



RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

# STRATEGY

2026 - 2030

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## **Rural Support Programmes Network**

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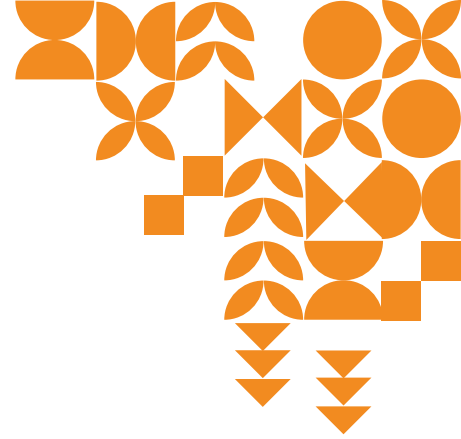
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## MESSAGE FROM CEO RSPN




Dear Members and Advisors of the RSPN Board,

It is an honour to present the RSPN Strategy 2026-2030 - a shared vision shaped by the collective wisdom, experience, and commitment of the entire Rural Support Programmes (RSP) family.

This Strategy is the result of an extensive and inclusive process. RSPN extends its sincere thanks to the RSPN Board Strategy Committee for its strategic guidance, and to the Chief Executive Officers and staff of our member RSPs, whose dedication and insights have been central to shaping our priorities. We are equally grateful to our donors and development partners, whose perspectives have supported our approach to be forward-looking and aligned with both national priorities and the evolving global development agenda.

This Strategy reaffirms our core mission — to remain people-centric — while setting a clear roadmap for addressing emerging challenges and opportunities. Above all, it reflects our collective resolve to stand with the poorest and most marginalised, enabling them to build resilient, inclusive, and prosperous communities.



As we look ahead, we do so with a renewed commitment to partnership, innovation, and impact. RSPN is confident that, together, we will continue to make meaningful strides towards realising the vision of empowered communities across Pakistan.

*(Please note this Strategy contains an addendum internal to the Board).*

With warm regards,

**Shandana Khan**  
Chief Executive Officer

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) are a national asset of Pakistan. The first RSP - the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) - was established in 1982 by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF). Its success and widespread recognition has led to the establishment of other RSPs across the country. In July 2000, the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) was established by the RSPs with financial assistance from DFID (now the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office), to facilitate the growth and development of RSPs in the country. Today, RSPN serves as a strategic platform for nine member RSPs, bringing together over 43 years of knowledge in Community-Driven Development (CDD). RSPN is currently the largest CDD network in Pakistan.

RSPN is proud to present its Strategy for 2026–2030, developed through an inclusive and participatory process. The process included an internal SWOT exercise by RSPN staff in September 2024, followed by a round of consultations with each of the nine member RSPs and then by a Board Strategy Retreat on 13 May 2025. The consultative process included some international donors. This Strategy outlines RSPN's vision, mission, and priorities for the next five years as we continue to support rural communities in Pakistan to overcome poverty through empowerment and collective action. The document sets a clear direction for RSPN's role as a catalyst for innovation, a national platform of its nine RSP members, sharing lessons between them, doing advocacy with external stakeholders to improve pro-poor policies and resource mobilisation for the RSPs, while remaining adaptable to emerging challenges and opportunities.

