



Rural Support Programmes Network



“We don’t want to live like our grandmothers”

**Short Note on the Visit to the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO)
Fostered Community Institutions fostered under the Sindh Union Council and
Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme (SUCCESS)
(February 22-27, 2021)**

**Islamabad
March 05, 2021**

This was a long overdue field visit to the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO). After discussions with the Chief Executive Officer SRSO, Programme Manager SRSO, and District Manager Qambar Shahdadkot, a plan for the visit was made. The plan included participation in the Taluka Qambar Joint Development Committee meeting, joining the field visit of the Commissioner Larkana, attending the Community Women Activists Dialogue, attending meetings with Village Organisations and Local Support Organisations, and see various activities undertaken by the Community Institutions fostered under the European Union supported Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme (SUCCESS), the EU supported Programme for Improved Nutrition in Sindh (PINS), UKAid/PSI supported DAFPAK family planning project and DANIDA supported Empowering Pakistani Women. It was also important that in the whole process, to continuously interact with SRSO's field staff members.

February 22/23, 2021:

On February 22, 2021, the flight to Sukkur was cancelled, therefore I had to drive. After a night stay in Toba Tek Singh, reached Qambar town at 1.30 pm on February 23, 2021. The Taluka Joint Development Committee (JDC), fostered under the SUCCESS Programme, meeting was in process and moving towards conclusion. The Assistant Commissioner (AC) was chairing the meeting. Other participants included representative from the government line departments, including Education and Health Departments, representatives from four LSOs and SRSO staff. The LSO leaders were sharing details of their work, including receiving support from the Education Department for school repairs and absent teachers. Women leaders were speaking with great confidence, and had all relevant information handy. The Health Department representative spoke about his Department's links with the organised communities and he particularly mentioned this linkage with respect to the polio eradication and routine immunization campaigns.

Before the wrap up of the meeting, I was asked to say few words. I mentioned that SRSO was set up by the Government of Sindh (GoS) in 2003 with a mandate to mobilise and organise rural people in to a network of community institutions, i.e. Community Organisations (CO) at the mohalla/ settlement level, federation of COs at the village level into Village Organisations (VOs), and the further federation of VOs at the Union Council level into Local Support Organisations (LSOs), to form the social pillar. Under an agreement between GoS and the European Union, SRSO is implementing the SUCCESS Programme in Larkana and Qambar Shahdadkot districts to foster the social pillar. Once the social pillar is in place, then it can strive to foster linkages with the GoS line departments to access goods and services. In order to facilitate this process, GoS agreed to setting up of JDCs at the Taluka and District levels. Giving the examples of the polio eradication and routine immunization that the Health Department representative had mentioned earlier, I said that that other Departments can also use the social pillar to extend their outreach to communities and also to meet their own targets for service deliver. At the end, I mentioned that both Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan and Mr Shoaib Sultan Khan, the founders of the RSP movement, had worked as civil servants for long periods and they have always told RSP staff members that without the support of government, rural poverty cannot be fully addressed. Therefore, it is very heartening to see that JDCs at the Taluka and District levels are playing a key catalytic role in encouraging and supporting citizen-state engagement.

Before the closure of the meeting, AC asked about the regularity of meetings by Community Institutions (CIs) and the management of the Community Investment Fund (CIF). One LSO representative replied that the CO level meetings are regularly held every fortnight, while the VO and LSO meetings are held on monthly basis. However, need based meetings are also held. With respect to CIF, another LSO representative said that each LSO has a Community Book Keeper who supports to ensure that all financial records are kept and regularly updated. In addition, SRSO staff also visit LSOs to check CIF records. RSPN staff from Islamabad also visit LSOs and check CIF records. All this ensures that the records are properly kept and regularly updated. With this, the meeting was concluded.

Mr. Asad Ali, District Manager Qambar Shahdadkot, then led the team to Village Organisation Mumtazabad. VO members welcomed the RSPN/SRSO team and first took them to the Farmer Field School (FFS) that has been set up in VO Mumtazabad, under the EU funded Programme for Improved Nutrition in Sindh (PINS ER3 Nutrition Sensitive Component). The Agricultural Entrepreneur-AE (FFS own/manager) said that during the winter (*rabi*) season his vegetable production had been good, and he also shared surplus vegetables with some needy households. During the 2020 COVID lockdown, he regularly distributed to the needy households identified by VO. SRSO facilitated AE to access one mini drip system from the Irrigation Department's Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP). He is now looking forward to planting vegetables for the summer (*khariif*) season. When asked about the utility of FFS for the community, AE responded that during the planting and growing season he conducted awareness raising sessions for community members. With the support from SRSO, he has encouraged other households to set up small kitchen gardens and grow vegetables.

At the meeting with the VO members, an open question and answer format was used. Upon asking the number of households and the poverty status, VO President Bashiran mentioned that there are 148 households in the village and they fall in four Poverty Scorecard bands:

Number of households in poverty scorecard bands	
PSC Band	Number of households
0-11	15
12-18	48
19-23	21
24-100	17
Total	148

Some households from 24-100 PSC band were not organised. VO leaders agreed to make some more efforts to include them as they were their neighbours and relatives, and also benefiting from CI's work, e.g. the link road.

