

To make a stone a flower



SPO
Strengthening
Participatory
Organization

اداره استحکام شرکتی ترقی



Maliha Shamim

To make a stone a flower

by

Maliha Shamim



CIDA



European Union



RNE

SPO's core programme is currently supported by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), European Union's Rural Social Development Programme (RSDP) and Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE).

SPO also acknowledges support from other donors for its thematic programmes and projects.

First Published by SPO Pakistan in 2002

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House No.9, Street 89, G-6/3,
Islamabad - Pakistan

The title of the book **'To make a stone a flower'** is taken from a poem by W.H.Davies.

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

During the 1980s, a major shift occurred in the paradigm of development of 1950s which emphasized on the growth of GNP with centralized planning by the government. The new paradigm focused on development of human potential and capabilities through participation of people by organizations formed by themselves. SPO which started its journey in 1987 for providing impetus to community based projects and by 1992 shifted its approach towards capacity building of CBOs, has followed the overall shift in paradigm of development and has been successful in proving that human efforts, however small they may be, can bring changes which make society more humane. The stories published in this book help us understand the principles of participatory development.

Professor Dr. Karamat Ali
Chairperson
SPO Board of Directors, 2000-2003

FOREWORD

“To make a stone a flower” is a brief yet highly readable and informative introduction to the quiet, under-publicized development work being rendered by SPO.

This publication presents pen-portraits of women, men and communities that have begun a process of positive transformation. They are using principally their own will-power and local resources to make this change. They have been able to do so after gaining new perspectives through their participation in the capacity-building training programmes known as DPM conducted by SPO in all four provinces of Pakistan.

The title of this publication is apt. It summarizes the extent of the transformation being attempted. Yet the contents herein do not convey the multiple levels at which the whole SPO team, comprising its volunteer leadership, its full-time staff and its partner-CBOs devote intensive efforts to initiate measurable, purposeful change.

The work of SPO deserves far greater attention than it has so far received from researchers and scholars of the development process. Perhaps this publication may serve as an “appetizer”

Javed Jabbar

*co-founding member, SPO
and former Chairperson, 1995-2000*

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GLOSSARY

‘Bibi’ culture	- refers to wives of feudal lords and the socio-cultural rules constructed to guide their behaviour
Bund	– dam
Choti funding	– micro funding for small projects given by SPO to its partner organizations, usually below Rs.30,000
Cluster	– a group of CBOs who attend training courses with SPO
Dar-ul-Falah	– welfare organization
DPM	– a training programme comprising of a set of basic concepts or skills related to development planning and management, designed for capacity building of CBOs
Jirga	– local group of village elders usually involved in decision making
Kacha	- uncemented
Karez	– underground wells dug in a row, leading from the source of water at the foot of the mountains, to the fields. A system of irrigation used specifically in Balochistan
Maulvis	– religious heads
Mauza	– a group of small villages
Nazim	– locally elected representative at district or tehsil level
Participatory Development Coalition	– development networks at district level formed by SPO
Pesh Imam	- the man who leads the prayers in the mosque
Purdah	– veil
Unicef	– United Nations Children’s Fund
Wadera	– feudal
Watta satta	- exchange marriage
Zameendar	– landowner

INTRODUCTION

We at SPO believe in rejoicing in progress and celebrating commitment. Our work with communities across the country validates the belief that destinies change when people themselves make decisions governing their lives. We do not define Pakistan by its beautiful landscapes, mighty rivers, sandy beaches, breath-taking mountain peaks, Mughal architecture, monuments and relics. To us, the country is about 140 million people who work tirelessly; whose majority struggles hard to make a decent living; who are denied the basic amenities of life and whose economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights have yet to be realised.

Empowerment of people so that they take control of their situation and then act to alter it requires them to gain a great deal of managerial and technical knowledge, besides an understanding of mechanisms that could confront the current structures of power. SPO recognises that access to information and knowledge is simply not enough. The capacity to process and utilise this knowledge is more important and vital to the social and economic development we aspire for as a nation. Our field workers, supported by managers, social scientists, and technical experts, ensure the catalytic role SPO plays in 49 districts in all four provinces of Pakistan.

The fairly comprehensive Development Planning and Management training programme is one of the key tools that SPO uses to build the capacity of its partner community-based organisations, which in turn serve the communities with a relentless spirit and enhanced expertise. Moreover, we provide specialised support to women groups and run thematic programmes in areas like education, health, environment, and poverty eradication.

SPO is deepening its capacity building initiatives to include local bodies, government line departments, and legislators to contribute towards good governance and to bring real development issues to the fore. We are increasingly looking at strengthening civil society networks, fostering our gender programme, and conducting research on local and national development issues.

This small book is a reminder to all of us that we should never give up. Whatever small contribution we make, individually or organisationally, does matter. Bringing about social change is a long haul. It requires time and patience. But as a Chinese proverb goes, “With time and patience, mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown.”

Maliha Shamim diligently compiled these stories of success and enterprise. This is not only her first publication but also the first compilation of brief case studies by SPO. She was helped by Riazat Hussain who meticulously designed the title and the book. Rizwan Mehmood, Zafar Zeeshan, Mukhtiar Chhargari, Fatima Hussain Ali, Arshad Haroon, Shahid Mehmood, Sarwat Jahan, Michelle Nadeem, Noor Mohammed, Shakeel Abro, Mustafa Baloch, and Shahnawaz Khan provided her with some basic material. Her travels were facilitated by many SPO staff, especially our hardworking programme coordinators and drivers. Kiren Khan and two of our honourable board members, Javed Jabbar and Farida Sher, helped Maliha edit the text. Most of all, I thank SPO partners, organisations and individuals, who took time out to share their experiences with the author and helped us learn so much about the things that matter.

Harris Khalique
Chief Executive SPO

DADLI RAHO



Village: **Agro Raho** District: **Hyderabad**
Sindh

Background

Moving towards Hala from Hyderabad city, one comes across a small village named Agro Raho. The village has a history spread over some three hundred years. Majority of the residents belong to the Raho community, but a few other castes can also be found, such as Sayyeds, Kalhoras and Kirias.

In a population of about 1500, the majority of the villagers own 50 to 60 acres of land for each family. Some have migrated to Saudi Arabia, while almost 350 households are barely meeting their daily expenses.

Following an age-old custom, women are engaged in the craft of making caps. One cap usually requires 10 to 20 days for completion, but the women get little return for their skills from the middlemen who pay them not more than Rs.100-250 per cap.

The case

In this village, a community based organization (CBO) called Samaji Tanzeem Agro Raho, came into existence with the efforts of a young man seven years ago. This CBO has now become a symbol of hope for the women. Committed to supporting the poor women who were excessively dependent on their husbands and who in turn, being involved in

DADLI RAHO

agriculture, could only earn a limited income – the CBO started a project to make Sindhi caps. The project was named Basic Institute for Rural Development (BIRD).

