



CREATING RIPPLES FOR ACCESS TO EDUCATION



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CREATING RIPPLES
FOR **ACCESS** TO **EDUCATION**





PREFACE

The Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) is grateful to the staff of the “Community Activism for Improved Access to Quality Education and Local Accountability (Article 25-A)” project based in the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs). Specifically, these staff members were located at the district level in Bahawalpur, Rajanpur (National Rural Support Programme), Battagram, Kohistan (Sarhad Rural Support Programme), Jacobabad, Kashmore (Sindh Rural Support Organization). Their hard work and tireless efforts have allowed us to produce these ten evidentiary case studies that document the endeavors of rural communities to secure quality education for their children.

We also greatly appreciate the support that the Project Officers and management of the RSPs have provided to their staff members and RSPN.

We are also extremely grateful to Foundation Open Society Institute – Pakistan (FOSIP) for its continued financial and technical support during the implementation of the campaign; especially Ms. Nargis Sultana.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Community Organisation
CRP	Community Resource Person
DEO	District Education Officer
DPI	District Parent Ittehad
FOSIP	Foundation Open Society Institute Pakistan
LSO	Local Support Organisation
NRSP	National Rural Support Programme
RSPN	Rural Support Programme Network
SMC	School Management Committee
SRSO	Sindh Rural Support Organisation
SRSP	Sarhad Rural Support Programme
UC	Union Council
VO	Village Organisation







GLIMPSE OF CAMPAIGN

The “Community Activism for Improved Access to Quality Education and Local Accountability (Article 25-A)” was a year-long campaign funded by Foundation Open Society Institute – Pakistan (FOSIP), a project which sought to empower communities to ensure the social accountability of politicians and the Department of Education vis-à-vis improvements in school facilities and enrolment of children from poor and marginalized population. The project was implemented by RSPN in partnership with three Rural Support Programmes including the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), the Sarhad Support Programme (SRSP) and Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) in 48 Union Councils of six districts. The districts included Bahawalpur, Rajanpur, Jacobabad, Kashmore, Kohistan and Battagram. These districts were identified on the basis of their provincial and national education rankings along with other related issues faced by these marginalized and poor communities.

The project comprised three major sets of actions:

1) Empowering communities to raise voices to access quality education. For this purpose, RSPs fostered Local Support Organizations (LSOs) that played a crucial role in organizing mass campaigns at community level by sensitizing communities about Article 25-A and the state of education in their areas and by motivating them to demand their right to quality education through lobbying local stakeholders, specifically the district Education Department, politicians, journalists and religious

leaders. This ultimately played a key role in improving school conditions and enhancing enrolment.

2) Community-led accountability for improvement in school conditions and learning outcomes. In

order to assess the on-ground situation of education and to prioritize needs for ensuring access to quality education at UC level, data regarding the Out of

School children and basic facilities in schools were collected. Based on this data, a Charter Of Demand

(COD) was developed for each district. The COD was then regularly used by District Parent Ittehad (DPI)

members for advocacy during their engagement with politicians, district administration and the

Department of Education for improving school conditions. This mechanism allowed stakeholders to

be held accountable by the community members for meeting the needs of the schools. Furthermore, a

mass text messages campaign was run in order to highlight the enrolment and supply side issues

hindering quality education and to encourage parents/caretakers to enroll and retain their school

