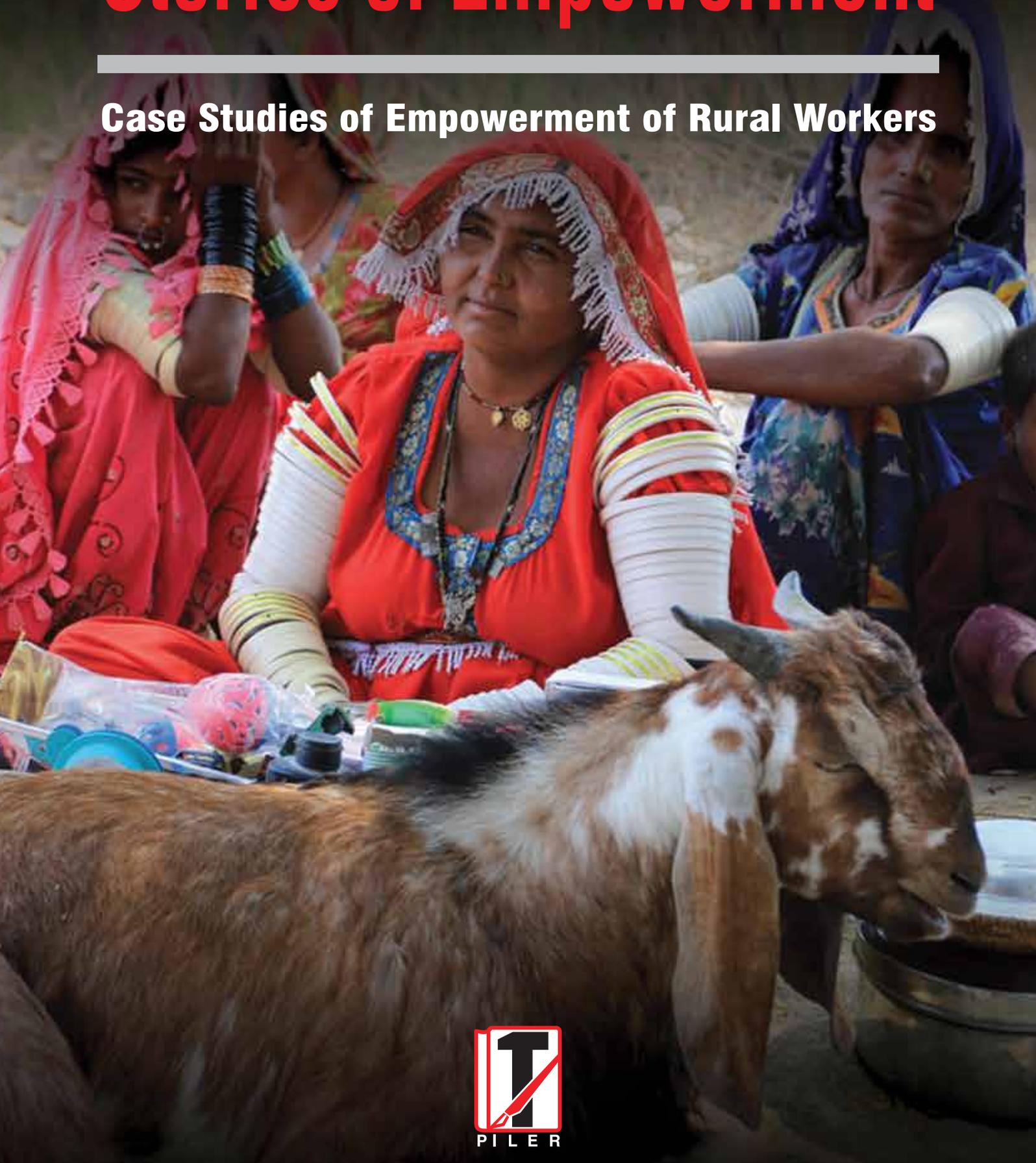

Stories of Empowerment

Case Studies of Empowerment of Rural Workers



Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research

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2015



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Contents:

Foreword	01
Organizations Working In Rural Sindh	02
Context: Rural Sindh	04
Case Studies	
Showing Farmers the Way Ahead	08
Fighting the Odds	18
Breaking the Shackles of Bondage	27
Mobilization of Rural Workers	37

Foreword

With a dismal performance in the human development Pakistan is also lagging behind in almost all the targets under the Millennium Development Goals till 2015.

But the situation in the Sindh province is quite worrisome in the human resource development. For many years Sindh has been suffering from chronic poverty; not only is most of its population incredibly poor, it is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters, especially floods. The rural economy of Sindh is adversely affected by inequitable access to productive means, especially land and water. The rural population, by and large, is excluded from citizenship rights, including the most fundamental rights like access to safe drinking water, sewerage system, education, healthcare facilities and social protection. This is a result of a toxic combination of inept governance, lack of resources and widespread corruption in the governing bodies.

The majority of the agriculture land in Sindh is owned by small elite, who does not only own fertile land, but dominates the provincial as well as national politics. At the same time a large number of peasant farmers are forced to work on the land under informal sharecropping agreements, where exploitation and bonded labour is rampant. None of the previous land reforms have been able to redress the imbalances in land ownership in Sindh.

Unfortunately, the population in Sindh is fragmented on the basis of religion, caste, creed and class, which also hampers any mobilisation effort. In this dismal situation PILER and other rights-based civil society organisations in Sindh have been striving hard to mobilize rural workers about their livelihood and citizenship rights. These efforts, while scattered and conducted on a small-scale, nevertheless sometimes bring about positive results. At least eight civil society organizations of Sindh are currently engaged in the implementation of a livelihood project, supported by Trociare. The small projects of these organisations have provided an impetus to the rural population for bringing some improvement in their lives by adopting innovative methods and taking support from existing legal and social structures.

Besides PILER, these organizations include Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), Research and Development Foundation (RDF), The Root Work Foundation (RWF), Participatory Development Initiative (PDI), Green Rural Development Organisation (GRDO), Indus Resource Centre (IRC) and Bhandar Hari Sangat (BHS). This publication covers the cases studies based on the work of four organizations involved in this project (the rest of the organizations could not be included here because of limited time, scope and funds). The stories included in this publication depict the zeal and the hard work of rural workers who require only training and a little funding in order to change their lives for the better.

We are grateful to senior author Salman Rashid for writing three case studies, who traveled from Lahore to Mirpurkhas, Umerkot and Dadu districts to meet the people who have brought some positive changes in their lives. We are also thankful to the senior journalist Jan Khaskheli for writing a case study of the Umerkot district.