In this backdrop, a woman named Dadli Raho was trying to make ends meet. She had a lethargic husband either earning Rs.30 per day through irregular labour or not earning anything at times. She had three daughters to support, while the *katcha* house she lived in fell down a year ago. Living with their relatives, the plight of Dadli and her daughters was to go hungry for days and also bear the humiliation when neighbours and relatives made announcements in the mosque asking charity for them. Their socio-economic conditions were totally dependent on these alms and the little that Dadli, or her husband, brought home.

As she was falling into total destitution, the project of BIRD was initiated in the village two years ago. This organization pays Rs.300-350 per cap. By becoming a member of the organization, she started earning Rs.700 monthly by making two caps and even more, if she could make more than three in a month. Now her elder daughter provides a helping hand and this way she can earn a lump sum, which proves to be more useful than a few rupees earned off and on in a month. Although she still acquires groceries on credit, she can raise enough income

now to feed her family, a possibility which seemed like a mirage before the BIRD project was initiated through the *choti* funding from SPO. Dadli is now earning enough to support her family as well as to rebuild her house. By freeing the women of this village from the exploitative clutches of middlemen and providing them with an opening to earn a decent living, the project has made considerable impact at the household level, ultimately benefiting the whole community.

ALI AKBAR BALLAL

Village: Allah Bux Ballal District: Hyderabad
Sindh

Background

Aged 38 years, Ali Akbar Ballal, is a daily wage labourer and a farmer who lives in village Allah Bux Ballal, Taluqa Hala. His endless efforts to fight the poverty that he has inherited are visible in each wrinkle on his face. Ali Akbar lives in a *kacha* house consisting of two rooms, with his family comprising his wife and five children (four daughters and a son). Despite the availability of electricity in the village, he has been living in scorching heat with his innocent children because his financial conditions have always remained precarious. Thus, his house is devoid of other related facilities, like fans, latrines, and a radio. By profession he is a farmer who tills the land of the local *zamindar*.

Not very long ago, he could not make both ends meet unless he did extra work. For this purpose, he collected firewood from a nearby forest and sold it in neighbouring villages, which are comparatively larger than his own. In this way, he used to earn Rs. 3,000 per month. Only three times in a year could he manage to purchase clothes for his family members. He was also sending two daughters to the only school in the village. His only assets included a cow, which provided milk for the family's daily use, a donkey and a cart to carry the firewood. His wife owned a sewing machine with which she stitched clothes for the women in the village to contribute a little to the household income.

The case

In the year 2000, members of an existing CBO of village Allah Bux Ballal were selected for SPO's DPM training when the capacity building of the Hala Cluster of CBOs was in process. As part of this training, the members conducted a situation analysis of the village and discovered the fact that more than 60 percent of the villagers were living in poverty. This result was sufficient to compel them to work for the eradication of poverty in the area.

After the completion of DPM training, the CBO members had to submit a project proposal to SPO to test the skills they had learnt. They decided to initiate a micro credit scheme for the villagers with Rs.10,000, acquired as *choti* funding from SPO. One of the borrowers was Ali Akbar. He took a loan of Rs. 3,200, repayable over a period of 18 months. With this amount he purchased a calf. Feeding the calf was difficult but he and his family cut down on other expenses because they knew that the calf would bring profit when sold. When Ali Akbar sold the calf after 12 months, it earned him Rs. 7,500. He had only spent Rs. 200 on its fodder, but had earned a profit of Rs. 4,100. After paying 40 percent of the profit to the CBO, he was still left with Rs. 2,460. Gathering hope from this experience, he bought a goat that cost him only Rs. 1,100. He used the money left over to buy some grocery items and clothes for

his children. Thus, began a process of buying and selling livestock by borrowing loan from the CBO that brought him some profit on each transaction.

Wise use of the loan has had a profound and positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of Ali Akbar's household. There was a time when he was languishing under the burden of financial liabilities and could not enjoy a single moment of peace. However, since he took the first loan, there has been a considerable increase in his overall income, improving the living conditions of his family. He is now able to easily pay the fees for his school-going daughters, an expense that was earlier making him consider stopping their education altogether. Thus, a little financial boost has brought peace and sunshine in his life and some of his desolation has already faded away.

**THE SWABI WOMEN'S
WELFARE ORGANIZATION**



**Village: Kernal Sher Khan District: Swabi
NWFP**

Background

Karnal Sher Khan Kili is a village in District Swabi. The area is dominated by the Yousufzais, which form the largest tribe of all Pakhtoons. In 1991, a non-governmental organization launched a project to promote reproductive health in this village. A few local women were motivated to become involved in the project. For that time, it was a miracle if a woman could come out of her house and work on this sensitive an issue. The girls faced strict opposition from their in-laws and the society. The act of going from door to door and that too to strangers' houses, and telling women about issues which were otherwise hidden from young girls, was considered taboo. Thus, their work received condemnation, not only from men, especially *maulvis*, but also from elder women, who constituted the target population. As *purdah* had been strictly practiced in the area for centuries, local *maulvis* made announcements on microphones against this breach of custom.

The project was to be handed over to the local workers in 1992. The suppression caused due to the rigidity of the social order, comprising harshly defined psycho-social boundaries, had now reached its pinnacle. There was a dire need for a progressive-minded organization in the village. To continue the project, the women decided to organize themselves. A few educated men who were highly motivated to

THE SWABI WOMEN'S WELFARE ORGANIZATION

work for the development of the community also joined in to form an organization called Swabi Women's Welfare Society (SWWS) in 1992.

When SWWS established a "Mother and Child Health Center" (MCH) in the village, few of the village men did not allow women to go there for regular check-ups. The *maulvis* continued with their negative propaganda, declaring the Society's work as 'unreligious'. In such circumstances, it was becoming difficult to operate the center until SWWS persuaded the women belonging to the households of local *maulvis* to join the organization. Once they came into the partnership, the entire scenario changed, and since then there has been no looking back.

The case

In 1994, four members of the organization were selected by SPO for the capacity building training package of Development Planning and Management (DPM), which was later transferred by them to other members.

Since then, SWWS was managing six MCH centers in nearby villages. However, in 1999, the performance of these centers faced a slump due to lack of funds, which caused a few lady health visitors (LHVs) to resign. When SWWS analyzed its program, it showed that the center had outreach to

about 66 villages. As the Society had come into contact with SPO earlier, it submitted a proposal to the organization for funding in order to revitalize the program. The CBO received SPO's Social Sector Funding in January 2002, which granted new life to all its centers.

Under this project, 20 to 30 Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) of SWWS centers are being trained in reproductive health practices. These LHVs further train Lady Health Workers (LHWs) at Basic Health Units (BHUs) set up by the government in different villages, as well as the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). The SWWS workers bring the LHWs to Peshawar for training. The trainers are transferring knowledge about hygienic practices in service delivery and sterilization, as well as modern techniques of family planning that are harmless to general health.