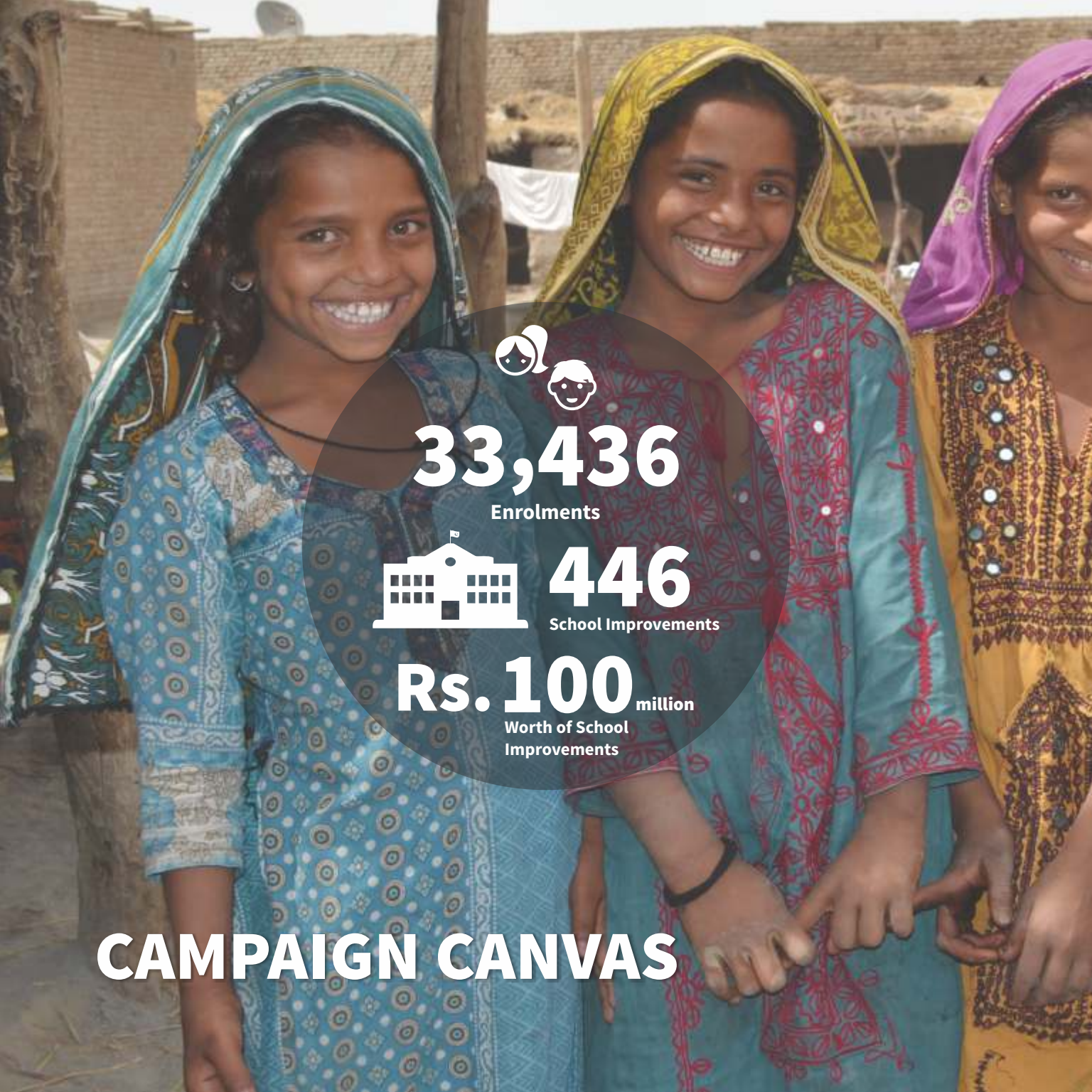
age children in school. **3) Community actions for enrolment of out of school children.** This was

achieved by launching enrolment campaigns at both District and Union Council level by DPI and LSOs. Mega

walks at UC and district levels were organized. Media (both electronic and print) supported and played a

key role in highlighting education related issues. Furthermore, efforts of DPIs and LSOs to address

education-related issues were highlighted.



33,436

Enrolments



446

School Improvements

Rs. 100 million

Worth of School
Improvements

CAMPAIGN CANVAS



06
Districts



48
Union Councils



48
LSOs



960
General Body Members
Male and Female Members



06
District Parent Ittehad



480
CRPs 50% Female Members



7,220
Community Awareness Sessions



6,570
School Management Committee Meetings



25,319
Text Messages

ABOUT RSPN

RSPN is the largest civil society network of Pakistan, representing 11 member RSPs working with a mission to reduce poverty and to improve the quality of life for the poor in Pakistan. Having been established in 2000, it serves as a strategic platform for RSPs with expertise in policy advocacy, grant management, networking, monitoring and evaluation, gender mainstreaming, renewable energy and social sector (health, education and sanitation) programming and implementation. The strength of RSPN lies in its vast outreach in the context of rural communities across Pakistan through the RSPs. With a current presence of RSPs in 138 out of 145 districts/agencies, RSPN and the RSPs

have adopted a three-tiered approach to Social Mobilisation. At the first tier, rural households are organised into Community Organisations (COs) at the neighborhood level. At the second tier, the COs are federated at the village level into Village Organisations (VOs). At the third tier, VOs federate at the Union Council (UC) level to form a Local Support Organisation (LSO). As of 2017, the RSPs have a presence in 4,255 rural Union Councils of Pakistan and have helped to mobilize over 7.2 million households into 425,588 COs, of which 50 percent are women's COs. A total of 1,631 LSOs at the union council level have been fostered, with some LSOs forming networks at Tehsil and district level.

Three-Tiered Social Mobilisation Approach

Local Support Organisation - LSO

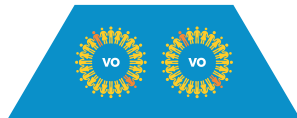
All VOs represented in LSO



1,631
(503 women only LSOs)

Village Organisation - VO

All COs represented in VO



22,617
(64% women only VOs)

Community Organisations - CO

All neighbourhood households (15 - 25) represented in CO



425,588
(50% women only COs)







ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

The success of a campaign or intervention can only be measured by its human impact and the difference made to the lives of the intended beneficiaries, and this compendium of case studies serves to illustrate how lives have been transformed for the better by this campaign. Beyond statistical reports and evaluations, these cases make tangible the experiences of the people whose lives and futures have been touched and transformed by this initiative in long-lasting ways. The case studies, which have been taken from all six districts of the project to provide a holistic picture of change in all communities covered by the campaign, highlight a number of benefits experienced by the community members. A recurring theme in these case studies is the massive increase in the number of out-of-school children being enrolled in school, while another key development is the transformation of school facilities, infrastructure and premises. Beyond these two clearly discernible transformations, these stories represent sagas of empowerment of the CRPs who have emerged as community leaders and mobilizers, of local residents who have found their 'voice' in demanding their rights and holding accountable public servants and of children who can dare to dream of a better future that is not circumscribed by their poverty and lack of resources. As the campaign for quality education has gained momentum, the regressive conservatism of communities and prejudice towards the education of marginalized members such as females too has begun to be superseded by a progressive outlook and a shared vision for a better and more just and prosperous future.



1 OPENING UP NEW HORIZON

In a village situated in Rajanpur, one of the remotest and most deprived districts of South Punjab, an amazing transformation is taking place as residents led by local social activist Amrozia Perveen join hands to prove that centuries-old neglect and deprivation of communities can be regressed when the determination and the tools to do so exist. A harbinger of progress to the far-flung village and Union Council

Hajipur of Tehsil Jampur, Amrozia Perveen exemplifies the power of grassroots change leadership and community mobilization. In this village located within Rajanpur, Amrozia Perveen has played a pivotal role in securing the establishment of two satellite schools in Hajipur, an underserved locale where no educational institutions existed before. As President of a LSO fostered by the NRSP, Amrozia had long been engaged

in improving the living conditions of fellow Hajipur residents when she was selected as member of DPI under the RSPN-led campaign.

Having engaged members of organised communities and the local people by making them aware of the importance of education and right to free education for their children, Amrozia worked with community members to identify locales without functioning schools in and around the villages of Basti Moajal and Farid Bux Mordani. This was followed by a meeting with the DEO Rajanpur during which Amrozia and fellow community members highlighted the lack of schools in the identified villages and raised the demand for new schools in the two villages. Learning from the DEO about the government's new initiative of Satellite Schools, wherein a primary school teacher and other facilities are provided by the government and the community is asked to provide space for accommodating the students, Amrozia and the community members were promised by the DEO that two satellite schools would be opened in the villages if suitable rooms or space were provided by the community for the school premises. Spurred by the prospect of empowering the village children by helping them to gain an education, Amrozia held a dialogue with local notables and convinced them to donate rooms for the schools. Subsequently, having met with the DEO who assured her that new satellite schools would be opened within next two days, Amrozia also spearheaded the process of preparing lists of out-of-school children that identified 35 children Basti Moajal and 65 in village Farid Bux Mordani as not attending school and passed on the list to the Education Department. Since then, two satellite schools have been established in both villages on a trial basis for one year. Primary school

teachers from schools with low enrolment have been transferred to satellite schools, and books and stationery items have also been provided by the government. The establishment of the schools has been welcomed by the villagers who take pride in piloting the government's new initiative for education in their villages. The villagers themselves take a keen interest in ensuring that the learners attend school and that essential facilities are made available to the students and teachers.

As we interview her, Amrozia's delight in the success of her efforts is evident. Expressing her happiness at the fact that almost all young girls in the village are attending the schools, Amrozia is quick to moderate appreciation of her work by the locals by highlighting the pivotal role of the RSPN and NRSP in supporting and motivating her. Not only does Amrozia share that she keeps an eye on the progress of the schools and encourages the locals to support the institutions, teachers and students, but she also reveals that she and other community members “have identified two more villages and are pushing the government to open two satellite schools there” expressing her hope that they will succeed soon in their endeavour. Their dreams and hopes are a strong sign of the wind of change the RSPN initiative has brought in its wake and a promise of empowerment through education. The story of Hajipur is a powerful one, sending out as it does a message of how communities themselves can act as powerful partners in government initiatives if they are furnished with knowledge and awareness of their rights by intermediaries like RSPN.



2 CARVING A NICHE

Behind the swift enrolment of 250 out-of-school children across nine villages in Thul Nau, Taluka Thul Union Council within four short months lies an

incredible story of one woman's quest to empower her community through the transformative power of education. In a village with rampant illiteracy,

Naheeda Khatoon had always stood out as an exception for her qualification as a matriculate not only enabled her to work as a private school teacher in the neighbouring village but also allowed her to serve as the unofficial reader of letters and text messages for non-literate female residents in the village. Residing in a small village of Badlo Bhatti in Union Council Thul Nau, Taluka Thul, District Jacobabad, along with her husband and four children, Naheeda had watched with dismay as everyday on her journey to and from work she observed school age children playing in the streets or helping out their mothers with their chores. Despite her wish to change this, it was difficult for Naheed to single-handedly persuade her fellow residents to enrol their children in government schools.