When asked about vegetable growing, members said that they had visited FFS and later seeds were provided by SRSO for seven types of vegetables to community members. These were planted at household level. As a result of this, vegetable access and consumption has improved. Home produced vegetables are not only fresh, but also taste better. One woman said that she harvested about 30/40 kg vegetables during the rabi season. With respect to the Moringa tree planting, VO members said that the plants had been planted only recently. They have been informed about the

nutritious value of Moringa leaves as a key dietary supplement. They look forward to consuming Moringa leaves.

When asked about milch goat distribution by SRSO, one mother with a young child said that she had received two goats. Upon asking, VO members said they themselves had identified her as she was not only poor but also had a young child who was not so healthy. The woman said that she received Rs 29,000 to buy two goats. Every one present agreed that after the purchase of goats and consumption of milk, the health of child has improved and his wellbeing is now physically visible. She now has four goats, including two kids.

Fifteen micro health insurance cards were distributed to the households meeting the criteria. Out of these three received benefits from MHI and the hospitalisation was due to pregnancy/birth related issues. The beneficiaries were quite pleased as without MHI they would have faced great difficulties in mobilising resources for hospitalisation.

When asked if any technical vocational skills training (TVST), one woman said that her daughter has completed a computer learning course. When asked as to what her daughter is doing now, the woman said that now she wants to open a small computer centre to teach other students about the use of computers, as well as to provide other ancillary services, e.g. printing. This will start as soon as some finances can be arranged.

When asked if anyone has received income generating grant (IGG), several women raised hands. One woman said that she received Rs 18,000. By selling their donkey cart and adding some more amount, the family purchased a motorcycle three-wheel vehicle (*rickshaw*). They were fortunate as they were able to sign an agreement with SZABIST to transport TVST female trainees to a centre at another location. Over a period of three-four months, the family earned Rs. 70,000. Now the rickshaw takes village girls to schools in nearby small Warah town. The VO build link road under the Community Physical Infrastructure (CPI) has greatly facilitated access to services available in Warah town, including access to education. Seeing the success of this rickshaw, seven other families have also purchased rickshaws. Now with improved access to Warah town as a result of the link road and rickshaws, more girls are attending schools in Warah town than before.

Under the UKAid/PSI supported of RSPN/SRSO DAFPAK project, 40% of the Married Women of Reproductive Age were receiving family planning/birth spacing services. They were aware of the benefits, especially for the health of mother and child. One woman who is working as Community Resource Person under DAFPAK and also acting as Guddi Baji under the Empowering Pakistani Women (EPW) project, making sales during house to house visit said that during the last cycle she earned a profit of Rs. 2,500.

I thanked the VO leaders and members and reiterated the importance of CI meetings at all levels, regular savings, keeping proper records and fostering linkages with other organisations, including government line departments.

Night stay at Larkana.

February 24, 2021:

After a request from SRSO, the Commissioner Larkana¹ had kindly agreed to visit Village Organisation Miandad Brohi in district Larkana. Upon reaching VO Miandad Brohi, the Commissioner inaugurated a CPI link road that connected the village with the main road. While impressed with the quality of the link road, the Commissioner asked about the maintenance system. VO President responded that the full responsibility lies with the community and that 3% maintenance fund has been generated and deposited in bank. Mr. Jamal Shoro, Programme Manager SUCCESS, mentioned that hundreds of this CPI schemes are being constructed in Larkana Division with the support of the European Union. After the inauguration, the Commissioner joined the Community Women Activists Dialogue. Representatives from various local LSOs were present. After welcoming the Commissioner, LSO representatives spoke about their work, achievements and challenges. All speakers highlighted that they are now playing a more active role within the household and the community. In particular, they highlighted their CIF and how through CIF hundreds of women have built up economic assets and set up small enterprises. In his remarks, the Commissioner appreciated the support of the European Union to Sindh's rural people. He also showed keen interest in the work presented by the women. The Commissioner said that the range of activities undertaken by the women led LSOs clearly shows that the women of rural Sindh have a great potential. For long time this was suppressed; now it is being harnessed for the benefit of families, communities and the wider society. He mentioned that the network of CIs has to remain transparent, especially in their financial matters. They have to ensure that there is full participation by all segments of the community and that these CIs are not hijacked by the few. Strong and sustainable CIs would attract other resources, including from GoS. However, while waiting for outside resources, CIs have to keep on practicing the concept of self-help, mobilise existing resources and better use of resources provided by the European Union under the SUCCESS Programme. He also distributed cheques to beneficiaries to purchase milch goats under the PINS Programme. The Commissioner visited stalls set up by local Business Development Groups (BDGs). Before his departure, the Commissioner was presented with an Ajrak.

After the Commissioner's departure, I was asked to say few words to the leaders of the LSOs gathered for the event. I began by giving a brief history of the RSPs movement in Pakistan, and highlighted the basic logic of the social mobilisation approach being followed and first espoused by Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, and then scale up by Mr Shoaib Sultan Khan across Pakistan including the four provinces, AJK and GB. In Sindh, GoS took the initiative to scale up the RSP approach, initially thought the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme, then in partnership with the European Union for the SUCCESS Programme and currently with the People's Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP). Today, this approach is taken to 20 districts of Sindh, and that is why the eyes of the whole country are upon the women of rural Sindh. From what I have read before, from what I saw yesterday and what I heard today, the rural women of Sindh are doing wonderful work.