Due to this expanded outreach, the turnout of women at the MCH centers has increased, and relevant medication is being taken by both women and children regularly. Women are not hesitant to share their health problems with LHVs and field workers (FWs) anymore. According to a survey conducted by SWWS, the use of family planning techniques in these villages has increased from 6 percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 2002. In addition, the staff of BHUs and TBAs has been mobilized as they are now

THE SWABI WOMEN'S WELFARE ORGANIZATION

moving out of their centers and visiting the communities themselves. Overall, the spread of diseases due to ignorance and neglect of service providers has been considerably controlled.

In a social set-up where women were not thought fit to even venture out of their homes, SWWS brought together men and women on a common platform to work on a highly sensitive issue. The positive outcomes of the project have been felt by the beneficiaries, and have also been acknowledged by the Government of NWFP, which honored the Society with an award in 2002. A small and timely boost has helped the CBO to aspire high and achieve its aims for the betterment of the community.

IRRIGATION CHANNELS



District: **Kachi**
Balochistan

Background

District Kachi is situated 30 km from Quetta city in Balochistan. It has a population of 358,670, spread over an area of 11,114 square kilometers. The local languages are Balochi, Brahui, Saraiki and Sindhi. The major tribes residing in this area are Rind, Shahwani, Bunglazi, Raisani, Mughari, Abro, Mustoi, Magsi, Lashari, Domki, and Khoso. The climate of the area is mostly arid.

About 95 percent of the land in Kachi mainly depends upon the rains, which occur during May-June and December-January. Water comes down from areas such as Loralai, Ziarat, Mara, and Sehan, and joins in streams running to the Nari River. The main source of livelihood is agriculture and from rearing livestock.

The area of Kachi was once renowned for bringing in a high rate of revenue for the Khan of Kalat when it was part of the Kalat state. However, during 1958, when land holdings were reformed and later divided and allocated to poor individuals and middle class, the irrigation system was not managed efficiently, and repairs proved very costly for small landowners.

The irrigation system here refers to a system for distributing river water equally to each village when the water level is high. Each group of villages along the river constructs *kacha* dams or ‘*bunds*,’ thus

IRRIGATION CHANNELS

diverting the floodwater collected in the river to fields via streams or channels. The next group of villages situated downstream has a similar arrangement, and so forth. This method has been practiced here for decades. By constructing these dams, the people irrigate their land and store water for other needs. However, for the past many years, the channels used for conveying water were being neglected and floodwater was allowed to run down, only to be wasted.

The case

In Kachi, the affluent class eventually forced the poor to migrate to cities and other areas by also forcing purchase of their share of the land. The poor, having no financial support, were compelled to put up their land for sale and move out of the area. The upper middle class in the village of Chhalgari adopted similar methods. Same channels were shared by both classes but small landowners had little or no resources to repair them. Being dominant, the upper class neglected the construction of proper channels to irrigate their fields, as well as the fields and lands of the poor, in a final attempt to oust them. Sensing the negative designs and conspiracy of the feudal lords, some of the community members got together to form a CBO to thwart the harmful plans and ideas of the feudal community and take control of their own destiny.

Keeping these points in view, the CBO began by developing a project proposal for construction and repair of the irrigation channel leading from the river to Chhalgari's fields, and submitted it to SPO for funding in 1999. With funding of Rs. 400,000 from SPO's Social Sector Fund, and an additional Rs. 139,500 collected from the community, a *kacha* channel was constructed for this area the same year.

According to a socio-economic survey conducted by the CBO, the output achieved from the construction of the channel has not only exceeded their expectations, but has also added to the income of more than 1,000 families. Wastage of water has been protected, resulting in a substantial increase in income for the villagers by bringing 40,000 acres of previously unused farmland under cultivation. The visible benefits have brought back many of the residents who had earlier left the area to improve their deteriorating socio-economic conditions. They have returned to resume cultivating their lands and to rear livestock.

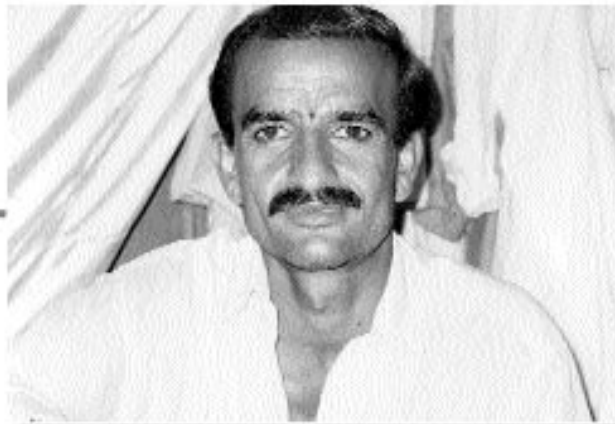
The construction and repair of this irrigation channel has benefited the villages financially, and has also helped SPO to gain access to indigenous knowledge on the type of irrigation methods used by the local people for 50 years. It has also led to encouraging awareness amongst the people and CBO members regarding their ability to work for the betterment and prosperity of their villages. The encouragement

IRRIGATION CHANNELS

received by the CBO from its community has convinced its members that they too can develop even larger and better project proposals in the future.

In addition, the result of this organized effort of the CBO sparked female interest in local development activities, since water is a major concern for the women of the area. Noting their interest, SPO started motivating females to participate and form member groups of their own, resulting in the formation of HANI Development Society. The charter of this society, comprising 46 women, is to promote income generation schemes and other activities for the development of the area.

**HYDERABAD DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATING ORGANIZATION**



Village: **Mohledino Mir Baher** District: **Hyderabad**
Sindh

Background

In a small village of Tando Jam, some 20 kilometers from Hyderabad, terror was unleashed on innocent people on the evening of 7th of April 2002. Tando Jam is named after a Jam Sahib belonging to a land owning family of Mirs. Other castes include Chandio, Memon, and Kumhar. People who settled here originally came from the surrounding areas of Nowshehro Feroz, Nawabshah, Larkana, and other villages in search of better work and educational opportunities. By occupation, the majority of the population is involved in agriculture and related tasks.

In this socio-economic scenario, the hold of feudal lords prevails over the area. Major resources of water, government jobs and land are largely controlled by the *waderas*. Inequal distribution of water through canals by the Irrigation Department is a common practice, as the officials indulge in corruption, favouring those who have enough financial resources to satisfy them.

A social worker called Abdul Latif, from village Mohledino Mir Baher was nominated as a candidate in local bodies polls held in 2001 for which a feudal was also contesting. According to the villagers electricity was disconnected to the polling station by certain men who were sent there by the *wadera*, and hundreds of illegal votes were caste.

The case

In this backdrop, a fateful incident occurred on the 7th of April 2002 in Mohledino Mir Baher. At 3 a.m., when people of the village were asleep and a few were in the mosque, policemen raided the village in large numbers. About nine police vehicles stopped in front of the mosque and asked the worshippers about the whereabouts of Abdul Latif, the man who had contested against the *wadera* in the elections. Meanwhile, the Station Head Officer (SHO) banged on the door of the house where Abdul Latif's brother, Shakoor Mallah, and his wife Zebunissa lived. He demanded the return of two criminals who had supposedly killed a police inspector in the past and were now hiding in the village. This was a false accusation, used as a means to avenge Abdul Latif's action.