However, when an SRSO supported NGO Emaan nominated her to become a CRP with the RSPN-led education campaign, Naheeda seized the opportunity to mobilize her community by making members aware of their right to access educational opportunities offered by the government. Naheed recalls that she underwent highly effective community mobilization training to apprise local residents about their right to education as well as their responsibilities, commencing realization of campaign objectives as a CRP by holding orientation sessions with communities and presenting herself as a role model. She was able to persuade the residents to enrol their children by linking the issue of education with their own lack of literacy and dependence on others for basic everyday communication tasks. The village

residents were also motivated by the fact that they would not have to pay for books and stationery for their children, a major consideration for most families in the village due to their limited means and lack of money even for the basic necessities of life.

As a result of Naheeda's enthusiasm for education and efforts to mobilize the community, she secured parental consent to enrolling 250 students across the nine villages of the Thul Nau, Taluka Thul Union Council at government schools. For Naheeda, this has been a phenomenal achievement, as every child off the street and in school is a child not just rescued from a life of illiteracy and poverty but also a citizen of the country empowered to dream of a brighter future.

Naheeda's vision for the future is “see every child of my area getting education to at least matriculation level” as this is the basic qualification that can open doors to college education in the years ahead. On the way back from interviewing Naheeda, it is still a few hours till schools let out, and the sight of streets and homes free of idle and loitering children, which is a sign that they are hard at work learning in their classrooms, heralds grassroots change that will progress communities trapped for centuries in the vicious cycle of illiteracy and poverty. It brings home the significance of the work of organizations like RSPN that are striving to put education on the agenda of the stakeholders and to empower communities through their awareness-raising activities.



3 EDUCATION WITHOUT BARRIERS

The huge wild boar was a menacing sight, as it charged towards children who had been playing blissfully in the playground of Government Primary School, located one kilometre away from village

Chak 23-BC, tehsil and district Bahawalpur. “Bhago,bhago (run, run)” screamed the terrorized youngsters as they ran for the safety of their classrooms. The teachers and nearby villagers

rushed over to chase the boar away. The partially-walled school, which had a 200-meter breach on one side made it easy for wild boars to trespass the school grounds. For weeks afterwards, the children of the parents refused to send them to school, despite the pleas of the principal and the teachers. Even later on, despite the capacity of the school, only a limited number of children returned for their studies, thereby leading to a negative effect on their academic outcomes.

The situation would have remained unresolved had the issue not been identified by the NRSP's team when they carried out a survey under RSPN's education campaign. Under this initiative, Yasmeen Rafiq, a member of the LSO and DPI, held a meeting with the SMC and the Head Master Muhammad Adnan to find a way to take care of the issue. Previous efforts by the SMC to do so had proven futile as no funds were available to build the missing part of boundary wall. Spurred by the training she had received as part of the campaign, Yasmeen along with the SMC chalked out an innovative strategy to highlight the problem of the breached wall by drawing the attention of the media to the incident. Coverage of the incident and the issue of the large breach in the wall in national media proved mobilized the Education Department which took immediate notice of the infrastructural lapse. As Yasmeen recalls “our strategy of engaging the media worked and the Education Department immediately took notice of the issue and transferred two hundred thousand rupees within a week to construct the wall”.

Since the current school strength is 122, the DPI members and SMC approached the villagers and appealed to them to send their children to school as it was now completely safe for them to return for their studies without fear of further incursions by wild boars. With great relief and a sense of achievement, Ghulam Rasool, a member of the SMC, notes that “many have pledged to enrol and transfer their children to this school in the next session,” says Ghulam Rasool, a member of SMC.

This case is an excellent example of how communities which have been furnished with the awareness and training to resolve their own problems can mobilize key stakeholders to address outstanding issues. Most significantly, it brings home the importance of creating community ownership of initiatives to create sustainable change. Today, the residents of this small village have found their voice and learnt new ways and strategies to tackle outstanding challenges. As Yasmeen Rafique observes “without training by RSPN, we would never have thought of taking help from the media to get that wall built. Now on the whole we have developed a can do attitude to addressing issues rather than always relying on others to solve our problems for us”. “Thank you RSPN”, she says with a smile, and her words instantiate our hope that the sands of time have begun to finally shift, marking the way forward to a progressive Pakistan.

4 BUSTING MYTHS AND BREAKING TABOOS

Against the rugged and distant mountainous backdrop of district Kohistan that are home to some of the most deprived communities in Pakistan, the clarion call for female education has been raised by an unexpected champion. In the conservative society of Union Council Bangar of Tehsil Dassu, Mufti Saeed ur Rehman is almost the lone voice amongst the clerics of Dassu who has been bold and visionary enough to advocate the educating of girls. The fact that there is only one high school for girls and educating girls upto matriculation level is still considered a taboo in this society speaks volumes about its orthodox outlook. As a respected cleric and a man of education in a community where few individuals, let alone women, have been schooled or have received tertiary education, Mufti Saeed performs a vital role not just as a religious scholar but also the arbiter of public opinion. As the father of five daughters who have been enrolled at a private school, Mufti Saeed ur Rehman is keenly aware of the importance of investing in the schooling of girls, and in his Friday sermons, he has made it a practice to lay emphasis on the need to provide modern education to girls and boys alike.