Shujauddin Qureshi

Organizations in Rural Sindh

Trocaire

Trócaire, an Irish civil society organisation, works in over 20 countries throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Trócaire delivers support through local partner organisations helping communities and families to free themselves from the oppression of poverty. In Ireland, Trocaires raises awareness about the causes of poverty through outreach programmes in the education sector, through parish networks, and through public campaigns and advocacy work. In Pakistan, Trocaire provides financial and technical support to a number of civil society organizations.

Research and Development Foundation (RDF)

The organization was established and registered in the year 2002 at Hyderabad with the objective to innovate social solutions against long standing problems through action research and creating impacts on lives and livelihoods of the less privileged sections of the society. The organization was established by young and energetic development professionals who believed in values of transparency, accountability and equality. The organization started its operations as a volunteer effort in its formative phase but later on since 2008 it started implement development projects in collaboration with funding agencies and humanitarian organizations. The RDF currently works in seven districts of Sindh in three main areas -- livelihood and disaster relief and rehabilitation; climate change; and education and skill enhancement.

Green Rural Development Organization (GRDO)

Green Rural Development Organization (GRDO) was established in 1997 by politically motivated peasant and labour workers striving for labour and human rights of peasants and agriculture workers in rural areas of Sindh Province of Pakistan. GRDO is member based democratic, not-for-profit organization which believes in democracy and empowering the women, peasants, kiln workers, labourers of informal sector and victimized

indigenous religious minority groups. GRDO's vision is "Discrimination Free Society with Equal Rights for All". Its mission is to work with participatory approach by motivating, mobilizing and organizing people to fight for their rights.

Bhandar Hari Sangat

Founded in 1999, Bhandar Hari Sangat (BHS) is engaged in organizing and mobilizing working people of rural Sindh—tenant farmers, wage workers, small growers and all working men and women. The BHS strives to empower its constituency through awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying, capacity building, research and networking.

Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER)

PILER established in 1982 as a not-for-profit, citizen sector organization, focuses on research, training and advocacy in the areas of labour rights, social justice, human development, regional solidarity and peace. In the 33 years since its inception, PILER has aimed to promote a democratic and effective labour movement and link it up with larger social movements and other dynamic streams of society. PILER is head quartered in Karachi and works through and in collaboration with local and national NGOs in the four provinces.

Context: Rural Sindh

With a population nearing 60 million, half of which occupies the two major cities of Karachi and Hyderabad, Sindh is the only province with a rural population in the minority. Research conducted by PILER shows that among this rural population 50 per cent of the available arable land is held by just 5 per cent of the population. This land is worked by landless peasants as seriously underpaid daily wage-earning labourers. It is not just the landless peasants that earn less than a living wage;

underpaying is endemic. Whether they till the land or work on brick kilns or as unskilled labourers, the poor of Sindh receive well below what they deserve.

Unsurprisingly, rural Sindh rates poorly on indicators such as food insecurity, landlessness, unemployment, child labour, registration for social security institutions like EOBI, gender discrimination, health issues and education. The circumstances are exacerbated by the natural disadvantages directly resulting from global climate change: most of the time Sindh faces either drought conditions or extreme flooding triggered by excessive rain.



The main issues facing Sindh's rural poor are:

- Poor access to resources like land and water because of the failure of land reform legislation that began with the Sindh Tenancy Act 1950. Three further land reform initiatives undertaken in 1959, 1972 and 1977 failed because of the strong and persistent feudal structure and the unholy cabal of feudal lords and corrupt bureaucracy.
- Famine and food insecurity.
- Debt bondage.
- Vulnerability arising out of climate change.
- Poor access to civic amenities, such as education, health, clean drinking water and shelter.

Categories of the rural poor falling under this focus include:

- Small-scale male and female farmers
- Landless peasants
- Fisherfolk
- Bonded labourers
- Rural women
- Youth



Stories of Empowerment

Research and Development Foundation
(RDF)

Showing Farmers the Way Ahead

Travails of the Tail-Enders



Multi-cropping in a vegetable patch with three creepers staggered with two plants has shown how already scarce water can be judiciously used for a far greater yield than mono-culture.

The elongated rectangle of Dadu district is bordered on the east by the Indus and on the west by the craggy Khirthar Mountains. The upper half of the district, especially the western segment below the mountains, is watered by the Dadu Canal taking off from the Indus at Sukkur and its several branches; the lower portion takes some water from seasonal streams and the remaining from the Indus.

In effect, therefore, only part of the district is canal-irrigated. Areas outside canal command are watered by sub-soil water drawn by tube wells. However, even in canal-irrigated areas, water is an uncertain issue. The endemic and ever-present problem is reduced availability of water at the tail of most branch canals and distributaries. This is mainly due to large scale water theft by the rich and powerful who hold large tracts of agricultural land. The small farmer and sharecropper with no voice in any official forum suffer the most as a consequence. Additionally, since the soil in canals is highly porous, unlined canals lose a great deal of precious water due to seepage.

Since rains are infrequent and unpredictable, most water-deprived farmers have taken to irrigating by the more expensive diesel or electric tube wells. However, the subsoil water in the district is brackish. Any water drawn from the aquifer therefore slowly turns the soil saline. Over the past four decades, the practice of tube well irrigation has led to high salinity in once fertile farmland, rendering the land infertile. The inescapable result is growing food insecurity.

The Floods

In the following year, 2011, lower Sindh experienced sustained and heavy rainfall in August. What was taken as a boon when the first drops fell soon became calamity. As the river rose, canals overflowing from the incessant rainfall suffered breaches to flood standing crops. Where there was neither river nor canal to flood ripening fields, the deluge pouring out of leaden skies did the damage. Once again land that had barely been made cultivable after the previous year's flooding went under with standing crops.



Village Dhani Buksh Khosa, the RDF target village in Dadu district.

For two consecutive years, Sindh was buffeted by floods. In 2010, unprecedented rainfall in the Indus catchment sent a wall of water racing down the river that did not subside for over a week. Not only was the wide floodplain of the river submerged, vast agricultural tracts on both banks were also inundated. The crops on these lands which, at that time were sugar cane and ripening cotton, went underwater. Though the water receded in about three months, the land was not cultivable for an equal period thereafter.

The small farmers and sharecroppers of Dadu district followed the same pattern as elsewhere: with the exception of one or two elderly men remaining at home, all able-bodied men migrated to urban centres to work as unskilled labour. Once again, when the water receded, the land was not immediately cultivable but had to remain fallow for about three months. Consequently, besides the loss of standing crops, much of the land was unfit for the next sowing of wheat in December 2011. Only in midsummer 2012 did work become available for the farming community.

The RDF Project

Established in 2008, RDF became the implementing partner for Trocaire in Dadu district. The three objectives of this partnership (Strengthening and Diversifying Livelihood, June 2013–June 2015) were:

- To improve the livelihood of water-deprived farming and non-farming communities.
- To improve water management, protect natural resources and improve ecological practices.
- To undertake advocacy for raising awareness.