Men, women and children were brutally battered as the policemen forced themselves into their houses. The people of the village were already depressed and emotionally charged due to their loss in the elections. Finally, some women mustered their courage and charged upon the policemen with wooden planks and other objects that they could get hold of. The policemen resorted to aerial firing to scare them, but the whole village became united against the attackers. This resistance forced the police to retreat after awhile. They left one of the sub-inspectors

behind who was in Zebunissa's house and whom the women were not letting out.

Meanwhile, Zebunissa, and a few injured women escaped to Hyderabad and started staging a protest in front of the Hyderabad Press Club. At the same time they contacted the Hyderabad Development Coordinating Organization (HDCO), a Tehsil level coalition of different CBOs, and informed them about the incident. By that time about forty four police vehicles and a Rapid Reaction Force unit returned to the village after the morning clash. This time each and every house was raided, doors were broken; eleven men were arrested and taken to the police station blaming them of giving refuge to the culprits.

The police stopped the atrocious acts of violence when Zebunissa returned to her village with media personnel from Hyderabad. Shakoor Mallah went into hiding in a near by village while Zebunissa's call to Hyderabad Development Coordinating Organization (HDCO) instigated a stream of corrective measures to solve the problem. As soon as the PDC members had been informed, they had started an organized advocacy campaign to bring the offenders against the law to justice, and help in the release of the arrested men. They protested in front of the Press Club for three days. During the protest, they also met 11 *Nazims* of the area. They protested in front of the District *Nazim's* house in Hyderabad,

HYDERABAD DEVELOPMENT COORDINATING ORGANIZATION

and actively associated the Sind journalist organization in the campaign. Almost 25 NGOs were contacted by HDCO through e-mails and faxes to inform them about the incident.

As a result of these efforts, the Deputy Superintendents Police (DSPs) of Mititari and Tando Allahyar were transferred. The false charges imputed on Shakoor Mallah and eleven others, of giving refuge to criminals, were also withdrawn and they were released.

During the entire episode, HDCO, which had received Development Planning and Management (*DPM*) training from SPO, played a highly effective role in securing justice for the community. It is widely acknowledged that the catastrophe which was suffered by the innocent people of the village because they had opposed the *waderas*, was averted through the prompt and organized help of the PDC.

KAUSAR

**Qasba: Jahan Khan District: Muzaffargarh
Punjab**

Background

Qasba Jahan Khan is located in Tehsil Kot Addu and District Muzaffargarh of Multan. The entire district was under the iron grip of feudal lords till about four years. Looking back in history to about three hundred years ago, the land was almost wholly owned by the British Government. The British started giving this land to the local people, who were in turn required to care for the cavalry and livestock needs of British forces. On the other hand, when people belonging to the Gurmani caste migrated here from Dera Ghazi Khan and Taunsa Shareef a few years later, they received some parts of the land as gifts from existing landlords in return for favours. Thus, landlords hailing from two different backgrounds gradually became the power holders in this area. No one could challenge their authority as they also entered into politics. Their rigid rule over the area derived its strength from the land that they owned, which, if sold to small farmers during elections, was snatched back without payment, after the need was fulfilled.

The case

Against this backdrop, a few men came together to create a community-based organization called Allah-o-Akbar. Being aware of the suppression that the people had faced for hundreds of years, the

organization wanted to work towards their betterment. In 1995, it came into contact with SPO. The members wanted to attend SPO's capacity building program but fell short of the organization's selection criteria, as the local people did not support them. Secondly, their organization was not gender balanced. In a socio-cultural environment where even men had faced difficulties in forming a CBO, it was hard to involve women in the capacity building training programme. Women belonging to the Baloch families residing in Jahan Khan rarely stepped out of their houses and were only heard, not seen.

However, to ensure women's participation, an influential personality of the area, Sayyed Badshah, and the Regional Director of the SPO Multan office met various Baloch families. They tried to convince them to let their women form a female organization, even though this act threatened the sustainability of Allah-o-Akbar. Gradually, the women were allowed to attend DPM training on the strict condition that the training will be held in Allah-o-Akbar's office rather than at a hotel because stringent stereotypes were attached to the idea of Baloch women going to public places like hotels. However, old women and men were also associated with the effort so that young women were eventually able to attend the training in Multan.

After the training, the CBO became convinced that only if similar organizations in surrounding villages were formed would the power of the feudal lords be broken. They started reaching out to people in nearby villages who were already surviving in poor socio-economic conditions. This effort prompted a mushroom growth of small community organizations in different villages. When the construction of a road leading to Jahan Khan was obstructed by the landlords of the area, all organizations, along with Allah-o-Akbar, applied pressure both on the feudals and government officials and were successful in ensuring completion of the road. The presence of a strong network of organizations deeply rooted in the communities and having the potential to break the authority of *waderas* was now evident. Similarly the organization's members fought for their mission of community development by making it clear to the religious personalities opposing them that their only goal was development. This became possible by also involving the *Pesh Imams* and local *maulvis* in their program.

During the elections held for devolution of power in 2001, a young girl, Kausar, was nominated for the seat of District Councillor from this area, and was elected as a result of good reputation of Kot Addu PDC that led her campaign. Now, she is actively participating in decision-making, which has elevated the status of women to some extent in this area.

Due to continuous efforts of the PDC, profound impact is visible in the socio-political and socio-cultural scenario. In all, 44 organizations have sprouted up since Allah-o-Akber's inception. This whole network is given much importance now by the feudals of the area who have adopted quite a humble attitude towards them as they visit their office frequently and show interest in collaborating with them on certain projects. Secondly, since the PDC in this area has won the seat of District Councillor for Kausar, the '*Bibi Culture*' within the feudal community has broken down, and the *waderas* are now obliged to nominate their wives and daughters in upcoming elections for seats reserved for women, which is their only lifeline determining their survival in the local political scenario. The most important social change which the people have witnessed is that now both men and women are together attending DPM training given by SPO, in contrast to the situation which did not allow the women to even go beyond the boundaries of their homes.

ARIF BALOCH



**Mauza: Ditta Baloch District: Bahawalpur
Punjab**

Background

Moving on the highway leading from Bahawalpur District to Karachi, some 17 kilometers towards the south, a thin muddy path branches out and meanders into *Mauza* Ditta Baloch. It comprises of a number of hamlets, and is situated on the borders of the mighty desert of Cholistan. The entire area is steeped in poverty and is also underdeveloped in literacy, health conditions, and various practices related to marriages and gender roles. Major castes living here are the Baloch, Bhatti, Kachi, Rana, and Arain. Young girls are tied into marital bonds at an early age and are condemned, along with their families, if they dare to become educated.

The case

In this community, there is a man whose perspective about gender roles and women's rights used to be a total contrast to his present, enlightened stance. Arif Baloch is a philanthropist by choice, and a homeopathic doctor and agriculturist by profession. Till two years back, he treated his wife as if she is someone created by God only to serve him and whose rightful place is only in the house. However, to quench his thirst to do welfare work for his community, he joined the Rural Women Welfare Organization.