¹ He is also ex-officio Board Member of SRSO.

Essentially, women have improved access to, control over and benefits from the development process. A tremendous beginning has been made, much more has to be done. However, more can only be hoped for if the CIs continue to remain transparent and become sustainable. In order to contribute to the CI sustainability GoS/EU have provided CIF to LSOs. Now the challenge for LSOs is to ensure that CIF is productively utilised and that it grows; it must not be consumed and allowed to evaporate. Money is something that brings people together, if not properly and transparently managed it can destroy any form of unity and hope for improvement. Therefore, the first challenge is to ensure that LSOs and their CIFs are transparently managed.

I mentioned that SRSO has very limited resources and with that what is available it has done social mobilisation and strengthening of CIs. Since huge resources are available with the GoS line departments, it is essential that CIs, especially LSOs, make efforts to link up with line departments to access goods and services; indeed, one of the key objectives of the social pillar is to foster partnerships with the administrative pillar. The process of developing linkages with government has begun, but still a long way to go before these are formalised through policies, budgets and changes in rules of business. Nonetheless, LSOs must carry on making efforts to foster linkages, and when linkages are made then to highlight the work of the line departments, to create more ownership within the departments.

Already there are hundreds of examples in Sindh where LSOs and GoS departments have linked up, e.g. in forestry plantation, in school repairs, reducing teacher absenteeism, in school enrolment, in polio eradication, in routine immunization, etc. In 2020, during the COVID lock down, CIs played a key role in supporting their poor needy members through local philanthropy. Many LSOs became members of Official Relief Committees. This is a recognition of your value. This must be built upon now and in the future. However, for this to happen, CIs must remain active. At the CO level, they must continue to meet and increase savings, at VO levels continue to address broader issues at village level, and at the LSO level practice proper management of CIF and try to increase it, and foster linkages with GoS line departments and other sources of support, e.g. NGOs, private sector, philanthropists, university students, etc. CIs are women led, but these institutions are for all the household members. COs/VOs/LSOs have found ways to locally engage female and male adolescents, youth and university students, local professionals (e.g. teachers, LHWs, etc.), shopkeepers, traders, tradesmen, etc., middle and large farmers and livestock keepers, etc. LSO must not become a well! It must become an ocean!

I highlighted that the Institutional Maturity Index (IMI) survey is underway in all SUCCESS districts. All LSOs must track their IMI scores over the past three years, and take actions to remove any weaknesses highlighted through the IMI survey. One key weakness that many LSOs have relates to record keeping. In order to improve record keeping, LSOs may consider engaging educated youth as volunteers; youth engagement is important for the sustainability of LSOs and also to make them more inclusive. In Ghotki and Khairpur districts, SRSO is supporting LSOs to set up Adolescent Committees to engage with the local youth.

I concluded my remarks by saying the success of the Sindh LSOs will lead to opening of pathways for socio-economic empowerment of women in other provinces. SRSO and RSPN will do all they

can to support you, however, it must be recognised that the onus now clearly lies with you. Your success will be Pakistan's success!

After the Community Women Activists Dialogue, RSPN/SRSO team left for a meeting with VO Arzi Markhand. VO has six-member COs. All CO/VO leaders have attended Community Management Skills (CMT) and Leadership Management Skills (LMS) trainings. Village has 176 households and 153 households have been organised. PSC band wise organised households is given below:

Households by PSC bands			
PSC band	Total households	Organised households	% organised households
0-11	33	33	100
12-23	89	88	99
24-100	54	32	59
Total	176	153	87

All member households have prepared micro investment plans (MIPs). These MIPs fall in three categories: agricultural inputs (91 hh/60%hh), livestock (45 hh/29%hh) and micro enterprise (17 hh/11%). For micro enterprises, various options were identified: small grocery shops, cooking wares for rent, rice/lentil stall, potato chips stall, etc. Members seemed aware that only a diversified range of micro enterprises bodes well; crowding in one sub-sector is a sure sign of failure.

VO was granted Rs. 671,580 as CIF revolving fund. IGG fund was Rs. 252,000. After consulting all, VO decided to use IGG as a revolving fund; in fact, increasing their CIF revolving fund by Rs. 252,000. Loans sizes vary, from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000. A uniform process fee of Rs 500 is charged and deducted from the amount disbursed to the beneficiary. Thirty-three community members have availed the MHI card. Twenty-five women have undergone various TVST trainings, including in block printing. Six lead hand pumps have been installed as CPI, with each pump benefiting 10 households. Access to water has improved and burden on girls and women reduced.

Other VO initiatives include planting 510 trees, accessing NADRA van to benefit 172 adults to get CNIC, 138 children enrolled in schools, seven poor households provided with food ration during the COVID lock down, 19 marriage certificates prepared, and seven birth certificates prepared. These initiatives are the result of awareness sessions conducted by CRPs using the Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT). Through developing linkages with the Union Council Chairman and Vice Chairman, as well as with the Member of the Provincial Assembly, brick pavement scheme has been completed in the village. VO has also celebrated various national and international days, e.g. Sindh Cultural Day, International Handwashing Day, etc.