Kohistan has been one of the worst performing districts in terms of facilities and educational standards, and it worries Mufti Saeed that the next generation will be left behind if they are prevented from seeking an education. His journey as the champion of education has been marked by resistance from orthodox members of the community. He reveals how he “faced resistance for talking about educating children, from my community and also those who do not want us to break out of ignorance”

and experienced a desperate need for institutional support. Becoming a member of the DPI as part of the SRSP that introduced a RSPN supported education campaign in Dassu district proved to be a turning point for Mufti Saeed to push forward the agenda for education. Participating in the campaign enabled him to raise his voice for the universal right to quality education, whereas preparatory training to act as a CRP helped to explode myths about such educational initiatives and prepared him to gain the knowledge and confidence to persuade people to send their children to school. With success in improving the enrolment rates for local children, Mufti Saeed has ambitious plans for advancing his agenda for promoting education in Dassu. He is now striving to get supervisory control of a government girls' primary school in Dassu, and he has also acquired a piece of land where he intends to establish a seminary that will be the first in the district to provide modern education to girls in addition to religious education.

There is great resolve in Mufti Saeed's voice he talks about breaking the taboos associated with educating girls, and he aims to be at the vanguard of change by ensuring that he helps all his daughters get a university education.

Educational reform is an incremental process, and it is clear from this story that RSPN has acted as a catalyzing force in creating a chain reaction, whereby the agenda for educational empowerment, ownership of the campaign and the tools to fulfil the established objectives have been placed firmly in the hands of local change agents and trendsetters.



5 CHANGE OF HEART

Emaan's eyes gleam with wonder as she bends over her reader and carefully sounds out the printed words on the page. Her grandfather Khalil-ur-Rehman, the 80-year-old family patriarch who presides over a joint family household that includes Emaan and her parents, looks on proudly as the little girl showcases her ability to read. It is hard to believe that only a short time ago, this bright young child, unschooled and non-literate, seemed destined to be another sad statistic amongst the millions of citizens in Pakistan without the ability to read or write. The poverty of her mud dwelling, a gift from the local landlord in village Pora of union council Koza Banda, district Battagram, is evidence of how education becomes a lesser priority in families with restricted incomes. Like Khalil-ur-Rehman, Emaan's father, Sawal Faqeer, a rock wall paint labourer in Battagram city who is the only breadwinner for the family found the thought of spending money on the children's education to be an additional responsibility that he could ill-afford.

Living in close proximity of the village's primary school, Emaan would quietly watch her age fellows going to school with books and bags, longing to join them but unable to express her wish to her father or grandfather. Compelled to spend time with her one-year old sister or to help her mother with household chores, Emaan saw her dream of attending school slipping away. It was only when RSPN started a campaign in district Battagram that the dreams of children like Emaan could find fulfillment. Under the campaign, trained CRPs, selected from within the communities reached out to fellow community

members about their right to a free education under the constitution, working hard to motivate them to enrol their school age children in the local schools. In Emaan's case, the CRP approached Emaan's grandfather, the family patriarch and decision maker, not only to apprise him of his rights and responsibilities regarding the education of his grandchildren but also to convince him to enrol his granddaughter in school. Becoming convinced, Khalil-ur-Rehman immediately paid a visit to the school where the principal not only enrolled Emaan but also engaged the LSO to provide her with books and uniform. Emaan shyly shares her happiness at finally attending school and looks towards her grandfather to speak for her. Although she has no idea what she wants to be when she grows up, she at least has the opportunity to learn new things and expand her exposure. Perhaps the impact of RSPN's work is most evident in Khalil-ur-Rehman's change of heart. He acknowledges that "I had never been to school myself, but now I realise it was just a matter of ignorance and fear of unknown that held us off. I'll advise my children to work hard and provide education to their offspring on top priority".

As the RSPN campaign is rolled out across Pakistan, it is evident that convincing one key person to change his or her outlook regarding education transforms the prospects of entire families, allowing education to take root and open up vistas of learning and empowerment for families trapped in poverty and ignorance.



6 THE FIRST **STEP** TOWARDS **CHANGE**

The tightening hold of poverty and deprivation experienced by generation after generation of 26-year-old Mekbaro's family due to their dependence on labouring work in the absence of education or schooling appeared to be the only legacy Mekbaro's young sons would receive from their father. A resident of Dassu in the district Kohistan, Mekbaro, a daily wage labourer without any schooling himself was resigned to letting his two young sons Zubair, 7, and Amer, 5 while away their time playing on the streets or on a small empty plot near the main road all day. He had little ambition for their future or the hope that they would become anything other than daily wage labourers like himself, believing instead that they would in years to come “contribute to family income and that sending them to school was just a waste of time and money”.

