, Shagufta said, *“They make regular announcements in mosques and also disinfect them every week. We have also provided the mosques with soap, sanitisers and masks. Furthermore, we have also drawn proper lines and circles in the mosques to ensure social distancing especially during the holy month of Ramzan when people visit the mosques for taraweeh prayers.”*



Figure 2 ShaguftaShaheen facilitating the disinfection of mosques

When asked about people’s reactions, she explained, *“Communities have been very receptive to our messages when it comes to safety precautions that are essential during this pandemic. We have explained to them that the only cure is prevention.”* She adds, *“People are taking these precautions very seriously especially when it comes to the elderly in their houses”*.

in the area, the reluctant ones also began accepting our advice. The primary challenge that remains now, is that we continue to protect ourselves and take proper precautionary measures when we visit different households to raise awareness against COVID-19. Thankfully, we have no suspected cases yet”, she says.

Shagufta also speaks about some of the challenges a CRP faces. *“Initially, there were some minor challenges we faced when few people in the community were reluctant to listen. However, as we approached more and more people*

Shagufta is passionate about the work of CRPs in these trying times. As she says, *“All CRPs have the passion to work on this initiative diligently and we are all trying to ensure that our responsibilities to our communities are fulfilled to the best of our abilities in the time of this pandemic”*.