## 2 VISION AND MISSION



### VISION

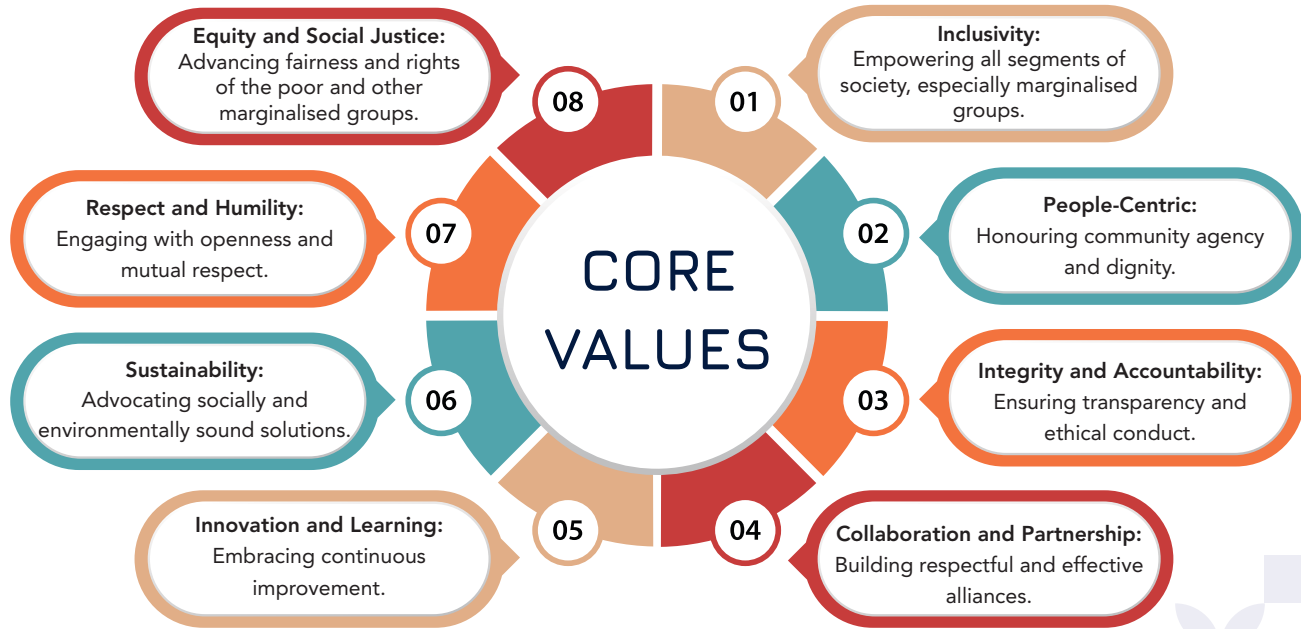
Empowered people realise their full potential for inclusive social and economic development.



### MISSION

To facilitate RSPs in nurturing people's social capital through shared learning, innovation, advocacy, and meaningful partnerships.

### 3 OUR CORE VALUES



## 4 OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

RSPs recognise that poor households in Pakistan — in rural and urban areas — often remain invisible and disconnected from state institutions and the development processes. Without organisation and empowerment, they cannot effectively access public services, opportunities, skills, or entitlements. RSPs bridge this gap by mobilising and organising these households into their own community institutions and groups.

RSPN facilitates RSPs through knowledge creation and documentation, support in strategy and programme development, innovation, partnerships, and policy advocacy, while RSPs foster and connect community institutions with political and administrative systems and support them in implementing programmes. As of June 2025, RSPs have collectively mobilised 8.7 million households into 538,000 Community Organisations, 44,850 Village Organisations and 2,520 union council level Local Support Organisations in 152 districts of Pakistan. The membership of Community Organisations stood at 9.1 million, of which 56% are women. The RSP approach was endorsed by the SAARC Heads of State in 1993 (Dhaka), who recommended the promotion of social capital strengthening through dedicated support organisations like the RSPs. In Pakistan and India, public endowments to organisations such as the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), the National Rural Support Programme, Sarhad Rural Support Programme, Sindh Rural Support Organisation, Balochistan Rural Support Programme, and Ghazi Barotha Taraqati Idara validate this institutional approach.

RSPN recognises the need for flexibility in approach, responding to local realities, Pakistan's diversity and donor requirements. In a fast changing environment where factors like digital literacy are beginning to impact our lives and in areas where security concerns shape our approach locally, RSPN remains flexible to working with and through a variety of local CSOs. The effort remains to link this social pillar to all efforts, for a wholistic approach to community development.