ARIF BALOCH

In 2001, as a representative of the CBO, Arif Baloch got a chance to attend SPO's DPM training. Firstly, he learned about the rights that women have to access all opportunities that life offers, and the potential that they have to contribute in the development process. Secondly, he also observed how other women in the group were intelligently participating in the training. This triggered a change in his beliefs for the better.

In time, this experience brought about such a major change in his attitudes towards women that he made his wife learn how to drive the tractor. Now, his wife ploughs the fields without any hesitation. He has also trained her to prepare the pesticide mixture at home when he is away, so that his tenants can spray it on the crops on time. On the same principle of enabling women to participate in practical life, he is currently teaching his sister and cousin to drive a tractor. He is now of the view that women are also capable of understanding these tasks if they are explained to them properly.

Realizing the importance of women's health, Arif has also built a self-funded "Mother and Child Health Center" near *Mauza* Ditta Baloch, baking each and every brick with his own hands in a small oven. The structure now stands ready to be equipped with staff and medicines. In fact, understanding the right of women to education and self-actualization has transformed him into a new person altogether.

He has even convinced his father and uncle to return the piece of land belonging to her aunt, as she had registered a case against them many years ago in this regard.

To provide these rights to women in his own family, Arif had to bear expulsion from his house and was condemned by the *Jirga* as an “indecent” man who was letting his wife work in the fields with machines. But due to his changed attitude, he is at least struggling for the rights of women in his family, and those of the community, so that they can have access to opportunities of income generation and proper health facilities. They are being protected, respected and honoured by him. For the sake of their rights, he is ready to face any challenge that comes his way.

Arif says that if he had not been imparted the concepts by SPO about women’s positive role in the process of development, he would never have taken pains to help women achieve their just rights. Rather, he would himself have continued to undermine their potential till the day he lived, like many other men of his community.

NAJMA

Village: **Momin Khan** District: **Mardan**
NWFP

Background

Najma lives in a village known as Momin Khan Killi near the small town of Jalala, District Mardan in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Her large family comprises six sisters and five brothers. Since her childhood, her father has been involved in farming. Being a girl, and the eldest among her siblings, Najma had to discontinue her education after completing Class Eight because her parents thought her role to be more productive at home rather than at the school. Education for girls was not highly valued by them.

Belonging to a peasant family, she had to play her part in farming, like many other rural women. But for Najma, farming was not enough. She had a passion to do something else to support her family. She obtained admission at the vocational center of *Dar-ul-Falah*, and began learning how to make dresses for tailoring. After some time, she could sew dresses for dolls and babies. Working hard, she completed a one-year diploma course from the center. She was then able to stitch clothes for others and charged Rs. 50 per suit. Thus, stitching two to three suits a day increased her income, which she began contributing to support her family.

The case

Looking at the advantages of the training she had received, her parents realized her potential, and did not attempt to block her way when she became one of the founding members of the Sahara Women's Organization, Jalala. She was elected as the organization's finance secretary. Najma was very honest and with her leadership, the organization progressed with leaps and bounds. This is evident in the increase in membership from 40 to 400. Najma earned high respect for the skills that she had learnt, and she came up with the idea of setting up a vocational center under the flag of Sahara Women's Organization. When it was established, she was selected as a vocational instructor for the center and a large number of girls were admitted to this center. This gave Najma more confidence and after taking a loan of Rs.5,000, she started her own business of producing ready-made garments, recovering the entire amount of credit in a short time. With this amount, she set up a shop for her brother where he could sell commodities of daily use.

In 2001, when the local bodies elections were announced by the government, Najma came to know about, and understand the plan through seminars on devolution of power arranged by SPO in her village. She realized that if women hold influential political positions, they can affect the decision-making

process directly and can bring great benefits to other women of their community. By now she had gained great respect and the trust of the community due to her integrity and hard work. She took her family members into confidence and decided to contest in the elections. Although many problems, especially propaganda from local *maulvis*, arose to break her campaign, she did not lose hope, as she had the full support from her family. She submitted her papers for nomination and was ultimately elected as a Union Councillor.

Having a strong belief in education and skills, Najma proudly stands on the citadel of success today. All her energies and ambitions have found a rewarding destination, from where she can deliver services to many in need while sustaining her roots in the community. She is glad that she came to know about the advantages of participating actively in the political process at the right time, through information provided by SPO at various seminars that she attended. Presently, Najma is delivering training on making squashes and pickles to the women of the organization.

**YOUNG ITTEHAD
TARAQIATI TANZEEM**



**Village: Nawan Sheher District: Khanewal
Punjab**

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Background

A town committee of ‘Nawan Sheher,’ meaning “new city”, developed almost 1 kilometer away from Kabeerwala in District Khanewal as a Sayyed family came to settle here, more than 50 years ago. Initially known as Basti Lal Shah, it expanded into a town as the Sayyeds started selling land at low rates. The area now hosts various castes, such as Sahu, Sial, Chatar, Bhatti, Bhutta, Rajput, Khokher, and Arain, as they came to settle here from surrounding villages and towns.

Nawan Sheher is devoid of dispensaries and the women of the area were ignorant of hygiene practices to maintain good health. In case of serious health problems, their only source of help was the hospital in Kabeerwala city. Women tended not to spend on their health, even when there was need, because of lack of adequate financial resources.

The case

Born in this socioeconomic scenario, a local CBO called Young Ittehad Taraqati Tanzeem, got the opportunity to attend Development Planning and Management (DPM) training, which was being imparted by SPO as part of its capacity building initiatives in Kabeerwala in 2001. During the training it learnt about development concepts and

mobilization of local resources to achieve certain goals. Even before it was given *choti* funding to conduct a project, as part of the training, it was asked by the trainers to initiate a project on self-help basis in its town.

The initial knowledge acquired during the training sparked enthusiasm among the CBO members, who decided to start an income generation project for women of the area so that they could spend their earnings on their health. Together, the members began pooling Rs. 10 per day, raised funds from the community, and collected Rs. 20 each from the organization's General Body members.

Earlier, the CBO had been involved in a micro credit scheme for local women in collaboration with an NGO called PIEDAR. In this project, the members had met a beneficiary, Shahzadi, who had utilized her loan to stitch undergarments and got a good return. She was hired by the CBO to train two of its own female members in this craft. Once their training was complete, the CBO used the collected funds to set up a training center in the town, buy one stitching machine, and start training other girls of the area.

The business thrived to such an extent that the products are now being supplied to markets in Bahawalpur and Multan at the rate of Rs. 70 per dozen, saving Rs. 10 per dozen. The center is now in

search of bigger markets, as its production is increasing day by day as more and more women graduate and become ready to work.

Having started from only one stitching machine, the CBO is now running the center with three machines. This has not only trained about 15 women in one year, it has also provided the graduates with income generation opportunities which have had a positive effect on their households. Thus, a small seed of knowledge cultivated by the trainers has grown into a huge tree, providing shelter to many women in the community.