However, Mekbaro's outlook and the lives of his sons changed dramatically when RSPN supported education campaign in district Kohistan. Under this campaign, community members were identified and trained to act as CRPs in order to engage with the communities and sensitize them about the right to education. One of these CRPs also contacted Mekbaro and invited him to attend one of the awareness-raising sessions on the right to education. Realizing that Mekbaro needed further

persuasion to change his skepticism towards schooling, the CRP continued to visit Mekbaro so that he could reiterate the importance of educating his children and how educational qualifications could potentially bring more prosperity to the family by improving his children's career prospects. Mekbaro was encouraged when he was made aware that he had the right to educate his children without paying for their school fees, and he decided to enrol both his sons in the school, requesting the school principal to enrol his children. Mekbaro now cherishes his decision to attend CRP sessions and meetings with him. In a voice filled with hope, a far cry from his prior dejection and skepticism, Mekbaro reflects “I don't know what my children would become when they grow up. But I've hope that they will certainly do better than us”.

While it will take many years to roll back the effect of decades of apathy towards education in underdeveloped and conservative areas like Kohistan, the RSPN-led campaign has already proven the effectiveness of grassroots change and community ownership of reforms wherein the established credibility of community CRPs and their social networks can be used to leverage societal change.



7 BUILDING TOGETHER FOR FUTURE

Looking around the dismal and basic boundary-less compound that houses the Government Boys Primary School in village Lal Bux Buriro, it is hard to believe that this one brick room facility with a veranda serves no less than 227 children, including 76 girls and 160 boys. Its reputation for being one of the most neglected schools of taluka Thul, district Jacobabad appears well-justified.

Sanallah, Head Master and Chairman of the SMC, a body comprising teachers, parent and community members, explains that the unsafe environment has long been a key concern for the parents of the students and the teachers. Unluckily, as the government has not provided funds for a school building, the Headmaster has had to be forced to announce a day off during rain and bad weather to make sure that the children stay safe. The poor facilities have also led to the likelihood of a high dropout rate for students. The situation would surely have persisted had the CRPs trained by RSPN and SRSO as part of education campaign, not approached the SMC and sensitised members about the adverse impact of missing facilities on the educational outcomes of the children in the community. The CRPs worked hard to engage the SMC and motivated them to take self-help initiatives to improve the school facilities and premises. Due to the efforts of the CRPs, Sanallah and other community members contributed to the SMC fund and utilised the money for constructing

an earthen platform to accommodate more students in the yard, also planning to collaborate on building a room funded by their contributions and the funds they will receive for the SMC fund from the Education Department.

These actions represent a sea-change in the perceptions of the SMC members who have been wont to believe that it is the government's responsibility to upgrade the facilities. Under the impetus of the awareness-raising carried out by the CRPs, the SMC members have come to realize that while it is their right to demand upgradation of the facilities from the government, working on a self-help basis to improve the premises and transform it into a safe school space is directly linked to better educational outcomes for their children, which is a reward that they are not willing to forgo any longer. It is eye-opening to observe the many levels at which the RSPN-SRSO campaign is yielding impact. From persuading reluctant parents to enrol their children in schools to motivating key community members to invest in the education of their children, the work of the CRPs has been instrumental in generating grassroots change in perception and outlook of communities most at risk due to a greater number of out-of-school children.



8 THE POSSIBILITY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

For too long, the idea of educating females has been stonewalled by local customs inimical to female empowerment in conservative communities of Pakistan. Seven years ago, this was a key reason for the closure of the sole government primary school in the village of Sohrab Pathan in union council Akhero of taluka Kandhkot, district Kashmore. Due to local resistance and apathy over female education leading to falling enrolment rates, the school had to be shut down. There was little protest from the local community as residents generally disfavoured sending girls to school. Under these circumstances, SRSO chose the union council Akhero to start an education campaign with the support of RSPN. Existing member of the District Parent Ittehad, Sabiha Pathan, who was also chairperson of the union council's Local Support Organisation called Barkat was selected by SRSO and trained to reach out to the local residents and raise awareness of the importance of educating their children. Having successfully convinced community members to view educating their daughters as an investment, Sabiha raised the issue of the school that had been closed down. With growing awareness of the importance of educating their girls, community members began to call for the re-opening of the school. Garnering support from their elected representatives, Sabiha and fellow community members made their representation for the re-opening of the school before the Deputy Commissioner, securing a firm promise from the official for establishing the school once again. Shortly

after, the collective efforts of the CRP and the community members paid off as the Deputy Commissioner issued the order for making the school functional again, along with the immediate appointment of two teachers. As a next step, Sabiha went to door to door, around the village once again to make sure that the maximum number of girls would enrol in the school. Since the formal re-opening of the school on October 30, 2017, the institution has started providing education to 39 girls, and more students are expected to join in the next session.