A number of community members have been trained in various fields. WASH, poultry, climate smart agriculture, vegetable growing, etc. Fourteen small farmers were supported to use drill machine for wheat planting. See their success, another 25 farmers adopted the same method to plant wheat. Two poor families with pregnant/lactating mothers were given milch goats. Five

women were given poultry inputs under the ‘Poultry Entrepreneur’ intervention. One household was given poultry cage. One Farmer Field School has been set up. Fifty-four households were given vegetable seeds for setting up small kitchen gardens. A small Moringa tree nursery has been set up. As plants grow, they will be distributed to community members.

Under PINS ER2 project, the local Community Health Worker (CHW) supported the setting up of Mothers Support Groups as well as Fathers Support Groups. CHW also screened children and 19 severely acute malnourished (SAM) children were identified and all have been enrolled at the local PPHI Nutrition Stabilisation Centre and received treatment. CHW also undertakes visits to households and advises on medical check-ups, TT vaccination, cleanliness and on proper diet.

Under the DAFAK project, 256 married couples of reproductive age were identified and after due diligence and motivation, 168 couples (65%) are practicing family planning/birth spacing. A Guddi Baji under the EPW project in her last business cycle worth Rs 18,000, earned Rs 19,800; a net profit of Rs. 1,800. She was looking forward to expanding her micro enterprise and said that during the household visits she gets requests for items not currently in her basket. This way she hopes to expand her inventory and earn more profits.

With regards to future plans, VO leaders said that they are in contact with the Sindh Education Foundation and seeking their support to improve local girls’ education. VO would like all adults to have CNICs, for all households to plant more trees, take part in keeping the village clean, with support from local government improve the village drainage system and construct culverts, support more local enterprises and businesses through CIF, etc. The current savings of six COs is Rs 30,000. Efforts will be made to not only increase this saving but also to ensure its proper management, reporting and utilisation. CO meetings are very important and in these meetings members save as per their capacity; some save Rs 10, some Rs 20 and some Rs 50.

The multi-dimensional role and functions of VO bodes well for its future. The range of activities have created ownership not only amongst the member COs, but also broadly in the local community. VO leaders were confident that they can not only increase their CIF but also to use it as a means for the sustainability of CIs in the village.

Next visit was to LSO Aitabar in union council of the same name. LSO was formed on December 30, 2017. Now LSO has 11 VOs and 82 COs as members. There are 20 members in the General Body and five members in the Executive Body. Total and organised households, within PSC bands, are shown below.

Total and Organised Households in LSO Aitabar			
PSC Band	Total Households	Organised Households	%Households Organised
0-11 PSC	625	610	97
12-18 PSC	627	450	72
19-23 PSC	553	485	88
24-100 PSC	802	231	29
Total	2,607	1,776	68

I mentioned that while it is very good that 85% of the 0-23 PSC category households have been mobilised, there are still about 800 (about one-third of the total) households un-mobilised and not organised into COs across the Union Council. All CIs under the LSO umbrella must make an effort to increase household coverage. With improved coverage, the strength of CIs will also grow, and many of the new members will also be able to contribute to the development of local communities. All present agreed to this suggestion and hope that during my next visit I will witness improved ratio of household coverage.

All organised households have been supported by CIs to prepare their MIPs. These 1,776 MIPs fall in three economic sectors: agriculture (452 hh/25% hh), livestock (1,232 hh/70% hh) and small enterprises (92 hh/5% hh). Under agriculture, the potential identified was for inputs to boost productivity. Under livestock, the potential identified was for purchase and rearing of small ruminants. Under small enterprise, the potential activities identified included small shops, frying and selling chickpea flour savouries, setting up a stall to sell ice cream, setting up a tea stall, setting up of an ice selling stall/point (for summers), selling home cooked food (*haleem*), etc. Many of these identified economic activities have been support through IGG and CIF.

SRSO has made significant contribution to the human capital development in the Union Council. LSO now has a large cadre of trained members: 167 members have participated in CMST training, 28 members have participated in LMST training, 12 members are working as CRPs with LSO, eight members have are working as Community Book Keepers (CKK), 18 members are working as WASH CRPs, 18 members are working as Agricultural Entrepreneurs, 45 members trained as Poultry Entrepreneurs, five members trained as masons for construction of low cost toilets, 73 small farmer trained in climate smart agriculture, 972 members trained in kitchen gardening, and 15 members working as Community Health Workers (CHWs). This human capital, I told LSOs, bodes well for its sustainability, provided LSO follows up with them on a regular basis to ensure that they are following their terms of partnership to serve the community members.

When asked about the benefits of SRSO's investment in social mobilisation and human capital development, LSO members responded that before the arrival of SRSO's team the community as a whole and women in particular, were not aware about many things. There was lack of understanding between members of households, between households and within communities. Women lived the lives of their mothers and grandmothers. They are hardly ever consulted in any decision making, be it at the household or community level. They were busy with their heavy daily chores, including cooking, cleaning, fetching water, childcare and care of the elderly. Their movement was very limited. A male member would accompany any move outside the home (apart from fetching water). One elderly woman said that in many ways community women were invisible.