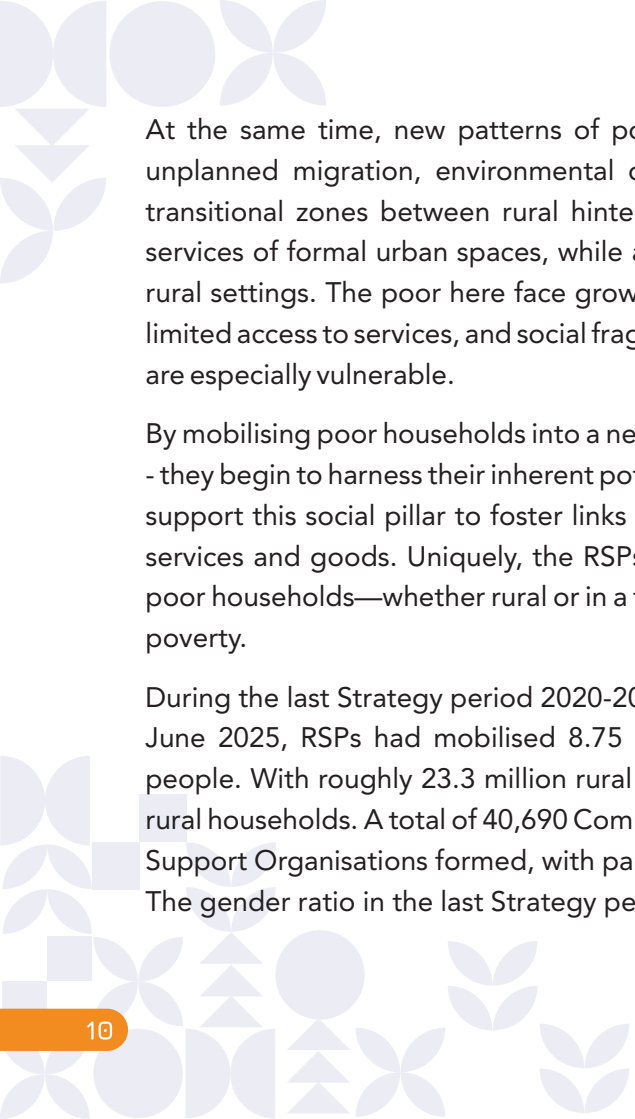
## 5 THE CHANGING POVERTY LANDSCAPE: RURAL AND URBAN REALITIES

The RSPs have grown into large, independent, and highly professional organisations delivering a wide range of development services at scale, across Pakistan. Their reach, experience, and institutional maturity allow them to implement community-driven development programmes effectively.

RSPN remains a strategic organisation with a lean structure. Its comparative advantage lies in its thought leadership, coordination, innovation, and policy engagement.

RSPN plays a critical enabling and facilitative role, adding value to RSP work by catalysing innovation, strengthening capacities, documenting and disseminating learning, and advocating for policies and systems that support sustainable development. It acts as a platform for promoting collaboration among RSPs, engaging with government and a variety of development partners, enhancing the voice and visibility of RSPs and the communities they work with.

In many rural areas of Pakistan, the poor—especially the ultra-poor—face entrenched, intergenerational poverty and lack access to land, livestock, capital, education, technical skills, adequate housing, healthcare, and legal protection. Socially isolated and unorganised, they struggle individually with food insecurity, malnutrition, and poor health. Many are women-headed households or include persons with disabilities, with communities often migrating in search of work or shelter. This exclusion renders them invisible and unable to claim their rights.



