



Report on Field Visit to PSI-RSPN
“Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing”
Project in
District Jhang, Punjab



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February 16 – 20, 2016

Background

As Research Associate at Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), I was given the opportunity to visit district Jhang and experience the work of RSPN in the field. The main purpose of the visit was to observe the activities of a project titled “Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing” funded by Population Services International (PSI), conduct a meeting with project staff members from Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP), undertake assessment of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) who have adopted Business in a Box (BiB) model and gather some project success stories. Ms. Tahira Tarique, Monitoring Officer of the project, and I traveled to the field area. She was kind enough to address all my queries and concerns and thoroughly explained me the workings of the project and made my first field visit comfortable as well as enlightening.

Travel Details

Day 0: Arrival at Jhang:

We arrived at the PRSP district office in Jhang at 4.30 pm on February 16, 2016 to hold a meeting with the district team. The first agenda of the meeting was to share the purpose of our visit and map out our field trip accordingly. The main purpose of our visit was to carry out an assessment study on BiB approach. From 150 CRPs who have been given BiB kits, 10 percent CRPs were aimed to be selected for interviews.

The selection of CRPs for BiB assessment was based on reported monthly profit earnings: high, average and low profit. Five CRPs were selected for each category. We shared the names of our selected CRPs with the team and asked for their opinion. In this regard, District Project Officer (DPO) Mr. Alam Sher shared with us their selected CRPs for the three categories. He pointed out that some CRPs might not have made a good profit in the last month but their overall performance has been good enough to consider them in our high profit category (total profit of the CRPs was not taken into consideration as CRPs from old areas have far more profit than the CRPs of the new areas, hence the selection was done on the basis of their monthly performance in the second phase of the project). With an input from the team, a new list of CRPs was made and then the field visit was planned accordingly.

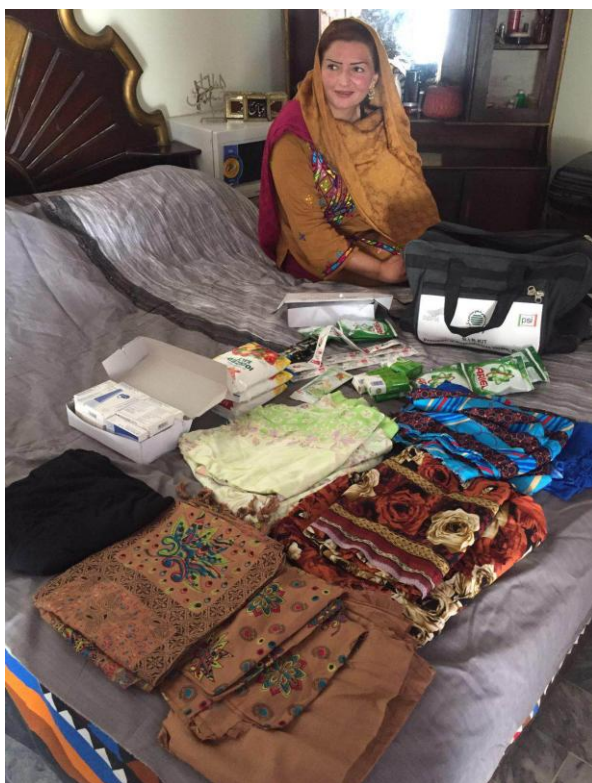
A quantitative questionnaire was designed to conduct interviews with the CRPs which aimed to determine the progress of each CRP using BiB approach as well as the post project sustainability of the approach. The questionnaire was shared with them and they were given a thorough explanation of each and every question. This was important so that if the Social Organizer conducts an interview, s/he must understand the purpose behind each question and get an answer rather than leaving it blank. They were asked for their input on the questionnaire and their concerns regarding some questions were addressed. Overall the team was satisfied with the questionnaire and nothing was added or removed.

Further, the team was instructed by Ms. Tahira to share success stories as well as Facebook updates. She further stated that a draft of two Facebook updates and two success stories must be shared with RSPN team each month and if any member has any issue of elaborating any story in English, s/he should write in a simpler way as RSPN team would further refine it.

She also inquired about office records and went through them briefly. The meeting ended around 6 pm and we headed to our accommodation in Faisalabad.

It was great to meet the team and understand the crucial role each member plays in mobilizing individual households, empowering them and creating awareness in the community. During the meeting I understood how important organizational processes and synchronization are for the progression of social mobilization. What truly amazed me is how the minutest of uncovered neighborhoods became accessible to me due to the efforts and coordination of PRSP team.