After SRSO's came, the process of dialogues with communities began. Initially there was great hesitancy about allowing SRSO's team to meet with community women. However, when the first few COs were set up, the male members relented and allowed more COs to be fostered. At all meetings with SRSO staff, community men would be present and keep an eye on proceedings. The real breakthrough came when the CO leaders started to attend CMST trainings. There they met with other CO leaders and slowly gained confidence. They learnt about the importance of having

their own organisations, their own savings. In one community, a child was injured in an accident. The CO savings were timely accessed and used to facilitate his transfer to a health facility. After this incident, the importance of COs and their savings increased. As the pace of SRSO's work in the Union Council increased, VOs were set up and then LSO, this led to a major socio-cultural change. The male community members finally accepted the role and functions of women CIs. As you see, in today's meeting, there are no community males present. This reflects many changes in the communities.

One LSO member said that the 'real revolution' took place, when LSO was sub-granted CIF and IGG funds. Along with some savings, now community women and their leaders had access and control over significant financial resources. Under CIF, LSO received Rs. 7,621,848 and the total revolved amounts now is Rs. 12,731,189. Under IGG, LSO received Rs. 3,338,860, out of which Rs 962,900 has been granted to identified beneficiaries. The process for the disbursement of the remaining IGG fund is underway. Hundreds of community women are now actively engaged to improve their economic condition through the CIF/IGG funds. In many cases, household men are also involved in supporting women in the management of these economic activities.

I said that the focus of SRSO is to improve the household members' lives and livelihoods. Therefore, all household members have to be actively involved in development activities. However, SRSO has fostered women's CIs since it believed that women have the potential to break out of their previously defined roles and to harness that potential for the development of their families and communities. What you have just presented speaks volumes for the foresight of SRSO and for the rural women to take on more responsibilities.

In LSO Aitabar, 789 CI members have been given the MHI card. Many members faced health conditions that called for hospitalisation. The MHI card was used and this allowed them to get timely and quality medical treatment. Many MHI cases were related to pregnancy/birth complications. Four CPI schemes have been completed in the Union Council; two related to construction of culverts and two related to installation of hand pumps.

LSO had taken an initiative to contact the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD). As a result of this linkage, 11 Adult Literacy Centres (ALC) were opened. These ALCs operated for a period of five months. In each ALC, a batch of 25 participated; altogether 275 women benefited from attending ALCs. They learnt basic literacy skills, as well as learned Quran and some sewing skills.

Through linkages with the UC Administration (Chairman/Vice Chairman), LSO was able to access support for the installation of 61 hand pumps. This has greatly facilitated 100s of community women and girls and reduced their heavy burden of water fetching. During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, LSO leaders reached out to the UC Administration, which in turn provided food rations for 35 families, as well as 135 sanitisers. LSO members growing vegetables also distributed these to nearby needy families.

In 2020, during the lockdown, the schools were closed, children and their families faced many issues. The process of de-learning began and families were upset that the children are playing in the village lanes all day. In order to solve this issue, communities got together and found space to

set up 'tuition centres'; in some communities this was in a mosque, in others a house with a larger room was identified. Then 'volunteer' teachers were identified and classes for children began with keeping the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in mind. Altogether, 104 children returned and continued their education in these tuition centres. Now the schools are open and all pupils are back in school.

When asked about CAT sessions, LSO members responded that these sessions are very informative and play a key role in raising awareness amongst community women about key issues. LSO leaders and CRPs are highlighting the pitfalls of early marriages. With increased 'space' for women within and outside the households, one key impact has been the reduction in violence against women (VAW). Community women played a key role in solving an old water dispute. One farmer was not allowing the irrigation channel on fields to be used for irrigation of his neighbours. So, while his farm fields were lush green, the neighbouring fields were dry. The women of the affected households then contacted CIs and CI leaders then approached both sides. After lots of arguments and counter-arguments, finally women were able to convince the farmer's household women to convince their men-folk to allow use of the irrigation channel by his neighbouring farmers. Finally, he agreed and then both sets of farmer field were lush green.

In order to improve community sanitation, VOs are taking steps. Over 50 low cost toilets have been installed on self-help basis. Seven VOs have been declared as Open Defecation Free (ODF). Others are in the process of becoming ODF. Twenty-six poor families with pregnant/lactating women (PLW) have been provided with funds to purchase milch goats. The mothers/children are directly benefiting from drinking goat milk. Many of the goats have produced kids, and the number of animals is increasing.

The Union Council has 2048 married women of reproductive age. CHWs, after conducting awareness raising sessions with them, have mobilised 940 (4650 to take up family planning/ birth spacing service of their own choice.

Regarding the future plan, the LSO leaders said that they want to increase household coverage, encourage more savings, ensure IGG is utilised by the benefiting households, ensure sound and proper management of CIF, as well as making efforts to increase the size of the fund, increase routine immunization coverage within the Union Council, ensure that all adults get their CNICs, ensure that all children have B-forms, following of member CIs, and foster linkages with local authorities and other service providers.