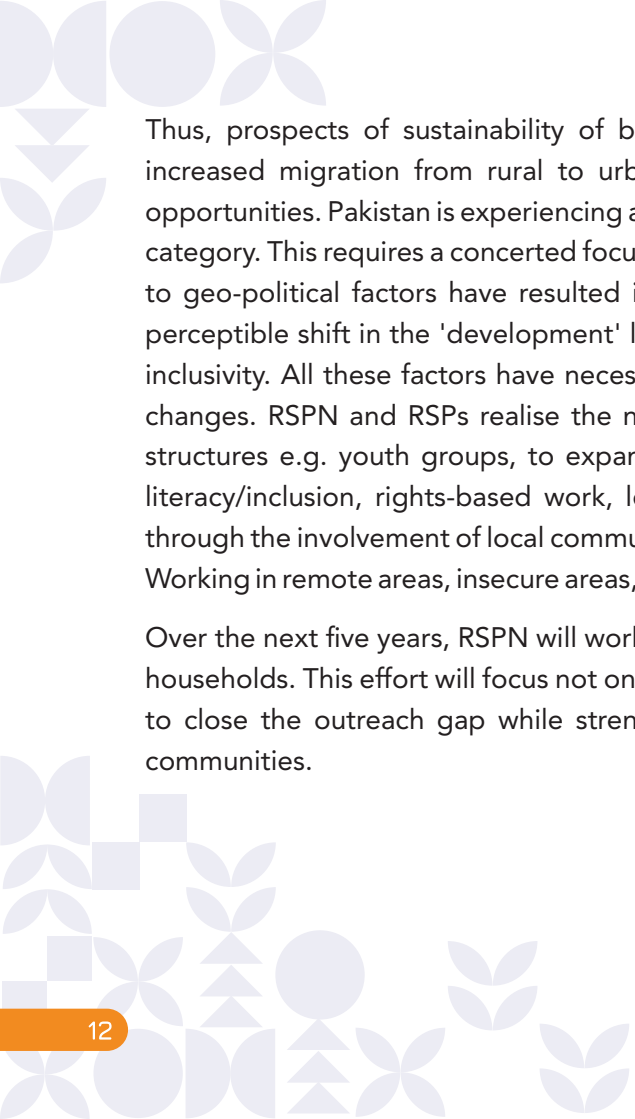
At the same time, new patterns of poverty are emerging in urban and semi-urban areas, driven by unplanned migration, environmental degradation, and economic displacement. These areas—often transitional zones between rural hinterlands and urban centres—lack the governance structures and services of formal urban spaces, while also lacking the cohesion and community organisation of typical rural settings. The poor here face growing challenges related to insecure livelihoods, informal housing, limited access to services, and social fragmentation. Women, youth, and migrant workers in these contexts are especially vulnerable.

By mobilising poor households into a network of local community institutions and groups - the social pillar - they begin to harness their inherent potential and strengthen their social capital. RSPN and the RSPs then support this social pillar to foster links with government administrations and departments that provide services and goods. Uniquely, the RSPs undertake this social capital building in Pakistan, empowering poor households—whether rural or in a transitional setting—to begin the process of exiting from extreme poverty.

During the last Strategy period 2020-2025 the outreach of community institutions grew substantially. By June 2025, RSPs had mobilised 8.75 million rural households, representing an estimated 56 million people. With roughly 23.3 million rural households nationwide, this means RSPs reached about 37% of rural households. A total of 40,690 Community Organisations, 15,953 Village Organisations and 297 Local Support Organisations formed, with participating households increasing from 8.4 million to 8.75 million. The gender ratio in the last Strategy period was 56% and remained consistent for the current period i.e.

56%. The 2020-25 period also saw the strengthening of existing community institutions and a shift was witnessed in the way they approached their collective problems primarily due to large scale development initiatives / poverty reduction programmes such as the EU funded SUCCESS programme in Sindh and BRACE in Balochistan, that enhanced awareness and the role of social media which provided an impetus to communities to demand services. Community institutions increasingly engaged with government in disaster preparedness and management, delivering family planning services, mother and child healthcare, youth development, mobilising resources for local development and enhancing demand for access to quality education. Internal and external assessments provide evidence of improvements in economic indicators, community-based infrastructure, women's incomes and empowerment, and the ability of communities to plan development activities.