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BILSUM

Village: **Moola** District: **Khuzdar**
Balochistan

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Background

Moola is located 60 kilometers east of District Khuzdar in Balochistan. The area consists of 30 to 40 villages and hamlets in a valley that stretches about 90 kilometers in length, and yet the population is only about 15,000 in total. Under the suppressive centuries-old system of feudal and tribal hierarchies, the area is characterized as the most backward place in the region. Local leadership is more concerned with its own vested interests than the problems faced by the common people.

The case

In such a dismal state of circumstances, people lost the freedom to grasp various opportunities to improve their living conditions. Unable to bear the suppression, a time came when some far-sighted people arranged to have their children educated by using all possible local resources. This was the start of a revolution, which then proceeded for some years. These young students realized over a period of time that self-help is the only solution to their problems, as the feudal and tribal chieftain systems will never favour the interests of the common people. They knew that the tribal chiefs would never want to free them from the shackles of their dependence.

Once this realization came, these educated youths

BILSUM

began to organize themselves and work in their different villages for the enhancement of education and development in other sectors. However, in each village of Moola, there was a separate struggle going on and the small groups were not being able to make the desired impact, being unaware how the others were working. There was a dire need to unite them. As they were all pursuing a common goal, in time, they came together to form a united platform called “Bilsum”, a Brahvi word, meaning rainbow.

Though united under “Bilsum”, they had no skills to build this forum into a strong organization. Knowing that there was no way that the elite of the area were going to help them, they decided to look for help from external sources. In the period 2000-2001, SPO had started the process of group formation in the district to impart training for capacity building. “Bilsum” saw this as an excellent opportunity and entered into partnership with SPO. Through this partnership programme, “Bilsum” received a series of training courses that enriched members with a thorough understanding of development concepts. The members came to know about the institutional aspects of a formal organization, including management; qualities and role of leadership, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects, etc. Soon after this performance-based training, “Bilsum” emerged on the landscape of Moola as a very strong organization.

The leadership of “Bilsum” knew that charity begins at home and they started reaching people at household and hamlet levels. Local disputes were solved internally instead of going to the tribal chief for a ruling. This saved plenty of money, energy and time. They motivated people to believe in themselves, and think and act wisely to solve their own problems, which was necessary to build up their capacity and self-confidence.

During this awareness campaign by “Bilsum”, the government announced the local bodies’ elections. “Bilsum” responded quickly and started convincing people through local campaigns about the importance of using each individual vote and about the positive change that can be brought about with its right use. “Bilsum” knew that this was the only chance to weaken the power of the chieftains. Although they had limited resources, the common people were with them, and announced their opposition to the tribal chieftain system. As a result of this organized campaign, 19 members of “Bilsum” were elected in the Tehsil Council. The *Nazim* and Deputy *Nazim* of the area also belonged to “Bilsum”. By electing these members, the community has helped to completely change the socio-political environment of the area. During the election campaign, everybody came to know about “Bilsum” and even religious leaders have now agreed to support it.

BILSUM

The president of “Bilsum” recalls that during DPM training they learnt many lessons. Among several exercises, he gives credit to “Blind Walk,” which made him realize the crucial role of a leader, and how an inefficient leader can ruin the entire community whereas a wise leader is often a key to success. Throughout the election campaign, a quote that he often recalled from his training was that “A leader should be strong like a fort.” This acted as an energizer for him and the organization while they fought against the feudal competitors.

Similar organizations take many years to reach a level of maturity, while “Bilsum” reached success in a short period of time. The inputs provided to them through SPO’s capacity building training programme helped them to shape their scattered efforts into a formal organization and also brought about a major shift in the local power structure for the betterment of the people. In the words of “Bilsum’s” president, “SPO’s dedication and commitment to small organizations is incredible and worth appreciating, as new paths of success have been introduced to the vulnerable groups.”

KHATTAK ISLAHI TANZEEM

Village: **Spin Kanay Kallan** District: **Nowshera**
NWFP

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Background

At the foot of the Cherat Mountains lies a village called Spin Kanay Kallan. This is a rain-fed area that has a vast expanse of grazing land. Most people in the village depend upon their livestock for survival and profit. Goats constitute the main source of income, as well as milk for household use.

The case

In this village, some local people came together to form a CBO to eradicate various problems regarding livestock and to conduct activities that could contribute to the development of the area. They named the organization: the ‘Khattak Islahi Tanzeem.’

When SPO came to this village, it selected the ‘Khatak Islahi Tanzeem’ for its capacity building program because of its potential to grow into a stronger alliance, and because the enthusiasm among its members to make a commitment to the community. During the DPM training, the CBO was asked to identify and prioritize the problems faced by the community and come up with possible options for the most urgent problems to be solved.

At that time, the village was struck by an epidemic of

livestock diseases, due to which almost 352 heads had perished within three months. The people were helpless in front of this natural calamity, which was gradually snatching away the limited security in their lives. The organization's members decided to address this problem. In this regard, they were advised by the trainers to contact the Department of Livestock and Animal Husbandry for help. When the members relayed their request to this Department, it responded by sending experts to the area for assessment of the situation and diagnosis of livestock diseases. The Department conducted a detailed study, but the hopes of the villagers were crushed when they came to know that it could only offer technical support – it could not provide medicines. Their apprehension about the survival of their only lifeline for economic stability was grave.

When a follow-up session of the DPM training course was held in this area, an exercise was conducted with the CBO for resource identification and mobilization. Through this exercise, the members learnt how to tap the local resources for need-satisfaction if external support was unavailable. As it was too late for the treatment of the livestock already infected with the epidemic, the CBO suggested the idea of vaccinating the rest on a self-help basis. The CBO identified two volunteers who opted to obtain training as Livestock Extension

Workers. Consulting the Department of Livestock and Animal Husbandry, they struck a deal to acquire medicines for Rs. 10,000, acquired as *choti* funding from SPO, which were to be used for vaccination of their livestock. The CBO was linked with the Animal Husbandry Department's 'In-service Training Institute' for a one-month intensive training of volunteers in extension services. After completing the training, the volunteers were provided space by the community to open an extension services dispensary where people could obtain easier access to their services. Charged with fervour, the volunteers took up the Herculean task of vaccinating all livestock heads in the area. Loudspeakers were used to disseminate information to protect the animals from deadly diseases. Along with the provision of services, the volunteers tried to educate people about the importance and cost effectiveness of vaccination as compared to treatment after the infection had spread.

The dispensary has since then been running on a self-help basis, sustaining the stock of medicines and vaccines with willing contributions from the community. A positive change that has come about in this area is that before this intervention, people did not recognize the problem of cattle perishing from diseases as one that could be solved. Rather, they accepted this as the "Will of God". Outdated

methods which people grappled with for treating the animals were of no help. Now, due to increased awareness about the importance of vaccination, the livestock mortality rate has considerably decreased, resulting into increased economic security for the community.