Field surveys prior to the training sessions showed that after over half a century of relying on means of cultivation introduced during the so-called Green Revolution, the farmer had forgotten traditional knowledge. As part of the project, Farmer Field Schools were established. These schools returned farmers to eco-friendly practices by illustrating how multi-cropping is economically and environmentally more advantageous than the prevalent monoculture. However, a rigid mindset and fear of trying anything new prevented ready acceptance of this new knowledge. Specially designed manuals for vegetable and wheat farming were used to aid farmers in understanding the importance of such practices.

Within a year 504 farmers were trained through the 'learning by doing' method to improve their agricultural practices. Moreover, motivation and awareness raising campaigns helped connect farmers to government line departments. Interestingly, small farmers were universally unaware of the several facilities they could avail on demand from the Department of Agriculture. Once they were made aware, they were surprised at the ease with which services could be acquired at reasonable cost.

As well as the above, training in micro-enterprise development for the poor prepared future entrepreneurs in business development, preparing business plans, carrying out marketing surveys and setting up a business anew. By March 2015, 200 beneficiaries having duly undergone the five-day enterprise development and business planning training sessions were transferred assets to begin or enhance their respective businesses.

The social mobilisation component brought about a sea change in community life in the village of Dhani Buksh Khosa. The formation of the community organisation (CO) gave the village its first taste of collectivism. Approaching the BHP Oil Company, the CO tapped into the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to secure a potable water point for the village in 2014. Until installation of this facility the community had to make do with contaminated brackish water. Under the CSR programme, the oil company also provided the village with a dispensary, its first health facility.

Challenges

- Due to a fear of failure, farmers hesitated to venture into the untried method of multi-cropping. It took considerable effort to convince them to give it a try.
- Since land owners and not their sharecroppers are decision makers in crop patterns, it was doubly difficult to convince owners to give the proposed method a try.
- A few multi-cropping exercises failed because of shortage of canal irrigation. The barely two to three hours of electric power made it impossible for the plots to be watered by tube well. Owners of the failed plots deemed this a failure of the method.

The success of the multi-cropping method can be gauged from the fact that non-beneficiary farmers in the area seeing the first crop of multiple vegetables coming off began to experiment with this method on their own. However, instead of the five suggested vegetables, they tentatively began with three. The first harvest showed that profit lay not only in the income but also in the saving on tube well diesel fuel for watering. With the second season, these farmers too were planting five different vegetables.

Moreover, as word gets around of the large profits to be gleaned within three years of planting it, acacia block plantation has new takers even outside the target village. This ancient wisdom, all but forgotten, will drastically reduce cost of reclaiming saline soils.

This spill over effect is seen in the case of kitchen gardens and courtyard fruit trees also. For some curious reason fruit trees had disappeared from courtyards. Just a slight nudge in the right direction and it is back in fashion. The saving of Rs 100 per day from one's own vegetable patch has spread the idea beyond the project village. In tandem, composting is encouraged to manure the kitchen gardens organically. In consequence, twenty compost units now turn organic household waste into good quality fertiliser.

Getting on the Way Ahead

Thirty-nine year-old Nazir Ahmed is a most remarkable man. He is almost blind, yet he refuses to give up. He has no idea what his affliction is called but he says he has been like this for more than twenty years. He can only make out the person standing next to him as a blur and he just barely discerns movement around him. Yet this extraordinary man loads his bicycle every morning with merchandise and rides or wheels it around the village as a mobile store.

Just over a year ago, life was hard for Nazir. The only capital he had was Rs 1,000. Yet with this paltry sum he was a bit of an entrepreneur. Investing it in crockery, he was his village's mobile crockery store going from door to door peddling his wares. Sometimes he would set up a small fruit shop at the bus stand where passing transport paused for a while.

But just Rs 1,000 permitted him to buy only very meagre stocks. Therefore, his profit after a hard day of hauling his loaded bicycle around the village was never more than Rs 200. That was hardly enough to feed his family of wife and four children. Even though they ate wheat chapattis either dry or with a little green chilli paste, it was hard for Nazir to put this simple meal on the table. He says sometimes even this was not possible and "we had hunger for a meal."

When things got particularly bad, Nazir borrowed money from friends and acquaintances to feed his family. The debt grew because it was not just food that Nazir and his family could not afford. Medical help was another thing that simply could not be had without a loan. In late 2013, his debt stood at Rs 45,000.

In April 2014, as beneficiary of the Strengthening and Diversifying Livelihood project, Nazir underwent a five-day training on enterprise development to learn the fundamentals of small scale businesses. Though he had peddled all manner of merchandise, this was the first time he learned about developing a business plan and carrying out marketing surveys.



Nazir Ahmed Khosa whose eyes seem to look, but can barely see exhibits his wares. Yet this extraordinary man refuses to give up. The Rs 15,000 worth of assets given him under the project have turned his life around.

Things changed with the injection of Rs 15,000 to purchase stocks. With his mobile store now loaded down with kitchenware, the man began to make sizeable profits every day. This was where his training in business development came into play. The cotton season was approaching and Nazir planned ahead to invest more in cloth because at that time women cotton pickers have spending money for new clothes.

The plan was a success and earned him significant profits. Today the man is a multi-entrepreneur who varies his merchandise with different seasons. It is fruit at one time, kitchenware or cloth at yet another. With the approaching wheat harvest Nazir plans to funnel his profits from fruit and crockery sales into wheat. He hopes to purchase enough to keep some for the family's use over the year and to sell the remainder when the price increases later in the year.



Within eight months Nazir redeemed his debt of many years. His lean-to shack with reed walls and roofing is now replaced with a mud and wattle hut that keeps the cold and the rain out and in his yard he has two grown goats, which cost him Rs 11,500. Both animals are in milk, and each have one kid. His two younger children now attend school and Nazir proudly points out that they go to school with a proper breakfast. He adds that hunger is no longer a part of his family's menu.

Next on his to-do list is the building of a brick and cement house that will withstand any rainstorm. With that in place, Nazir will invest in a store near the bus stand where, he says, shoppers from the nearby dozen villages make purchases. With his fruit, crockery, cloth and cereal stocks, Nazir will be the only departmental store in the village of Dhani Buksh Khosa.

Success through Healthy Farming Practices

Mohammad Ibrahim of the village of Dhani Buksh Khosa is a farmer of five acres of land. Given the chronic shortage of water in his village and that part of his land was stricken with salinity, he was a farmer of very limited means until interaction with RDF under the Strengthening and Diversifying Livelihood project. That was the turning point for Ibrahim.