However, the period 2020-25 was not without challenges. In addition to persistent political, economic and security concerns and instability, the country endured the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating 2022 and 2024 floods which severely affected large swaths of Pakistan's population, particularly the poor. The June 2025 World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook (MPO) which analyses macroeconomic and poverty developments in 23 developing countries in East Asia and Pacific reports that 44.7% of Pakistan's population now lives below the poverty line—defined as under US \$4.20 per person per day (2021 PPP)—up from 39.8% under the previous benchmark of US \$3.65/day (2017 PPP). The proportion living in extreme poverty (under US \$3/day) has surged to 16.5%, compared to 4.9% previously in 2017/18.



Thus, prospects of sustainability of benefits yielded by RSP programmes are challenged. There is increased migration from rural to urban areas, particularly by youth in search of better livelihood opportunities. Pakistan is experiencing a youth bulge, with 26% of its population in the youth (15-29 years) category. This requires a concerted focus on youth development. In addition, shifting donor priorities due to geo-political factors have resulted in a shrinking space for development organisations. There is a perceptible shift in the 'development' landscape but with an increased focus on rights-based work and inclusivity. All these factors have necessitated transition / adopting new approaches to navigate these changes. RSPN and RSPs realise the need to work within changing dynamics and include new social structures e.g. youth groups, to expand their scope of work to include emerging sectors like digital literacy/inclusion, rights-based work, legal empowerment, continued work on improved governance through the involvement of local communities, inclusion, climate change and localised resilience building. Working in remote areas, insecure areas, with the poorest and the poorest women, remain a priority.

Over the next five years, RSPN will work closely with RSPs to expand outreach to cover more poor, rural households. This effort will focus not only on widening coverage but also on deepening impact—helping to close the outreach gap while strengthening the resilience, livelihoods, and social capital of rural communities.

## 6 FOCUS AREAS

### 6.1: Knowledge Management and Documentation

- Capture and disseminate evidence-based insights and innovations from RSPs.
- Promote learning through policy briefs, case studies, thematic papers, and documentation of best practices—especially on social capital, institutional linkages, and people-centred approaches.
- Support knowledge-sharing platforms for RSPs and development partners, including lessons from emerging urban contexts.

### 6.2: Innovation and Strategic Pilots

- Act as an entrepreneurial hub to test new development ideas and adapt global best practices to local contexts, including urban settings.
- Pilot scalable approaches that address evolving rural and urban challenges.
- Support RSPs in scaling successful pilots through sustained engagement with donors and government.

### 6.3: Capacity Development and Coordination

- Provide technical and strategic support to RSPs based on demand or emerging opportunities.
- Organise exchanges and peer learning mechanisms among RSPs.
- Strengthen coordination across the RSP family on common themes such as M&E, gender, climate resilience, youth, and expanding development models to urban fringes.

## 6.4: Advocacy and Policy Engagement

- Impact policies with evidence from our work, specifically in areas of community driven development and poverty reduction.
- Represent RSPs at national and international platforms, contributing to development policy dialogues.
- Advocate for increased public sector investment in community-driven development, including support for growing urban poverty and vulnerabilities.

## 6.5: Strategic Partnerships

- Build partnerships with government bodies, donors, academic institutions, foundations, the private sector, INGOs and NGOs.
- Help RSPs leverage national and provincial programmes to access resources for both rural and urban communities.
- Facilitate joint programming or learning with actors aligned with the RSP approach and adaptive to evolving geographic realities.

## 6.6: Strategic Responsiveness and Adaptive Programming

- Maintain strategic flexibility to respond to emergent needs, donor interests, and new development opportunities—including those in peri-urban and urban areas.
- Leveraging other networks to access required skills and knowledge, where needed
- Use adaptive management to revise priorities as needed while remaining aligned with our long-term goals.

## 7 THEMATIC AND CROSS CUTTING AREAS AND LINK WITH SDGs

Through project implementation, RSPN will contribute to Pakistan's progress to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by focusing on the following thematic areas:

### Pro-Poor Economic Empowerment

RSPN will continue supporting the economic uplift of poor and marginalised communities through initiatives such as climate-smart agriculture, livestock development, construction of basic physical infrastructure, improved access to financial capital and markets, vocational and enterprise skills, and inclusive employment and income-generation activities.