At the end, I was asked to give few remarks. I said that first we should thank the GoS and European Union. With their support, so many activities have been implemented in the Union Council. Community members and their institutions have now the responsibility to benefit from these interventions and this can only happen if they are implemented and maintained properly. The LSO has now a huge CIF. Through its proper management, this will contribute not only to benefit the borrowing community members but also to CIs sustainability. A key challenge for LSO is to find ways and means of increasing CIF and to meet CIF operational costs. In many LSOs, a small processing fee is charged. Many other LSOs are thinking of mobilising local resources to enhance CIF, e.g. at the time of wheat and rice harvest, each member to donate 2 kg to LSO. Then the LSO

leaders sell this and add the funds to CIF. At all three levels, e.g. CO, VO and LSO, the practice of self-help has to be sustained. They are many things that the households and communities can do on their own, e.g. the construction of low cost toilets in the Union Council is an excellent example. Another wonderful example is the practice of community philanthropy during the COVID lock down. CIs have to take a keen interest in the interventions supported by SRSO in the villages and check on their progress, e.g. are COs/VOs active? Are they meeting regularly? Are savings in COs increasing and managed and use properly? Are the CPIs schemes being used and maintained properly? Are trained cadre of CRPs in the SUCCESS and PINS Programmes working as per their terms of reference? Are the CIF borrowers benefiting from utilisation of funds? The role of SRSO was to mobilise and organise households into a network CIs and trained a large cadre of local people in various managerial and technical disciplines. SRSO provided CIF, as well as undertaking other interventions. SRSO has shown the path. Now the CIs have to continue to travel along that path, and for this journey we need unity, togetherness, inclusivity, transparency, and improved management utilisation of all resources available. And, finally, LSO has to continue to foster linkages with the GoS line departments and highlight their contributions. The whole idea of district-wide social mobilisation and fostering of CIs was make them more visible, so that they can demonstrate their value to government. In Taluka and District JDCs, there is a growing recognition of the value of CIs. All this bodes well for the future.

One final recommendation given was for LSO to identify some households who have seen a great transformation in their lives and livelihoods as a result of LSO's work. The focus has now to shift from inputs and outputs to results/outcomes (*natijaa/maqsad*). In the future, more and more question will be asked about the outcome of SRSO and LSO's work, interventions. We have to gear up to answer this, at the community level, district level and at the provincial level.

I thanked the community women for taking out lot of time to meet with RSPN/SRSO team and wished them well for their future endeavours.

After this, I visited one hand pump, a family with milch goats, and some kitchen gardens. All beneficiaries were happy with these interventions and said they contributing to ease their lives.

Night stay at Larkana

February 25, 2021

RSPN/SRSO team visited LSO Soonh of Taluka Shahdadkot. LSO Accountant Ms. Parveen talked about the LSO. The LSO was fostered in February 2018 and now there are 62 COs and 14 VO. Before SRSO's intervention in the Union Council with about 3,000 households, there was general lack of awareness about education, routine immunization, polio eradication, nutrition, mother and child health, family planning/birth spacing, enterprises, and the important role that women can play in enhancing household's welfare. There was also no awareness about civic rights, After SRSO's entry in the Union Council and the initiation of the process of social mobilisation and fostering of network of community institutions, the process of social and economic change has begun. CAT sessions are playing a key role in raising awareness about important cross cutting issues. Now more women are aware about their civic rights.

LSO has been successful in fostering linkages with local authorities. After advocating with local Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA), part of the Union Council was provided with piped gas and about 400 households now have this facility. With the support of NADRA van, that LSO mobilised, 118 adults received CNIC cards, more B-forms are being applied for and received, more marriages are being registered, and more birth certificated being made. LSO linked up 340 women for the Government of Pakistan's Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme. With the support of Hidayat Trust, based in Hyderabad, some handicapped persons are getting a support of Rs. 2,000 per month. Linkages with the UC Administration resulted in installation of five hand pumps. Links with the Health Department are developing well. The government routine vaccination now is working well, as is the polio campaign. Community institutions mobilise the mothers and children and bring them at one place and the government vaccinator provides services. The local school lacked space and many children were studying in the open. After approaching the Education Department, two additional class rooms have been built.

With access to IGG/CIF funds, women led CIs and their members are playing a more active role in household economic development with focus on livestock, agriculture and micro enterprise development. A number of small enterprises have been set up, from selling drinking water (Rs. 20/can cost and selling at Rs 50, to rilly making (monthly profit Rs1,500 to Rs. 2,000), to small grocery (*parchun*) shops (monthly profit Rs 1,500 to Rs. 2,500). Household women and men folk are working together to improve their incomes.

One community member highlighted the importance of CIF by citing her own example. She said that she and her neighbour accessed two CIF loans amounting to Rs 18,000 and Rs. 14,000, respectively. By adding some other savings, with a total amount of Rs 75,000 a catering service (hiring out of utensils and cutlery for large public events, e.g. marriages, gatherings, etc.) was set up. Initially, three large cauldrons were purchased and over time three more were added. Family males help out in the small business. Upon asking about the enterprise performance in January 2021, she said that the catering material was rented out for 10 days in January and the total rent received was Rs. 30,000. She was very happy with this and said that during the marriage season (post wheat harvest) the number of rental days will increase manifold. At the moment, the utensils are stored in a small room in her home and in the future, as business grows, she hopes to rent a shop in a more central local. This too will contribute to boost her profits.