Day 01: Visit to Union Council Sheikh Jauhar, Chak 446, Sultanpur, Kot Lakhnana:



Mrs. Naeem Akhtar displays the items of her Box with pride

We reached the district office, Jhang at 9 am and after picking up SO Ms. Saima, we were en route to interview our first CRP. Mrs. Naeem Akhtar resides in Union Council Shaikh Jauhar, which was on a 35-minute drive from district office. As luck would have it, the weather was very pleasant and the lush green fields of Jhang made the journey enjoyable. Naeem lives in a comfortable house in village Shah Nazim. She is one of the most successful CRPs; her case is a great example of how the micro social enterprise model can ensure the sustainability of social marketing. Naeem has successfully turned her Business in a Box into a profitable micro-enterprise by including clothes and other highly demanded products in her box like make up products and jewelry. Last month alone, her profit was Rs 4000, she even

shared that she saved her profits from the last few months and treated herself to a pair of earrings. She was very satisfied with the project; she said that it has given her something to do and made her a new person.

“I find myself advocating for birth spacing and reproductive health in social gatherings and wherever I go, I feel that it is a great cause. Women are being encouraged by this project and I am earning very well. Before the project, the nearest medical store was 50 minutes away and hence there was no availability of family health medicines. This project has made them easily accessible in our village, I have observed a real change around here”, says Naeem. She wants to continue working on reproductive health even after the project ends. After hearing about her remarkable success, we chose her story to be published as a Success Story of the project.

The second CRP we met was from Union Council Chak 446. Mrs. Hamd Elahi came under our Low Profit CRP category and as the SO liked to call it “a reluctant one”. She was not very motivated for the BiB idea and decided to use the products in her own home, mostly because she needed them herself. She lived in a small mud settlement with 5-6 family members. She found it difficult to carry out her CRP responsibilities along with the burden of raising her children and taking care of the family members.

The next CRP we met was Mrs. Sofia Nasir in Basti Nikka Dultana in UC Sultanpur. She was making a 300-500 rupees profit per month and was reinvesting it for new items. She was selling many products at good profit and was very satisfied with project and with the introduction of BiB. She also claimed to continue working with BiB kit even after the project ends.



Interviewing Mrs. Sofia Nasir at her office

The next CRP was Ms. Nargis Batool from Basti Chamoochi Wali in UC Sheikh Jauhar. She has also made innovations in her BiB. She used her profit to reinvest the money in women clothes, children clothing, toys and shoes for kids, powder, lotion and some beauty products. She earns an 80-100 percent profit with her BiB and more often women from her neighborhood visit her. When inquired about the afterlife of the project, she was very encouraging and said that she will continue working even after the project ends.



Interview with Ms. Nargis Batool at her residence

The next CRP was Mrs. Naheed Akhtar from UC Kot Lakhnana, she was also very optimistic about the project afterlife. She makes a profit of Rs 400-500 each month, which she often reinvests into the BiB. She feels the project has given her a purpose and the women in her neighborhood respect her and look up to her ever since she started working as a CRP.



Interview with Mrs. Naheed Akhtar at her residence

The last CRP for the day was Mrs. Musarat Parveen, who comes under our Low Profit category. However her reasons for earning a low profit were entirely different, it was not because she was facing difficulties or was not interested in the work. She simply did not want to operate on a profit basis, and wanted to give those things without adding profit. She says, "I feel guilty for charging profit, so I buy and sell at the same price." She belonged to a family who is known for giving charity in the area. She said that she will continue doing so even after the project ends.

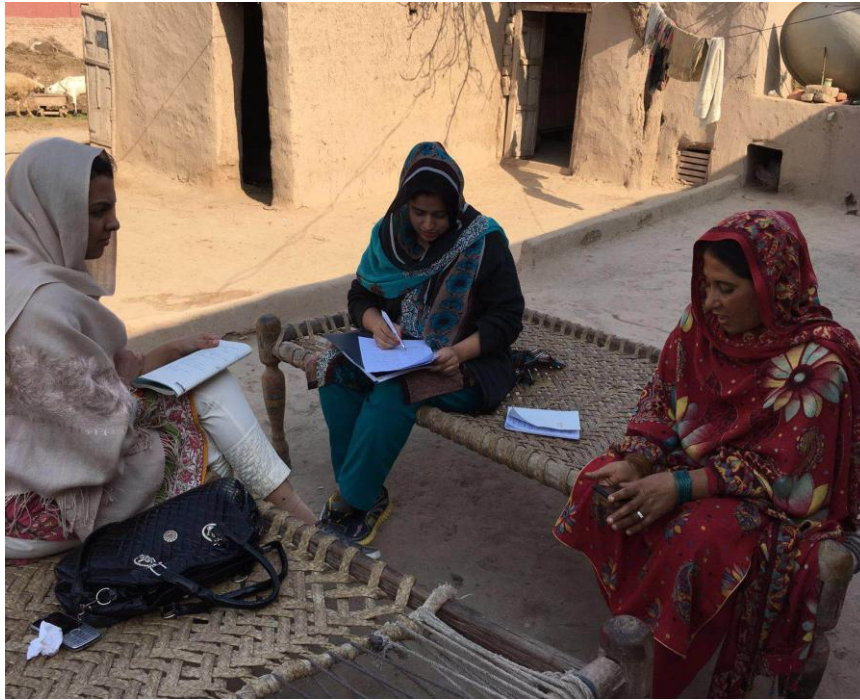
The first day on the field was very insightful as I experienced the lives of different women from low socio economic groups. Furthermore, I observed the process of conducting interviews and how important it was to inquire with empathy, to make sure the interviewee does not feel intimidated. In many instances, we had to let the CRPs know that this interview is simply for us to find out their viewpoint on BiB. In this regard, the interviewer has to be very careful with their tone and demeanor. Ms. Tahira ensured that all CRPs were comfortable, and inquired about the functioning of their respective VHCs as well as support from SOs.