Training at the RDF Farmer Field School set up under this project, he realised the importance of Natural Resource Management and how the health of his land was tied to its use and water management. What was ancient wisdom came back to Ibrahim anew: that saline soil can be treated efficiently with block plantation of the native babool (*Acacia nilotica*).



The half-acre acacia block plantation of Mohammad Ibrahim. In 2017, these 750 rees will sell for some Rs 5 million. This is way beyond what this saline block of land could ever have yielded under conventional use.

To his surprise, Ibrahim also learned that chemical pesticides have to be the last resort. That pests can be controlled by habitat manipulation as well as by encouraging the growth of friendly insects. Like countless other farmers in the post 'Green Revolution' era, he too had forgotten the difference between friendly and harmful insects. By his own admission, he had never observed one kind of insect feeding on another that damaged his crops. When he sprayed his fields with pesticide, all insects were alike; all needed to be exterminated.

The training taught him to distinguish between beneficial and harmful insects. With the projected establishment by RDF of the insect zoo, this knowledge will soon be as common as it was half a century ago.

However, when it was suggested that Ibrahim practice multi-cropping in his vegetable patch he was somewhat doubtful. Nevertheless, the three vegetable creepers and two plants that staggered together on half an acre of land became a boon for him. Not only did he get five simultaneous harvests, he used five times as little water as he normally would have for the same output. In two months he earned Rs 7,000 from the sale of vegetables. Moreover, in this same period his family did not have to purchase vegetables from outside – saving on average a hundred rupees daily. Ibrahim also points out with visible pride that the vegetables in his patch are all one hundred percent organic, fertilised by compost produced in the village.

In March 2015, his six month-old acacia block plantation was a metre and a half tall. When it matures in another three years' time, it will sell for Rs 7,000 per tree. With 750 trees in his half acre block, Ibrahim is safely looking at a profit of Rs 5 million. As he waits for the trees to mature, he begins harvesting leaves to sell for fodder for a projected profit of Rs 2,000 per annum. Additionally, the protein-rich seed pods, a favourite fodder which he can harvest at the end of the year, sell for Rs 3,000 per hundred kilogram bag.

Mohammad Ibrahim, who was despairing of ever making a farmer's living as recently as late 2013, is now on his way to becoming a millionaire.



Green Rural Development Organization
(GRDO)

**Fighting
the
Odds**

Self-Help to Self-Empowerment



Women such as these who serve Nabisar Road as mobile vendors of trinket and articles of makeup have enhanced their daily income after the asset transfer to some of them.

Back in the late 1970s, agricultural land around the village of Bhit Shah (located then in the Hyderabad district, now in Matiari) first felt the pinch of decreased supply of irrigation water. With two canals, one just a kilometre to the east and the other some five kilometres westward of the village, this paucity was peculiar. It was the result of the rich and powerful in connivance with irrigation officials drawing off from the canals more water than was their due. Also, water theft by those whom the long arm of the law could not reach was common. The sufferer was the holder of five acres or less and the sharecropper – both of whom had no voice.

As small farmers' crops suffered because of water scarcity, a group of young political activists from the village of Sher Khan Malokani near Bhit Shah set up a protest. In the suppressive 1980s, without a platform, this noise went unheard. As the decade passed, what started as fields of withered crops turned into a barren dust bowl. Owners of small holdings abandoned their parched fields and shifted to other lines of work. However, sharecropping families suffered the worst. Many were forced to enter into bonded labour due to overwhelming debt; others left home to seek new lives elsewhere.

Relentless Struggle

In 1997, the same group of leftist political activists who demonstrated futilely for the restoration of their irrigation water supply got together to set up Green Rural Development Organisation (GRDO) with the express objective of turning Sher Khan Malokani into a model village. But without external funding this was an impossible task. Putting their back to the millstone, the activists of the organisation undertook a private door-to-door fund raising endeavour. Despite invidious whisperings, the funds came in and the impossible was taken in hand.

In good time, the village had a blacktop link with the nearby highway, paved streets with brick-lined drains running along the sides. Electricity and natural gas became available. The jewel in GRDO's crown, however, was the middle level school in the village. Earlier, children had to either walk three to four kilometres to another village or simply give up education at the primary level.

A self-help dispensary, which was also established under this same initiative, operates to this day. Once with a part time doctor and full time dispenser, it is now managed by the latter and caters to a population of twelve thousand people from a number of nearby villages. An index of the success of the initiative is provided by the periodic visits to the village by post graduate students of Rural Development Studies from Sindh University.

Another one of GRDO's significant struggle against the odds was the demand for a rightful share of irrigation for water-deprived small land holdings that had once been fertile farms. The effort paid off and in 2003 a new brick-lined canal was dug to water five thousand acres of land that had lain parched for more than a decade.

In the summer of 2011 the heavy rainfall and overflowing of canals spread destruction across vast areas of rich farmland in lower Sindh. With mud and wattle houses dissolving into the surging waters, hundreds of landless peasant families and small entrepreneurs of Union Council Nabisar, including the localities of Lohar Mohalla, Bachaoband and Yar Mohammad Gishkori in Umerkot district, become homeless and lost their livelihoods.

When the water receded the affectees returned to rebuild their lives. Yet they remained without any work as the farmland was submerged for four to five months after the flood. In large numbers men moved to work as unskilled labourers in the cities, but there was every chance of most going into debt to keep body and soul together. That meant a life of labour bondage.

The GRDO Project

For the people of Union Council Nabisar, the Trocaire-funded project 'Development of Sustainable Livelihoods in Union Council Nabisar, Umerkot District' project came at just the right time. With the 2006 Trocaire partnership with GRDO for the release of bonded labourers as a benchmark, the selection of GRDO as executing partner was easy. Beginning in April 2013, the two-year project envisaged the mobilisation of 240 women and men over a period of three months of extensive training with the Islamabad-based organization Empowerment thru Creative Integration (ECI). Training included basic literacy, awareness raising and gender sensitisation. Visits to wholesale and retail markets were arranged to polish the buying and selling skills of trainees.

At the end of the mobilisation training, 130 persons opted for technical and skill training in seven different skills. Of these 75 individuals were finally selected as possible beneficiaries for asset transfer. Of the 75 trained persons, assets worth Rs 30,000 were transferred to 60 individuals. This sum was a one-time grant with the beneficiary contributing their share in kind, that is, either by way of providing the working premises or labour.

The project encompassed the registration and insurance of the newly set up businesses. However, the concerned government department did not entertain such miniscule businesses, thus conserving the sum kept aside for this formality. With this surplus assets were transferred to another ten of the remaining fifteen trainees.