After thanking the LSO members, RSPN/SRSO team left for the Shahdadkot Field Unit Office. I asked the Unit Incharge to develop some charts about her working area and the various projects that SRSO is implementing. This will useful to highlight her and her team's work to visitors. She agreed to this suggestion. Mr Asad Ali, DM Qambar Shahdadkot, thanked COO for taking out the time to visit SRSO districts, to interact with the CIs fostered under the European Union supported SUCCESS Programme, and how CIs are implementing both SUCCESS, PINS ER3, PINS ER2, DAFPAK and EPW, and also how CIs are linking up with local line Departments and other service providing organisations. He had one request and this relates to new project design and proposal development. DM asked that while SRSO's nominated Focal Persons work with RSPN colleagues for proposal design and development, it would be important to have the relevant DMs involved in the process so that they are more aware. Sometimes, they are not fully aware and the projects run

into some difficulty then the DMs are called-in to support course correction. I responded that in the future RSPN will ask the Focal Persons to also invite DMs in the discussion for proposal development. After thanking the Field Unit In charge, RSPN/SRSO team left for Qambar town.

At the district office Qambar, DM asked for my overall assessment of the visit to SRSO districts. I first thanked him for his kind invitation for the field visit. It is always exciting and learning to undertake field visits and to meet with RSP colleagues and leaders and members of CIs. Key takeaways from the visit are:

- Vast majority of the poor rural women have been mobilised and organised
- Rural women are now managing their own community institutions, from mohalla to village to union council levels
- Through the preparation of MIPs, VDPs and UCDPs, leaders and members of CIs are now more aware about the importance of potential identification, prioritisation and planning for implementation
- Access to and control over CIF has contributed significantly to women's role in decision making
- Working to improve incomes, both through household level efforts as well as through Business Development Groups
- With the rural communities, there is an increasing number of women-led enterprises and these are acting as 'role model' to encourage other women
- Enhancing their economic assets as well as controlling their benefits
- Gaining new managerial and technical skills; a large trained female cadre is now in place in all LSOs
- Improving community infrastructure both with SRSO's support as well as through linkages
- More awareness about the importance of mother and child health, and accessing family planning/birth spacing services, focusing more on children's education, sanitation, nutrition, etc.
- Linking up with local stakeholders, line departments and other service providers
- More aware about their civic rights
- Contributing to reduction in violence against women
- More confident about their and their children's future
- They have found more 'acceptance and space' in the communities
- The presence of some LSO leaders in Taluka and District JDSs is also contributing to the recognition by key local stakeholders about the role that women can play to supplement and complement government's own efforts to improve service delivery
- In cases of disasters, CIs are acting as first responders
- In the current COVID-19 Pandemic, at the community level CIs played a key role in mobilising local resources to support their less fortunate members
- Leaders and members of CIs also motivated local notables and managers of Farmer Field Schools to practice community philanthropy to support local needy community members.

- Capacity building sessions under SUCCESS, PINS, and DAFPAK have significantly contributed to raise women’s awareness about themselves and their potential to contribute to development and to benefit from it

The achievements of women-led CIs are many, and much more will be achieved in the coming years. In terms of specifics, I said that under agreements with donors RSPN and SRSO have to focus on both numerical targets and as well as quality of the work. For a long time, focus has been on reporting inputs and outputs, whereas now both donors and RSP Boards are asking about outcomes and impacts. In the Qamabr Taluka JDC meeting, AC had also asked about the impact of SRSO’s initiatives. In both SUCCESS and PINS, baseline surveys have been done. Other studies have also been completed, e.g. IMI survey, Financial Inclusion Thematic study, etc. DMs should access all available information from their MER sections, and present these at JDC meetings as well as sharing with other stakeholders. Some studies are under process, e.g. PINS midterm survey. When this study, is completed, all DMs should have data relevant to their districts with them. Under the PINS ER3 Programme, monitoring teams are also conducting immediate benefit assessments using Open Data Toolkit (ODK), and data relevant to Qambar Shahdadt Kot should be accessed from PM PINS ER3 SRSO or MER section of PINS ER3 PMU at head office. If visitors/stakeholders ask question about outcomes and impact, while we may not have full data/information, we should at least be presenting/sharing what we have. (This was also discussed with Mr Naveed Memon, Programme Manager MER, SRSO, at Sukkur on the morning of February 26, 2021). SUCCESS MIS has much information, e.g. about CIF, the amounts granted to LSOs, purpose for which loans issued, etc. These should be shown in charts in each District and Field Unit Offices. Finally, I suggested that the District Team members should also be encouraged to identify some households who have witnessed a ‘transformative change’ (in terms of lives – education, health, nutrition, housing, WASH, etc., and livelihoods – assets, incomes (enhancement and diversity), change in occupations (away from casual labouring, farm work to more productive work), savings, etc.) since the beginning of SRSO’s work in Qambar Shahdadt Kot district. Once identified then their stories of improve should be captured, documented and communicated. There are many staff members in district offices, therefore undertaking this should not be too difficult.

With increasing reliance on the use of CRPs, it is important that the selection and training of CRPs is conducted properly, and that their work plans are developed and then, properly followed up by SRSO’s field staff; without proper follow ups and mentoring and encouragement, the work of CRPs begins to lag, both numerically as well as in terms of quality. Each Field Unit should have display of their CRPs and categorise them. This will then allow them to focus more on the laggards, those following in lower categories. It has also been observed that some CRPs are involved in multiple projects; while this may have advantages, there are also likely to be disadvantages. If follow ups are not taking place, then disadvantage come to fore and project activities are disturbed. For new projects, careful selection of CRPs should be made, for wrong selection usually leads to wrong results.

