



LSO Initiatives

LSO Bagh Rural Development Organisation

What are LSOs?

LSOs are union council-level organisations consisting of grassroots communities and are central to the RSPs' approach of Social Mobilisation. Social Mobilisation entails the organising of rural communities (with a special focus on women and the poorest) into their own organisations through a three-tiered structure. LSOs consist of Community Organisations (COs) (neighbourhood-level community groups) and Village Organisations (federations of COs at the village level). These two tiers federate to form the LSO at the third tier in order to carry out community-led development of the union council. LSOs are able to carry out development through self-help initiatives, linkages with NGOs, donors and the private sector as well as work with and hold local government accountable due to their advantage of numbers.

The LSO

District: Bagh, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)

Union Council: Bagh

Total Households in union council: 3,156

Organised Households: 1,375

Coverage: 44%

Number of Village Organisations (VOs): 9 female VOs

Number of Community Organisations (COs): 55 women's COs

Number of General Body Members: 55 women

Number of Executive Body Members: 17 women

The Initiatives

ESTABLISHMENT OF VOCATIONAL CENTRE

The LSO has established a vocational centre for its members in which they are taught sewing and stitching; something which had been demanded from all of their Community Organisations (See Picture Above). The vocational centre has 20 sewing machines on which an average of 15 students per batch learn how to sew. The LSO charges a nominal fee but

waives the fee in the case of the poorest girls. In addition to this, the LSO also has an I.T centre which consists of five computers.

AWARENESS-RAISING REGARDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN RIGHTS FORUM

The LSO specialises in delivering awareness-raising sessions on women's rights where the entire LSO Executive Body delivers the training in their own areas and Community Organisations. Two organisations have trained the LSO activists in this area namely Save the Future and Women and Children's Voice. Both are local NGOs but funded by Action Aid and Oxfam respectively. As a result of these sessions, several women have started to earn a living for themselves by joining the workforce as teachers, development workers and nurses.

One such example can be seen in the case of Salma Fatima, 25. Salma has five children; the eldest being eight years old while the youngest is nearly two. Following the devastating earthquake of 2005 which hit at the heart of AJ&K, Salma was compelled to work for an

NGO because her husband had experienced a mental breakdown due to the earthquake and the personal loss associated with it. Salma recalls how she was ridiculed by her relatives and neighbours for working in an NGO and coming back home late in the evenings. That changed however when the LSO started providing awareness sessions to the communities. Salma states that now even the neighbours' daughters work without any judgement. "I can see a clear positive change now; not only in my own home but also in the people around me".



Salma – Free from judgment

In addition to the awareness-raising sessions, the LSO is a part of a forum called "Aurat Ki Awaz" or Women's Voice. This forum consists of members from other local organisations as well; all with the purpose of ensuring that no woman suffers injustice. The LSO has ensured that Forum members' telephone numbers are provided to all Community Organisations' members who may want to call the Forum, should they be suffering any injustice. The Forum has saved numerous women from various situations, such as young women being forced to marry elderly men, crimes against

women such as throwing acid, snatching children from women, etc. In these cases, the Forum has stepped in by ensuring that the police are involved in the protection of the victim and in ensuring that justice is provided. For example, in the case of the young woman who was forced to marry a very elderly man; the woman managed to escape on the second day of her marriage and call the Forum. Immediately Forum members came to her assistance and took her in police protection. They then went to the local courts and managed to get an immediate annulment of her marriage. Now the community members and especially her family know that if they try to carry out a similar injustice on her again, there is a group of people who would and are able to intervene to stop such activities.



A class taking place in the LSO's Vocational Centre

"I can see a clear positive change now; not only in my own home but also in the people around me".