(Linked SDGs: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10)



### Social Development and Access to Basic Services

RSPN will promote access to quality services in sexual and reproductive health (including MNCH), nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection, and adolescent and youth development. New areas such as mental health will also be explored, and efforts will be made to develop capacity of RSPN and RSPs to work in this important area.

(Linked SDGs: 3, 4, 6)



## Social Protection

RSPN will promote programmes and interventions designed to safeguard individuals, households and communities from poverty and vulnerability through interventions such as Income Generating Grants, Micro-Health Insurance, building resilience of communities to shocks and linkages with Social Safety Net programmes of the government and others.

(Linked SDGs: 1, 2, 10)



## Digital Transformation

RSPN will support digital inclusion through initiatives on digital literacy, youth-led e-commerce, and access to digital platforms and services in underserved communities. Developing capacity in using AI will be included. This will include educating communities in ethical and appropriate use of IT and AI in order to promote responsible and moral behaviour in digital environments.

(Linked SDGs: 4, 8, 9, 10)



## Human Rights, Governance, and Peace

RSPN will expand efforts that promote legal empowerment, community awareness of rights, accountable governance, and peaceful coexistence in fragile settings.

(Linked SDGs: 5, 10, 16)



## Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality remains a core area of RSPN's work, informing and intersecting with all thematic domains. The Network will continue promoting women's leadership, participation, access to opportunities and protection of rights apart from continued work in women's economic empowerment.

(Linked SDGs: 1, 5, 10)



## Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Resilience

RSPN will strengthen partnerships with national and international organisations, academic institutions, and research bodies to continuously enhance its capacities in climate change. The Network will design and implement projects in disaster risk reduction, clean energy, nature-based solutions, and community-level resilience to climate impacts.

(Linked SDGs: 7, 13, 15)



## Humanitarian Response

RSPN will continue supporting timely and coordinated responses to natural and human-induced disasters, pandemics, and other emergencies. It will also establish a RSP Humanitarian Forum to share best practices, coordinate response, mobilise resources, and present RSP work at national and global platforms. It will partner with key national level institutions, e.g. NDMA.

(Linked SDGs: 1, 3, 11, 13)



## Regional Cooperation

Recognising shared challenges across the Global South—such as poverty, exclusion, and weak service delivery—RSPN will foster regional learning and collaboration. Focus areas include climate resilience, digital inclusion, value chains, and linking communities with government services. The aim is to promote mutual innovation in community-driven development.

(Linked SDGs: 3, 16, 17)



## Localisation and Community-Led Development

RSPN is committed to advancing localisation—transferring power, resources, and decision-making to communities. This involves strengthening grassroots community institutions, supporting local governance mechanisms, and building capacities of RSPs and civil society actors to lead development locally. RSPN will also advocate for localisation in national policy and donor frameworks.

(Linked SDGs: 11, 16, 17)



To remain relevant and inclusive in a rapidly evolving development landscape, RSPN will mainstream the following cross-cutting themes throughout its strategic focus areas. These themes reflect shared values across the RSP movement and respond to persistent and emerging vulnerabilities in rural and urban Pakistan.



### **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

Promote women's leadership, participation, and access to resources.



### **Youth Inclusion**

Engage youth in innovation, enterprise, and civic action.



### **Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability**

Mainstream climate-smart, nature-based, and risk-reducing practices.



### **Digital Transformation**

Enhance digital systems and grassroots access to data and learning tools.



### **Social Inclusion and Equity**

Prioritise marginalised groups, especially in rural and transitional zones.

RSPN will work closely with member RSPs, governments, donors, foundations, international organisations, and the private sector to advance this Strategy. At the core of this work is the strengthening of community institutions and other forms of social capital, promoting inclusive development from the ground up. Through collaborative partnerships and sustained engagement, RSPN and RSPs will continue to empower communities, foster resilience, and enable sustainable socio-economic progress for Pakistan's underprivileged communities.





## The Network of the Rural Support Programmes

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