

Nurturing democratic values:

With an aim to nurture ownership of local issues among the leadership of different political parties, SPO introduced the concept of district steering committees in Dera Ghazi Khan. They were brought together to create among them the culture of mutual acceptance and tolerance, appreciation for the difference of opinions, recognition of and appreciation for each other and the rights of others, and unity to tackle the issues of common concern. Through trainings, they were sensitized about the basic human rights, democracy and good governance, leadership and their traits and ethics of politics. They were sensitized regarding the roles they are supposed to perform and can/must perform as political activists and leaders to address the common issues of general masses. This sensitization played a pivotal role in changing their thinking patterns and approach towards political struggle for the uplift and protection of the basic rights of general masses.

Interestingly, the members of the district steering committee who were otherwise aware of a long-pending/decades old water canal related issue, decided to take it up after they were sensitized. The water canal was constructed in 1910. However, in 60's it was converted into a sewage line. Since it passes through the residences of the major population of the city, it was posing serious health related threats to them. The canal is famously known as the Manica canal.

The district steering committee dialogued with the district line agencies, conveyed the seriousness of this issue to their peer politicians, held meetings with provincial political leadership, mobilized the public to peacefully demonstrate against the usage of water canal as sewage line and disseminated information about the issue through print and electronic media. Without losing their focus and getting under the pressure of vested groups, the district steering committee members consistently campaigned against the conversion of water canal into the sewage line. Eventually, through their successful grass root level engagement with local population, the district government officials and the political leadership at the district as well as provincial level, the district steering committee convinced the relevant authorities for reinstating the original status of the water canal. Now it is no more a water sewage line. It is being used as a water irrigation canal. The district government, under its water canal restoration plan, has converted the filth filled side banks of the canal into green belts through tree plantation.