Challenges:

- Natural catastrophes can possibly jeopardise and undo the success of the project.
- In rare cases beneficiaries were dissatisfied with profit, disposed of their assets and used the proceeds to shift to other trades, where they were more successful.
- There is a tendency in some beneficiaries to regard the monetary input as a hand-out that can be repeated again.
- In some cases, monitoring of beneficiaries through the lengthy process of sowing and harvesting is difficult.

Starting Life Anew

“This training and the monetary help was like a blind man getting new eyes,” says Parshotam of Lohar Mohalla in Nabisar Road. At just ten years of age, he joined a blacksmith as apprentice. For the next five years he learned the art of creating all kinds of small farming implements. It was a poor life that just gave him enough money to make a meagre contribution to the family’s daily income.

Fifteen years ago, Parshotam set out on his own. But without any capital, he could not purchase the requisite tools or the raw material to keep his forge working non-stop during the workday. All he could turn out was an implement or two in a day, eking out a daily income that was just marginally more than his life as an apprentice. Having seen others go into debt and spend their lives paying it off, Parshotam says he was afraid of going that same way. “I needed a push to make something of my life. But there was no one to give it to me,” he says.

Then came the floods. For the two consecutive summers of 2010 and 2011, farm work had all but ceased. He had had only a trickle of customers coming in for new tools and business was so close that he was on the brink of giving up and entering a different line of work..



Parshotam who says the asset transfer was like ‘a blind person getting eyes.’

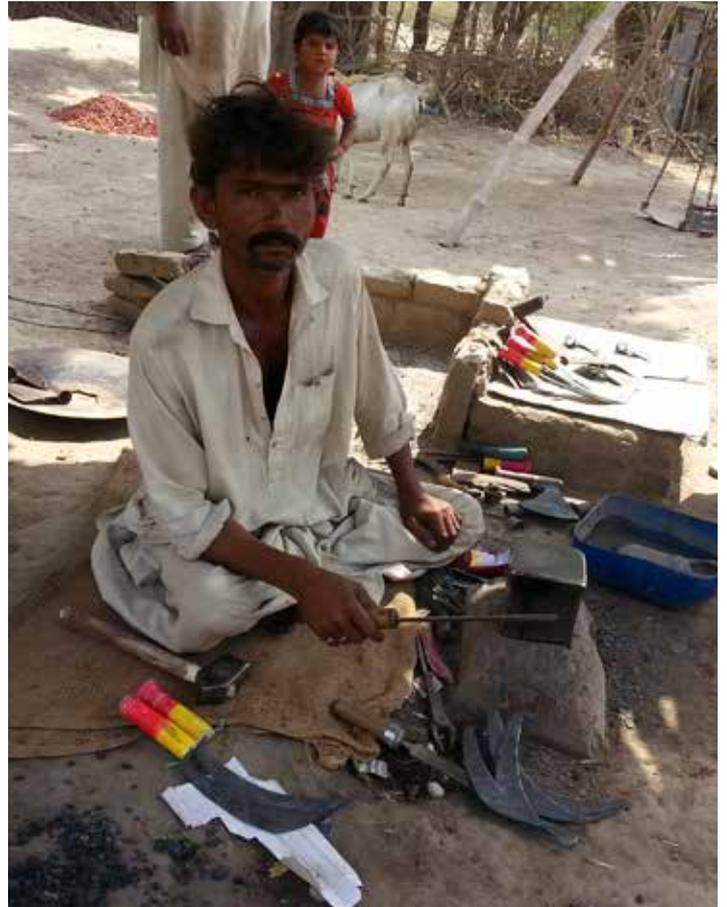
It was at this point that Parshotam was selected to be a part of the the Trocaire-funded GRDO project. The first significant nudge was the training. Parshotam says he had much to learn not just in technical terms but about business management and purchase of raw materials. One important concept he learned was that discipline is the key to success. The man who had earlier never kept a timetable, began to open his workshop an hour after sunup and work through the day until sunset.

At the time of his joining the training, Parshotam could only craft basic farming implements. Under a master fabricator he learned to create other things, including window grills, steel doors and balustrades. His trainer added finesse to Parshotam’s hand, which was once tuned only to the crudeness of sickles and trowels.

The one-time grant of Rs 30,000 enabled him to purchase the tools he lacked and had always had to borrow from his old teacher. The grant also enabled him purchase his raw materials in bulk. Within days, Parshotam got his first contract to fit window grills in a local school. Had the Trocaire input not enabled him to purchase raw material, he would have sought an advance. Since that is not the norm, Parshotam would have lost out to a better established fabricator.

In just over a year since he got the grant, the man has moved on from a small-time ironsmith to a steel fabricator. From earning about Rs 200 per day selling farm implements, he now never makes any less than Rs 500. By his own admission, on good days of contract work he has netted as much as Rs 5,000 in a single day.

With this increase in income came new expenses. According to local norms, he wed his seven year-old son to a five year-old bride, he says, spending Rs 150,000 on the wedding. Then his other son had an accident and damaged an eye. The surgical procedure to save the eye put him back another Rs 20,000. He says no price was too high to save the boy's eye, and remembers the time was when could not have afforded the procedure, and the child would have forever remained one-eyed.



Parshotam does not gloat over the saving he keeps at home, but he admits there is a little bit of money kept aside for emergencies. When he has enough he plans to purchase a proper workshop, which will significantly better than working under a tree, as he does now. Such a premise will cost him in the vicinity of Rs 250,000. He says that if he keeps getting contract work, he'll be in his own workshop before the end of 2016.

As a man who barely earned Rs 200 per day and who had a family to feed, Parshotam lived a hard life. New clothes and a full stomach were rare. He says he can count on his two hands the number of times he had eaten meat in his life – or even a dish of vegetable stew or expensive lentils. But that is now a distant memory, thanks to the push he got.

Sewing her Way to a Better Life

Humaira and her husband Munthar were sharecroppers. But the combined daily wage of Rs 250 at most was hardly enough to feed them and their five children. And so, in order to maximise the daily income, the five children helped in the fields after returning from school. Even then life offered no more than simple wheat chapattis washed down with water. Sometimes a few green chillies were added for savour.



From being an underpaid landless farm work, Humaira has moved on to become an expert seamstress thanks to the training she received under the programme. The sewing machine and electric iron received under the asset transfer have transformed her life.

Some years back, Humaira had scrimped and scraped to put together Rs 16,000 to purchase a tiny block of land for her home. Life was as good as it could get when the summer of 2010 saw the Indus in a flood that overflowed its banks and drowned acre after acre of prime farmland. The water rose around their home and the couple was forced to abandon it. Two months later they returned to a heap of mud and timber.