The IMI exercise is almost 50% done. When it is finished, then the IMI results should be presented and discussed with the CIs, especially LSOs. In the IMI dialogues with LSOs, their strengths should be highlighted and then weaknesses. With regards to the latter then LSOs should be

supported to prepare an action plan for taking corrective measures. Thereafter field staff should follow up on these plans. DM should monitor this process.

DM can encourage CIs by highlighting VOs (later perhaps LSOs) with 100% achievement in various development activities, e.g. VOs will 100% household membership, toilets, kitchens gardens, EPI vaccination, children given polio drops, planting trees, saving in COs, livestock, access to clean drinking water, school enrolment, girls school enrolment, with diversified income sources, etc. This would not only highlight CIs work, but would also be a tool to motivate other CIs.

I thanked Mr Asad Ali for his facilitation and hospitality and for taking out the time to accompany me to CIs. I also asked him to thank PM SUCCESS SRSO and Mr. Hamid Ali Magsi, PM PINS ER3 SRSO, for accompanying me on some of the visits.

I arrived at SRSO head office at 930pm. CEO SRSO was in office, and over late dinner briefly update him about my visit to Qambar Shahdadkot and Larkana districts.

Overall the visit was excellently arranged and managed by SRSO colleagues. I was felt great to see the leaders and members of women-led CIs talking so positively about their changes in their lives in such a short period of time. (I was reminded of the initial few dialogues that I had conducted in one NRSP and one TRDP district where there was lot of hesitancy from women and men about what RSPs, social mobilisation, and ‘harnessing the potential’ was all about!) Biggest change being that, despite the harsh social and economic structure² of the Sindh rural areas, the women finding space and voice, and of course access and control over CIF, participation in various other SRSO interventions and linking up with local stakeholders and line departments, has given them not only confidence but also tangible benefits.

Thank you SRSO!

² I mention this to remind oneself about the baseline data that showed exceedingly high landlessness, female illiteracy, lack of livestock assets, etc. Majority of household income was from casual low paid labouring in farm and non-farm sectors. And of course the strong prevalence of feudalism, strong patriarchal attitudes, ancient customs, etc.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Increase household coverage in both 0-23 and 24-100 PSC bands to create more social mass (in one LSO, about 800 households (mostly from 24-100 PSC band) were unorganised)
2. District and Field Offices should have access to more information about programme inputs, outputs and outcomes. Increasingly there is more demand for information about outcomes. District Managers should proactively approach MER Sections and get information for their respective districts from a) PSC census, b) Socio-economic baseline survey, c) PINS baseline survey, d) Financial Inclusion Thematic Study (about to be finalised), e) PINS mid-term survey (in process), and other sources
3. From SUCCESS MIS, PINS MIS, etc., key performance indicators should be highlighted in charts in District and Field Offices, e.g. savings, CIF related indicators, other interventions, etc.
4. Identify, document and communicate few households who have seen a major output level 'transformation' in their lives (education and technical skills, health, nutrition, housing, WASH., etc.) and livelihoods (increase in productive assets, increase and diversity of income sources, change in occupations (from low value to relatively higher value), increase in savings, reduction in debt to others, etc.)
5. Community Resource Persons: Proper selection, training, work plans and follow-ups have to be ensured. Field Units to display list of CRPs and their categorisation. Action plans to be developed to support 'weak' CRPs and the plans need to be followed up. From each Field Unit, certificates to 'Best CRPs' should be presented signed at key events where senior District Administration representatives are present.
6. Institutional Maturity Index: After the completion of the IMI Survey, there is a great opportunity to re-engage with CIs and to hold dialogues about their IMI results. In these dialogues, the strengths and weaknesses should be discussed and action plans prepared to remove their weaknesses. The key role of the District Manager is then to follow up on these follow up plans that the Field Units will be following. Each Field Office should present 'IMI Topper' certificate to one CO, one VO and one LSO. These can have presented at key events where senior District Administration representatives are present.
7. Each Field Unit identify Villages Organisations with 100% coverage of any key activity, e.g. VOs with 100% households: in VOs, undertaking savings with COs, accessing CIF loans, with all girls in enrolled in school, with kitchen gardens, with toilets, all children have polio drops, all children are vaccinated, access to safe drinking water, planting trees, CNI Cards, birthday certificates, family planning/birth spacing by married couple of reproductive age, birth delivery at a health facility, marriage certificates, voters registered, etc. These cases can then be documented and presented at Taluka and District JDCs and Administration Pillar's support sought to have more such villages. They can also be awarded 'Merit' certificates. Such VOs can also be used as motivation tool for other VOs to follow and replicate.
8. Regular meetings (meeting frequency to be decided by CIs themselves) of CIs is essential for the transparent, accountable and self-directed performance of CIs. Without meetings there can be no community institutions. Currently several large projects are being

implemented hence this issue may not be of importance now, but in the post-project condition it will be critical.

1)

Field Visit Photo Gallery