This is an excellent example of successful community activism vis-à-vis the right to an education, from raising awareness amongst the village residents, motivating them to seek resolution of the issue of the school closure, engaging elected representatives, petitioning relevant officials to ensuring the enrolment of the girls in the new school. As Sabiha notes with pride in her voice “If I hadn't been trained about Article 25-A, none of the girls from my village would have been able to attend school today”. Her words are a strong reminder of how the work of RSPN and SRSO has begun to mobilize communities through awareness-raising and creating understanding of education as the basic right of every citizen as well as through providing the tools to translate this awareness into action.



9 A SEED RE-SOWN



It is 6.30 am, and a young girl is just finishing her breakfast as she pores over her English reader in preparation for her class test later that day. An ordinary

start for most children across the country, this sight is less than ordinary in the backward rural community of Battagram where education is a luxury within the reach

of only the fortunate few. Until recently, thirteen-year old Khush Niaz' day began not with preparation for school but with her father's exhortation to "hurry up bachi, we have to go to the fields for work". As she accompanied her father Zarin Shan, a small struggling tenant farmer in the village Shungar located in the Union council Batta Mori of Battagram, on the daily trek to the fields, Khush Niaz thought longingly of the school she had dropped out of the previous year. Unable to afford her school fees and needing help with farm work, Zarin Shah had been compelled to turn to Khush Niaz and his seven other children for assistance with fieldwork and taking care of the livestock. Khush Niaz' day was spent in working the land owned by local landlord and helping her father with different chores, from picking ripe fruit and vegetables and farming the land to taking care of the farm animals. The course of her future seemed set for now, with the daily toil of working in the fields or attending to the livestock likely to be succeeded by early marriage for Khush Niaz as was the custom in her society. Yet despite the interruption of her studies and knowing that her father was reliant upon her help with farm work, Khush Niaz secretly dreamt of a day when she could return to her books, for the passion for education lit by her early years of schooling could not be extinguished so easily. Little did Khush Niaz know but her dreams to attend school were about to be transformed into reality.

Managed by RSPN and SRSP, the education campaign had been rolled out in Battagram, and under this initiative, a CRP approached Zarin Shah and his wife and persuaded them to attend one of the awareness raising sessions on the children's right to free education. Attending these CRP sessions, they learnt about the government's responsibility to provide free education along with books and stationery to children. They also learnt that it was now their moral and legal obligation to send their school age children to school.

Above all, the CRP sessions brought home to the attending parents the message that educating their children was the only pathway out of the poverty their families had been mired in for successive generations. Persuaded by the force of this message, Zarin Shah agreed to send Khush Niaz to school again. The CRP then helped her get enrolled in the Government Girls Primary School of Iqbalabad, a village in the same union council. Enrolled in 4th grade, Khush Niaz has turned out to be a brilliant student who takes a keen interest in her studies and also loves to play on the playground swings during recess. She still helps her parents with field work after school hours, delightedly sharing stories from her school and the new things she is learning with her parents and siblings. Her carefree laughter symbolises a childhood restored and the freedom to dream of a better future, a future where a girl like Khushi Niaz can hope to train as a teacher or to become a doctor. Inspired by the blossoming of Khush Niaz' personality and her growing knowledge, Zarin Shah has begun to think seriously about enrolling his other school age children at school as well.

The transformation of this one young girl's life is nothing less than the transformation of a family and a community, contributing not only to the alleviation of poverty through education but also to the creation of a progressive nation emancipated from the shackles of conservatism, bigotry and prejudice. Looking at Khush Niaz, it is difficult not to be impressed by the power of grassroots change and community ownership of members' self-transformation and empowerment through education. From little ideas comes forth great change, and as we depart Shungar, passing through the lush green terrain, it is heartening to think of how bit by bit, a new Pakistan is taking shape under the aegis of initiatives such as those led by community organizations like RSPN.



10 TRANSFORMING DREAMS INTO REALITY

Not so long ago, education was a distant dream for ten-year old Shehla, born to a family mired in poverty and accustomed to a life of deprivation. Living with her parents and two younger sisters and two brothers in a rundown mud house situated in Colony 24, Union Council 24-BC, Tehsil and District Bahawalpur, Shehla never thought that she would ever be able to attend school like peer sher whose parents could afford to

educate them. The odds seemed stacked up against this bright young girl, for the income brought in by her mother, Ansar Bibi, a 33-year-old housemaid, and father Muhammad Savzal, 31, a day labourer, both unschooled themselves was barely enough to allow them to buy the basic necessities of life. However, Shehla's life underwent a dramatic change when a CRP under RSPN's education campaign approached

her mother and persuaded her to attend a session highlighting the importance of education, especially for girls. Ansar Bibi recalls how she had lived a nomadic existence with her parents selling locally made throws while moving from one city to another. Like her husband, Ansar Bibi had not received schooling, and with great difficulty, after getting married they had managed to settle down in Colony 24, hoping for some economic stability by putting down roots in one place. Still sending their children to school and educating them was something they did not dare to dream of, believing that money spent on schooling would only burden the family and lessen the prospect of the children contributing to the family income in time to come. Shehla helped her mother with household chores and with looking after her siblings while Ansar Bibi worked as a maid at the landlord's house. The cycle of poverty and illiteracy looked set to continue under these circumstances.