According to a misinterpretation of the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950, the loss of input in terms of seed, fertiliser and pesticide was divided equally between the rich landlord and his penniless sharecroppers. Humaira and her husband's share came to Rs 50,000. Together with the cost of rebuilding their home, this was an astronomical sum and the couple could not even look forward to paying off part of this debt from the wheat and cotton

harvest of 2011, as no wheat could be planted on water-logged land. And even as the cotton buds began to burst white later that summer, the deluge came and all was once again lost.

It was only in 2012 that they were able to pay their land owner Rs 25,000. This sum was managed with her children spending long hours in mesquite groves harvesting the thorny timber to sell as firewood. They had to beg and grovel for the remainder to be written off, says Humaira. As that year ended, Humaira and Munthar were virtually without hope.

It was just in time that Humaira joined the training under the 'Mobilisation for Livelihood Rights in Rural Sindh' in early 2013. Already a somewhat skilled seamstress she quickly improved her craft. The monetary input from Trocaire enabled her to purchase her own sewing machine, an electric iron and the necessary materials to set herself up as the tailor in her locality.

These purchases changed things drastically. Earlier, she would rent a sewing machine at Rs 30 per day and could only make a net profit of a little under Rs 100 for stitching a women's suit. With her own equipment and supply of materials, she began selling ready-made garments as well as doing order work, increasing her profit to nearly Rs 1,000 per day. During times of festival or harvest, when folks needed new dresses, the profit was even higher.

Meanwhile, her husband Munthar went down with illness and was no longer capable of farm work. The surgical procedure to cure her husband was beyond the family's means, but Humaira had another plan. Putting her elder son as a helper at a fruit shop for Rs 150 per day, she began to save every rupee of her own income. Soon, she had put together Rs 14,000, the cost of a donkey cart. Her husband may not have been able to walk without difficulty, but he could ride his cart around hauling other people's load to make about Rs 200 per day.

Worried about her teenage daughters having to go to the fields to relieve themselves in the dark, Humaira had an in-house latrine installed. Although it put her back Rs 4,000, she breathes easy after the installation. Times are not as good as they used to be, she says.

Now the family eats reasonably well. Like very poor landless peasant they had lived off of simple wheat chapattis. But now they have lentils or vegetables daily. With a full belly, Humaira dreams of having a brick and cement house, one that will withstand the severest storm of rain – a home that gives her family security and which she does not have to leave in the event of a flood.

When asked how she measures the change in her life, Humaira sums it up by remarking that she once wore clothes handed down to her by people better off than herself. Now she sews new clothes for herself and her entire family.



Bhandar Hari Sangat

Breaking the Shackles of Bondage

Genesis of Bondage



An extra keen graduate of the BHS training centre improving her craft in her free time.

The Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950 states that in the event of a landless peasant working an owner's property land, irrigation of it and seed will be provided by the owner. The peasant will provide all labour while profits from produce of the land will be shared 50-50 between owner and peasant. However, over time the system has gotten skewed in favour of the employer.

The system worked well as long as labour entailed tillage by animal-drawn plough and fertilisation with animal dung and domestic bio-degradable waste. From the produce, peasants and farmers saved the necessary seed for the next sowing. However, the so-called Green Revolution changed all that with purchasable chemical fertiliser and hybrid seed. The land owner cunningly divided this expense on a 50-50 basis, which the illiterate, powerless peasant had no choice but to comply with.

The introduction of farm machinery further fouled up the situation when the land owner divided the cost of its operation with the peasant on the same 50-50 basis. With periodic crop failures and natural disasters subtracting heavily from the annual farm income, landless farmers under increasing monetary pressure began to borrow from their employers sums of money that were impossible for them to repay. With every natural catastrophe or personal setback, the debt redoubled.

In this way, bondage was born. But even with entire families working to repay the debt on the pittance they received either at harvest time or as daily wages there was no redemption for them. Matters were made worse by the contrivances of the landlord's book-keepers who doctored accounts in favour of the master. Unsurprisingly, some peasant families in recent years accumulated outstanding sums of up to a million rupees. This led to the practice of sale of bonded labour: any land owner with surplus peasants on his land would 'sell' them to another who needed more labour. Thus, no matter where they went, landless peasants remained under bondage.

Bhandar Hari Sangat

Established and registered in 1999, the Bhandar Hari Sangat (literally translated as Collective Peasant Solidarity) focused on the injustices against landless peasants especially through abuse of the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950. However, over time the focus widened to include other working classes. Additionally, the scope of work expanded to include education, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), emergency and disaster relief and management and livelihood.

Apart from these areas, in 2008 BHS, with assistance from Trocaire, took the first steps towards freeing bonded labourers in three villages. After extensive dialogue between bonded peasants and landowners, BHS equipped peasants with passbooks to maintain accounts of every transaction of cash and kind between peasant and owner. With every transaction in writing, the book-keeper was no longer able to subvert the account in favour of the landowner. Three years after initiation of the project, a donor survey showed that three hundred bonded families were liberated. Of these only three families have returned to a debt-ridden life of bondage.

The 2011 floods set the farming community back several notches in terms of work and food security. With vast tracts of farmland remaining submerged for nearly four months and thereafter unfit for cultivation for another three, farming activity came to a standstill. While landowners had savings to fall back on, the peasants who got by on meagre daily wages were left without any income.

In normal times accustomed to getting by only on wheat chapattis and a mix of chilli water and onions, peasant families were reduced to just one meal a day. Even that was no more than just a portion of a chapatti for each family member. Men in large numbers left homes to work as unskilled labour in the cities, but in a milieu where women were equal earners of daily wage from farm work, the per family income remained drastically reduced. Unsurprisingly, thousands of peasants slid either back or deeper into a life of debt.

The BHS Project

The 'Developing Business and Technical Skills for Sustainable Livelihood of Rural Women' project was designed to address just such a situation. In the Mirpurkhas district, BHS became the Trocaire partner to offer alternate sources of income to selected peasant women by providing them with the relevant technical and business skills. Beginning in April 2013, the two-year project entailed the provision of skill and marketing training to ninety women from three villages in sessions of three months each.

The three-month period of social mobilisation was initiated in the three villages from where beneficiaries were to be selected. This included two awareness sessions a month in each village where noted civil society activists addressed participants. At the end of these training sessions, participants were invited to showcase their talent on paper. This became the criterion for selecting already skilled candidates to add refinement and value to their craft by further training. Final selection was done by interview.

Simultaneously six women, two each from the three target villages, were selected and trained as Business Development Service Providers (BDSP) by the Islamabad-based organization Empowerment thru Creative Integration. This training entailed three separate sessions beginning with a one-week session. There followed two more sittings respectively of ten days and four weeks. Skills imparted were cutting, sewing – particularly of the traditional ghagra (ankle-length skirt) and the blouse that goes with it – and embroidery. Record keeping and marketing was also taught.