ISHRAT PERVEEN



Village: **Kachi Paind Khan** District: **D.I.Khan**
NWFP

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Background

Situated near the city of Dera Ismail Khan is a village called Kachi Paind Khan. Due to its proximity to the city, the village enjoys basic amenities of life, and people have access to water, electricity, telecommunication, and postal services. However, ever since the village came into being, there has been a notable absence of proper educational institutes for both boys and girls. Until 1999 there was only one government school, situated at quite a distance from the village, where people hesitated to send their children, especially girls and to avoid the expenditure on uniform and monthly fees. Moreover, the villagers are still living in the shadows of age-old customs by which there are early marriages of girls and '*watta satta*'. These factors combined had caused a low enrolment of children, especially girls, at the government school.

The case

In this village lives a woman called Ishrat Parveen. She was her parents' only daughter and had just reached class eight when she was wedded to her cousin and started bearing children. Her desire to study was lost somewhere in time as she was handed the responsibility to run the house and take care of her children. However, the spark of passion in her to become educated did not burn out with time. Rather,

ISHRAT PERVEEN

it manifested itself in her sustained efforts to educate her own children. Her elder son has now completed his masters in education, and daughter is studying for her Matriculation. A woman of substance, Ishrat has never felt awkward in acquiring education from her own children, since they have achieved major milestones in their education.

When her children were young, the local people asked her to teach their children at home. Having a supportive husband, she consented, and started giving local children religious education along with teaching other subjects. As her son grew up, he also taught the girls of their neighbors in *purdah* i.e. they sat in a room separated by a curtain.

In time, Ishrat received an offer to teach Class Five in a school situated in Thoya Fazil, a nearby village. There, she found out one day in 1998 that SPO in collaboration with the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) is establishing primary schools for girls offering free education under the name of Ammal Project in areas that do not have schools in the vicinity. These schools did not demand any uniform and were to provide children with schoolbooks, free of charge.

Upon learning this, Ishrat went to Mohiyar, a place where one of the Ammal schools was being set up, and obtained all the details regarding the project. She

convinced the Ammal team that her village was also devoid of educational facilities for girls and needed a school. Once her village was identified by the Ammal team, as being in need of a school, she offered a part of her own house for the classes to be held.

While the school was being established, Ishrat received training in Lahore, alongwith other teachers involved in the project, in which she learnt various techniques to impart education to young children. The techniques involved teaching with puppets, pictorial charts, and models made of clay.

She then embarked on a journey to success. In 1999, she started operating the school, with the name of “Aks-e-Noor” under the Ammal Project. The number of children, including both boys and girls, increased to 70 in 6 months and when it reached 100, one of her cousins donated his house in the village to expand the school premises. Now in 2002, the number of students has increased to 150.

When some of the girls at “Aks-e-Noor” completed Class Five and were to take admission in government schools for Class Six, the issue of acquiring uniforms for them was again raised by their parents. Through her training, Ishrat had learnt that small solutions could make a big difference. She was not going to let her students’ education go waste on a petty issue. Her

ISHRAT PERVEEN

fervour and training helped her conceive the idea of teaching the girls to make paper flowers, an art she herself had learnt in her youth. Hand-made flowers in vibrant hues were sold by the girls for Rs.1 each. Selling bouquets of 20 flowers enabled them to earn Rs.20 from each household. The girls raised enough money this way and were able to buy uniforms for their new school, thus preventing the financial burden of their education from falling on their parents' shoulders. As a result, the enrolment of young girls, both at the government school and the Ammal school, has increased considerably.

Ishrat Parveen is not only involved in the development of her village but is like a burning torch that has brightened the paths of many with the light of education. Due to her efforts, the enthusiasm for the education of children has increased. Being given a little opportunity to run the school gave her motivation an impetus, and the school, even after withdrawal of external funding in 2001, has become self-sustaining.

HUMAIRA

Village: New Moosa Khar District: D.I.Khan
NWFP

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Background

Some 17 kilometers from Dera Ismail Khan city, there is a village called New Moosa Khar, which spreads on a wide expanse of land. More than 25 years ago, the dwellers of this village were settled close to the mighty Indus River. At that time, natural calamities in the form of floods inundated the village and displaced the survivors for months, till the government gave them the present land to inhabit. Since then their new settlement is called New Moosa Khar.

The village is dominated by the Baloch caste, which constitutes the majority. Most of the people are involved in agriculture, cultivating wheat, rice, sugarcane, lentils, and corn. A few villagers are engaged in government service, while some own local shops. No traditional feudal system prevails here. However, the people are entangled in the customs of *watta satta* and child marriages. Rigid customs have marred the lives of young girls who have to bear the negative consequences of these cultural norms.

The case

In 1998, the village was chosen by the Ammal Project of SPO being run in collaboration with British Government's Department for International Development for establishment of a primary school for girls. The schools aimed at providing education

HUMAIRA

free of cost, where children would not have to wear uniforms and books and accessories would be provided for. The children would only have to arrange notebooks to write on. In a village where people considered education unnecessary for girls, the school survived with much difficulty.

Humaira comes to teach in this school from a neighbouring village. Hailing from an educated family, Humaira has qualified with a matric certificate. She joined the school against immense objections from her family, as New Moosa Khar is well known for its backwardness and rigid customs. In 2000, she attended a teachers' training arranged by the DFID, first in Peshawar and later, in Dera Ismail Khan. After the training, she realized that children could be taught and motivated through various techniques.

It was her dream that the children who came to her school should be clad in neat uniforms, like children who go to schools in the city. For her, it was important because she thought it would bring discipline to their lives. Secondly, as the children used to come to school in dirty clothes everyday, it did not give a positive impression to visitors. But, she was afraid that, by introducing uniforms, she might disrupt the program or offend the parents. The task of broaching the idea was nothing less than perilous because, in this school, parents often withdraw their children as even the single responsibility of buying notebooks falls heavy on their shoulders.

However, when Humaira discussed this idea with the programme coordinator of the Ammal Project in Dera Ismail Khan, she received great encouragement. According to her, this encouragement was all the support she needed to pursue her idea. She asked all her students to contribute by the “committee” of 1 rupee daily to create a collective rotatable fund. She made every effort to convince the parents to cooperate in this regard, after which, 70 out of 125 children started contributing, and Humaira started maintaining records of the fund collected. After three months, enough money was collected, and she herself subsidized the amount that was needed to buy the cloth for the uniforms. She herself stitched the uniforms, taking help from her family members when required.

Now, when one enters the school, children dressed in smart blue and white uniforms can be seen sitting in each classroom, among whom can also be seen the presence of Humaira radiating both humility and pride in her achievement.

In a socio-cultural milieu where parents are not even willing to send their girls to school or buy their notebooks, it is a great achievement for Humaira to be able to make her dream come true. Thus, a little encouragement and training has made her zeal accomplish what seemed impossible to others.