It was only when a CRP under education campaign approached Ansar Bibi and persuaded her to attend the awareness raising session of the children's right to a free education that Shehla's future took a different direction. Ansari Bibi recalls how she “attended a session in which [the CRP] told us about the government's responsibility to provide free education to every child with free books and stationery. She also told me that given free education facilities by the government, it was parent's responsibility to make sure their children are enrolled”. Not only did this session provide Ansar Bibi with awareness of her children's right to a free education but it also helped her to realize her parental obligation to ensure that her children received this education. Gaining her husband's consent to having Shehla enrolled at school, Ansar Bibi approached the CRP for assistance in

securing admission for Shehla and with her help, Shehla was enrolled in the Government Primary School of Chak 23-BC, a village next to Colony 24. Ansar Bibi has also started making plans to send Shehla's younger brother Madni, 7 to the same school, and she shares that in a few days, Madni too will join Shehla at her school.

With obvious pride, Ansar Bibi turns and points to Shehla's school bag placed securely on a shelf behind her and observes “I feel privileged that my daughter now goes to school, a right denied to us year ago. Hers is the only school bag in our family. Her younger brother is so thrilled that he waits for her to return, takes her bag and pretends that he is going to school now. I love it when he plays with her bag and books. She tells them about her classroom activities and teaches them what she learns every day. I wish she and her siblings get higher education and do well in life”. The hope and optimism in her voice are powerful reminders of how the Community Activism project is changing lives for the better. Shehla too is very excited about her studies. “I feel happy when I give correct answer to my teachers and they appreciate and encourage me. I will study hard and become a teacher one day,” says Shehla, and listening to her dreams and ambitions gives hope that the cycle of poverty and social inequity can be interrupted through the catalysing power of education, thereby transforming not just single communities like the one in which Shehla lives but also wider society as the right to education is actively implemented across the country.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES ...

The cases presented in this report serve to evidence the resounding success of the community-led advocacy and accountability campaign implemented under the aegis of RSPN and its RSPs (NRSP, SRSP and SRSO), clearly highlighting the importance of empowering people to demand their Right to Education (Article 25-A). Side by side, these success stories index the important role key stakeholders can play in powering educational reform under the momentum of pressure exerted by informed communities, which are able to hold them accountable for their actions. To a large extent, this campaign has been implemented exclusively through the network of grassroots organizations in the form of LSOs and DPIs, and they have effectively demonstrated that they are capable of using evidence-based advocacy to bring about concrete change. Two key pieces of evidence of proving the effectiveness of the campaign include the impressive number of out-of-school children who have now been enrolled in school and the substantial improvements in the basic facilities and infrastructure of schools. The total cost of school improvements undertaken is estimated to be more than Rs. 10 million, and this investment has been leveraged by community members lobbying resources from various stakeholders.

Although Article 25-A extends assurance of free education for all children between the ages of 5-16 years, most parents in rural areas tend not to be aware of this key constitutional guarantee of their rights, or

even familiar with the idea that education is a basic right. Initially, when community members were approached to participate in the campaign, a great deal of skepticism was observed over the efforts of RSPN and its partners, as most of the residents in the local communities simply saw this as another futile initiative being imposed upon them. Lack of awareness of their rights and lack of knowledge of the mechanisms to ensure that these rights were secured meant that community members were unable to conceive of the potential value of this campaign. As the campaign was rolled out and CRPs were trained and began to lobby key stakeholders and officeholders for implementing educational reforms, the skepticism of community members began to dissolve, and for the first time they discovered that they had a voice and the ability to demand change from public servants and politicians who had earlier paid little heed to the needs of local communities. Hence, through this intervention, we have not only empowered communities but we have also provided them with a sound mechanism for demanding their rights. Active advocacy through LSOs, DPIs and Media has helped in highlighting the local level issues, which has further increased pressure on the stakeholders to resolve these issues efficiently.

The key lesson that this campaign has furnished for the communities, stakeholders at the district level, RSPN and its partner RSPs is that when communities play a leading role in seeking to resolve their issues through a proper mechanism, positive change ensues

despite a lack of resources. Furthermore, this change becomes sustainable when awareness-raising and community empowerment are combined. Hence, to make quality education in rural areas a reality rather than a dream, it is vital to ensure that the community members themselves are equipped to identify issues and to mobilize the right stakeholders and resources

to bring about positive change. We strongly believe that partnering with communities and equipping them to author their own change and to design their solutions has opened up the scope for local residents to sustain the momentum of self-transformation through autonomous action, with or without the presence of external partner organizations.



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