Since the selected women were all from landless peasant families who only months earlier had resumed earning from farm labour, a stipend was offered for the days they attended the training sessions. In lieu of their maximum income of Rs 150 per day for farm work, the Rs 300 per day to attend the training session was an attractive alternative and attendance during the session was one hundred per cent. In fact, as word got around, women from neighbouring villages also visited the BHS office and training centre in an effort to become part of the programme.

After the completion of the training, a ten-day session with consultants guided trainees in preparation of their business plans together with estimates of the sum each individual needed to begin the enterprise. Initialization cost was met with a 75 per cent grant by Trocaire through PILER. The remaining 25 per cent was contributed by the beneficiary herself.

As the project ends in April 2015, the entire lot of ninety beneficiaries stands fully trained and well on their way to becoming successful entrepreneurs. Once every month the BDSPs accompany the trained women to Hyderabad to sell a load of collective products and to receive fresh orders. For every single one of the beneficiaries, the visit to Hyderabad was the first ever trip out of the village in her life. The biggest break came when a group of women accompanied their BDSP to the trade fair at the Karachi Expo in the first week of March 2015.



With buyers readily lapping up their products in Hyderabad, the women have spending money of their own – a life-changing occurrence. They have moved on from the uncertainty of finding daily work to make a meagre Rs 150. Though most of them still spend part of the day at farm work, the greater part goes to attending to their needlecraft which brings ready cash. Now, for the first time in their lives they have savings to tide over the family's medical or other emergencies that had earlier to be paid for by loans from the landowner.

Challenges

- BHS had no prior experience of service delivery. However, the NGO's own learning on the job was swift.
- While all-Hindu villages did not have issues with women's mobility, composite or purely Muslim communities presented some initial resistance. However, this resistance was overcome by getting the local religious leader involved.
- It was feared in the beginning that local politicians would feel threatened by this intervention and by a perceived subversion of their vote. However, the small scale of the project rendered such fears unfounded. As the project draws to an end in April 2015, it is so well entrenched and acceptable that it is no longer under any such threat.

Despite the challenges, the project was a success – a fact that is exemplified by the number of women that continue to frequent the BHS office asking to be among the selected beneficiaries. There is constant clamour for the project to be extended to afford more women the chance to better their lives.



A Tale of Two Women

Sadhori

The only life Sadhori and her husband Amolak remember was that of underpaid farm labourers in a settlement fancifully called Model Farm. It was a life of the hardest toil under the merciless sunny skies of the Mirpurkhas district. From dawn until the sun was overhead they toiled in the fields, hoeing, watering, fetching fodder for the livestock or harvesting the produce. At midday they took a short break to rest under the shade of their wattle and grass-thatched hut.

“Being under the summer sun was like being in dozakh [hell],” says Sadhori. For no fewer than ten hours the couple toiled and yet together they never made more than Rs 250 a day. Depending on the seasonal availability of work, sometimes even this meagre income was denied. One after the other their daughter and six sons were born, each to be put to the same gruelling labour when they were old enough.

Though the couple wanted to school their children, Sadhori says, “Sometimes there was no money to buy notebooks and other times none to even to pay for a pencil.” The four elder children dropped out in grade five and took to full time farm labour like the parents.

The family’s hard life was made even more arduous by the floods of 2011. During this difficult time, Sadhori attended the BHS social mobilisers’ visit to the village and became a part of the skill training session. At the end of her three months at the training centre, Sadhori had a sewing machine, twenty-two metres of material and all the necessary threads and needles to keep her going for the next two to three months.



Sadhori whose training at the BHS centre and subsequent asset transfer established her as the seamstress to village Model Farm.

This was in July 2014. Before August ended, Sadhori was the acknowledged seamstress of her village. From nearly twelve hours of back-breaking work under the burning sun, she now put in only five hours and spent the rest in housework, fetching fodder for their livestock, and working with her sewing machine. Within a month, she made between three to four thousand rupees from her work at the sewing machine. Harvest months that meant more spending money in the peasants' pocket made for greater profits for Sadhori.

When asked how much she has saved in the nine months since she got her machine, Sadhori points out that the makeshift shelter that was home to her and the family has been transformed into a semi-permanent wattle and mud plaster home. She also smiles and says that her three younger children now attend school regularly.

Hurmi

Hurmi of Model Farm was just eighteen in 2011 when she was wedded to someone she had never seen in her life. All she knew was a photograph of a youthful man, but on her wedding night she discovered that her husband was a boy no more than ten years old. The photo she had been shown was that of his elder brother.

As a Hindu, divorce and remarriage were taboo. Instead, she simply came back to her parents and rejoined them in the life of farm labour. There was no quarrel between the two families, however. Hurmi visited with her in laws for festivals and other functions and she knew she would return to them when her husband came of age.

Two years after this event, Hurmi was selected by the BHS social mobiliser for training under the 'Mobilisation for Livelihood Rights in Rural Sindh' project. Her asset was the finesse of her hand in producing her designs. Following the training she opted to focus on rallis (colourful patchwork quilts), beadwork that is popular with Baloch women, and traditional fancy parandas (cotton attachments with tasselled ends to braid with the hair) and azarbunds (trouser strings).

She set to work with her two months' supply of materials given her as part of the project. The refinement of her hand, noticed by the social mobilisers won Hurmi quick recognition. By March 2015, nine months since she set



Hurmi shows the refinement of her hand at Baloch style beadwork.

herself up in her home, she is an established businesswoman who makes periodic trips to Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad to sell her products and get fresh orders. The record she maintains of her transactions shows that in good months her income rose as high as Rs 6,000, making her the top earner among the lot of this batch of beneficiaries.

Hurmi wears a nose ring and matching jewellery in her ears that she proudly says is gold. All of it, worth Rs 20,000, was purchased from her savings over the past nine months. She also now owns a goat in milk that cost Rs 10,000. But she is most proud of the fact that she is the major contributor to household expenses for her family of six members. She also helps her in laws when they need some extra spending money.

The next project for which Hurmi puts aside most of her income is to open a small general merchandise store in the village. She has earmarked a space in her courtyard where the cubicle will be built from where she will supply

tea leaves, sugar and confectionary to the village.