After our last interview, we drove back to Faisalabad and reached our hotel around 7 pm.

Day 02: Visit to Kot Lakhnana and Shah Sadiq Nahang:

We reached the district office at 9 am, stopped there to conduct a meeting, checked the records and shared the findings of the previous day. Furthermore the team was given instructions to make and share Facebook updates regularly. Later we headed to visit our first CRP.

Mrs. Zaitoon Bibi resided in Union Council Kot Lakhnana and runs a small children store next to her house. She was reluctant to work as a CRP as she claimed the women do not buy from her, as it is much cheaper to get it from the nearby market. She stated that if there were a demand for door-to-door service, only then she would consider working with BiB.



Interview with Ms. Zaitoon Bibi at her residence

The next CRP we met was Mrs. Nadia Rasheed from Basti Walanwala in UC Shah Sadiq Nahang. She also pointed out that people in her neighborhood do not avail door-to-door service, as it is expensive and if she starts selling it at a cheaper rate it would not make her any profit. She says, “The Bag has received an unfavorable response in my neighborhood; this is because LHW gives the products for free hence it is useless.” She does not think that there will be a project afterlife. She was further asked about the presence of LHW in the area as that was supposed to be a non-LHW covered area. She responded that this used to be non-LHW covered area but nowadays government is being strict hence LHWs are given far more area to work on than they are supposed to. Nonetheless, the methods of FP are not properly available in the area. They visit households once after 3-4 months and only distribute contraceptives.



Interview with Mrs. Nadia Rasheed at her residence

The next CRP was Mrs. Rubina Naaz from Basti Wallanwala in UC Shah Sadiq Nahang. She is a teacher so we met her in the school she works for. It was a very small facility with about a 100 children. Some of them were having a class in the yard under the scorching sunbeam, the sight left me speechless. Mrs. Rubina is also one of the reluctant ones; she has not earned much profit from BiB. She claims it's because she doesn't have time, also the women find it expensive and do not believe in spending money on the hygiene related products. She was also skeptical about project afterlife.



Interview with Mrs. Rubina Naaz in the school

The last CRP we interviewed was Ms. Samina Kausar from Basti Rastabad in UC Shah Sadiq Nahang. She only earned Rs 350 profit from BiB. She said, “I haven’t been able to make sale as women expect it to be free and when I tell them it isn’t they do not buy it because they find it expensive.” She said that she will only continue working if women from her area start buying items from her and she makes a good profit.

After CRP interview, we visited the health mobile camp in Basti Rastabad. There were about 20 clients from neighboring areas who came to the camp in order to

seek advice and family planning services from project Lady Health Visitor Ms. Saima Mumtaz. Many of them were visiting her for the first time and had little or no awareness on reproductive health and birth spacing. She explained it to them softly and with patience, she told them all the benefits as well as disadvantages of each contraceptive method. She took the history of each client and informed her that which method is suitable for her. Then clients took several methods with their consent. The camp was well organized. The women were queued up outside, waiting patiently and socializing. It was great to see the women reaching out to the LHV; it’s an indicator of success of the entire project.

Key takeaways:

In this field visit, I got to experience the on ground work of RSPN. I saw that once the individual households are organized then they become more confident, they develop capacities and begin to undertake various activities that meet their need. In this case, I saw an opportunity to see the RSPN/PRSP fostered Village Health Committees and how they were supporting CRPs to undertake activities in the reproductive health sector. I saw that the project staff of PRSP was working hard to support VHCs and CRPs. I observed the important roles of various team members and the key tasks of a Monitoring Officer. Furthermore, I was reminded of the harsh realities that are easier to ignore when you live in the bigger metropolitan cities.

I am looking forward to our next visit in the field, which will be in the second week of March to Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan. I would like to thank RSPN team for organizing my visit to the field and PRSP district Jhang staff for making the field experience comfortable and an enlightening process.