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LAL JAN

Village: **Nasirabad** District: **Kech**
Balochistan

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Background

Turbat, a land of desert tract, sharp rocky mountains, deep ravines, and pebbly ground that is scattered with oases dense with date palms—is located in Mekran Division. With a population of almost 475,000, District Ketch includes the beautiful land of Turbat. The topography of Turbat is also characterized by a series of underground wells, dug close to each other, visible in the wide expanse of barren land that stretches from one end to another. These are locally known as the '*karez*'.

A metal road from Turbat city leads towards a village called Nasirabad, some 40 kilometers away. Here, Balochis form the major castes, while Darzada, Gichki, Ghulam, Rais and Nowsherwani are smaller groups, representing the ethnic composition of the area. The village is an oasis: as it is approached, soft dusty moulds of sand dunes form a canvas on which date palms grow, grouped together in small gardens separated by mud walls. Planted by the inhabitants, the dates form the major cash crop, although they yield little return in the current water shortage. Flocks of sheep and goat roam about in search of shrubbery. They are the rest of the lifeline of the villagers, who have little income from other sources.

The case

This village is where Lal Jan grew up, informally taught by a female relative up to Class Two, some 30 years ago. In those days, female education was an alien concept for most people in the area. Since early marriages are deeply ingrained in the Baloch culture, Lal Jan was married at the age of only 14 to become a widow just eight years later. When she moved back with her parents, her only asset was her son. She tried to support his studies by stitching clothes and adorning them with embroidery for women who came to her from the city for this purpose.

In 1995, a few people came to this village from Turbat city and invited the girls and women of the village, and motivated them to form a group called '*Anjuman Zanana Taleem*' (AZTs) (meaning, organization for female education). These people were the team of SPO's Village Education Program (VEP). They motivated the women to collectively work for the enhancement of adult female literacy in the village by operating schools through AZTs. Members of the AZTs were convinced to initiate the process of education in the area by joining the schools themselves. As Lal Jan was honoured and respected by everyone and supported by her family, she was chosen as the president of the *Anjuman*. This was the beginning of a new life. She vacated a room of her own house for the school and joined the primary level classes. Although she and other

women were teased by men in the streets about obtaining education in their adult age, they never lost hope. After completing her education up to primary level from the school, she appeared in the exam of Class Eight, and later, for Matric from a government school in the village. Now, she is privately completing her First Year in college.

The initial thrust which was provided to her by VEP yielded many rewards for her, improving her socio-economic conditions step by step. On the basis of her qualification, she was selected as a Lady Health Worker (LHW) for the Family Planning Program of the government, in which capacity she is now earning Rs. 1,600 per month. Other women who wanted to become LHWs in this village were allowed to do so by the men only because Lal Jan was also in this profession. She and many others who completed primary education from the adult literacy school are now getting their children educated and can confidently monitor their progress in school. They can also help teach them, if required.

Lal Jan's determination and education has enabled her to progress far in life and molded her into a beacon of light for others. She says that if she had not grasped the hand of VEP, she would still have been fighting a losing battle against socio-economic deprivation, which keeps women forever disadvantaged.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT



Village: **Razgir Banda** District: **Kohat**
NWFP

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Background

On a sunny day in August 2000, the project staff of the Early Childhood Care and Development programme, being operated by SPO in collaboration with Unicef, was holding a meeting with parents, community activists, local trainers and care givers, in a village called Razgir Banda, near District Kohat. They are usually called Community Promoters. The stages of growth and development of children from birth to two years were being described by the trainers.

The case

Suddenly, a child started crying loudly and disturbed the meeting. Ironically, the topic being discussed just then was how to soothe a crying child. The child's mother, however, frustrated at not being able to control the child, started hitting the six-month old girl, slapping her hard which disturbed the child even more and made her wail even louder.

One of the Promoters, Mrs. Amraiz, decided to take charge of the matter and took the girl in her arms and started soothing her, using the tips they had just learnt. The child became instantly calm and started interacting with this Promoter. Hence, what was being discussed was practically demonstrated, and the rest of the women present commented that they

did not believe a child could be soothed by using the methods being mentioned until they had seen this process with their own eyes.

The same day during the meeting, a six-year-old boy returned from school with his head bleeding due to an injury. After listening to him and giving him the necessary first-aid, it was found that a schoolteacher had hit him. The child was shaking with fear and the bitterness showed in his eyes. The project staff asked parents present if they planned on taking some action. The horror of seeing the bleeding child was too compelling and the parents vowed to form a group to intervene and stop the prevalence of violence in schools.

Subsequently, realizing that violence was an issue in these areas, a sample survey was conducted by the programme staff to probe into the child rearing practices of the Promoters themselves. The results were not very encouraging, though the Promoters were not expected to entirely reflect the practices and views of the whole community, because they are the selected few that are more educated and aware than the rest. However, they are representatives of their communities the survey was intended to give a basic idea about local child rearing beliefs and practices. Although the survey revealed Promoters' understanding of, and insights into, child psychology and parental practices, there were still some surprises. A staggering 35 percent of the participants

thought that beating children had positive effects on their personalities. Overall, the responses showed that parents did not frequently bestow affection upon their children. Beating or insulting them in front of others was not thought of as abuse. Instead, in some instances, these modes of behaviour were defined as methods necessary for the good socialization of children. Most importantly, 99 percent of the participants admitted that they often took out their anger and frustration on their children in the form of verbal abuse and physical beating.

It was clear from these findings that the Promoters, as well as the community, through these Promoters, needed training on the subject of violence and disciplinary abuse. Thus, a training course was designed and conducted in which the Promoters were asked to identify issues of violence in homes, especially those concerning children, the roots of this violence, and the negative impacts that ensue. Together, the participants were encouraged to explore the dynamics involved, and the measures that need to be taken to eradicate these negative habits, and find positive and proactive methods to raise mentally, psychologically, socially, and physically healthy children. Suggestions and techniques were discussed for conscientious, effective, and beneficial disciplining of children, alongwith tips on how to deal with anger. Voluntary and involuntary abuse was discussed at length, including deliberation as well as the newly

recognized injury that is referred to as “shaken baby syndrome” which has devastating effects.

After the training course, the Promoters were quite moved and said that they themselves had changed considerably, and their attitudes were now more positively inclined towards their children. They identified their previous misconceptions and negative attitudes and were convinced that their behaviour should be modified. They also imparted the knowledge they had acquired through this training to people in their respective villages and were successful in reaching out to more than 5,000 care-givers with these messages.

Disciplining children is a hard task that is often frustrating and anger-provoking, and violence may lead to unhappy consequences for the victim as well as the perpetrator. However, if the caregivers resort to proper techniques of socializing children, positive psycho-social growth can be enhanced. SPO made a small but vital contribution to help bring smiles to the faces and hearts of the children in Razgir Banda, Kohat.

This collection of case studies from the field reflects SPO's approach in helping realize its vision of sustainable development where the 'disadvantaged' participate at all levels. The diversity of the people involved – women, men, children, groups from all over Pakistan – and their endeavours, strengthens our commitment to facilitate the process of empowerment.

Ferida Sher

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and former Chairperson 2000*

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Price Rs. 150