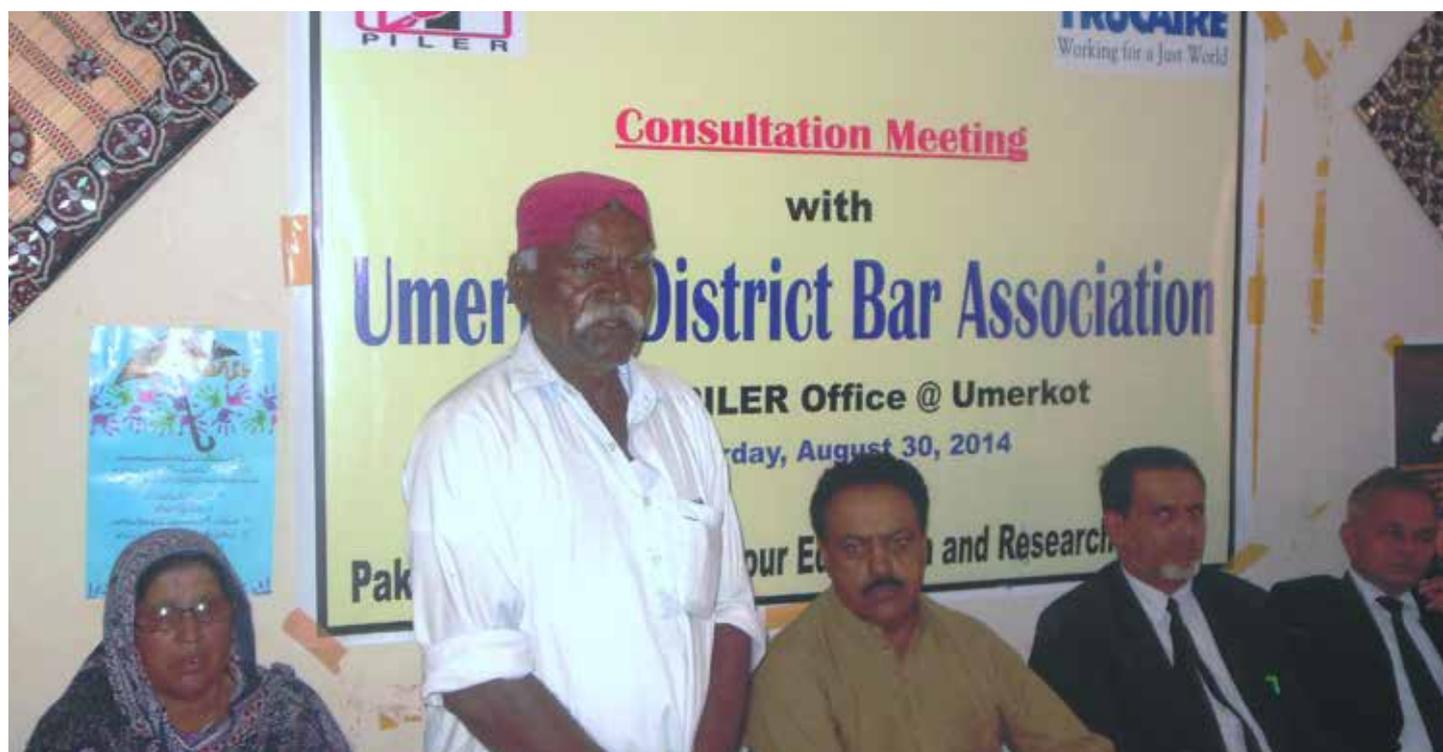
As the project draws to an end in April 2015, BHS plans to honour the top earner with an award. Hurmi is clearly the candidate for it.



Pakistan Institute of Labour Education
and Research (PILER)

Mobilization of Rural Workers

Exclusion to Citizenship Rights



Rural workers in Sindh (haris, tenants, sharecroppers, debt/bonded workers, brick kiln workers, daily wage earners), are mostly landless and face a diverse range of livelihood challenges. The floods 2010 and 2011 clearly exposed the vulnerabilities and the level of marginalization of the rural communities. Access to education and health facilities are dismal and formal skill development mechanisms do not exist at all. Skewed landholdings, increasing fragmentation of farms and lack of support in terms of infrastructure, inputs and investment characterize agriculture, the main livelihood of the rural populace.

According to an estimate , 100,000 workers are pushed out of agriculture annually . Climate change is further impacting the available meagre resources. The successive floods since 2010 have further depleted livelihoods assets and resources of the vulnerable rural population.

Rural workers – men, women and youth –are politically excluded from the mainstream due to the prevalent power structures. The urban bias of the policy makers have deprived rural areas of basic infrastructure and facilities, and have even excluded the rural communities from the existing mainstream services such as social protection schemes, and livelihood-related policies. Absence of local government and a politically-biased district administration are other major hindrances for rural population to access citizenship rights and state benefits.

It is easy to understand why bonded labour may flourish in a region characterised by such a high degree of inequality. Most areas in lower Sindh have a heavy presence of the landed elite who own more than 1,000 acres of land. They exploit haris and non-haris, both by way of informal work arrangements and an unequal access to social resources. A 2004 ILO study marked the two districts of Umerkot and Sanghar as two of the list of districts in Sindh with an especially high concentration of bonded labour. Hundreds of families in Umerkot are trapped under vicious cycles of debt and stayed slaved as bonded labourers for generations.

PILER has, over the years, remained keen to engage with the rural population in Sindh to promote sustainable livelihoods and advocate for labour and basic citizenship rights. PILER has strong linkages with different stakeholders in the province (including state department officials, political party representatives, parliamentarians, academics and civil society members) and by utilizing such linkages, it has initiated a mobilisation of rural workers in Umerkot and Sanghar districts with support from Trocaire since May 2013.

PILER Project

PILER considers strong social organization as the first step towards community empowerment. In its programme to advocate and mobilize community members of rural Sindh to fight for their livelihood rights, PILER has linked up with local community-based organizations through community activists that include farmers, political workers, lady health workers, teachers and counsellors.

With the financial support of Trocaire, an Irish organization which works on different social development issues, PILER initiated a three-year project (2013–2016) Mobilization for Livelihood Rights in Rural Sindh. The project aims to enhance space for rural workers to access livelihood and citizenship rights and respond to climate change. Through this project, PILER, has engaged a section of rural population in two districts of Sindh to promote sustainable livelihoods and advocate for labour rights and basic citizenship rights.

Mobilization was initiated through approaching the rural workers in Sanghar and Umerkot districts by arranging initial meetings in villages and union councils of the target districts. Initiatives were made to link rural workers with local civil society organizations and Bar Councils by organizing collaborative meetings of the rural workers with these key stakeholders. This initiative helped rural workers in broadening their relationships and social-asset base to help them in pursuing their desired agenda of social change and rights struggle. Additionally,

interaction of the rural workers with their employers was also initiated. The objective of this interaction was to bring together both the employees and employers on a single platform to discuss and resolve their conflicting issues.

Meetings were held to facilitate rural workers, especially bonded labourers, in accessing relevant government schemes such as Zakat-Baitul Mal and Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). Additionally, legal support was also given to a number of oppressed rural workers. Several liaison meetings with government departments were arranged in both districts by engaging the concerned workers. Media was also pursued and motivated to highlight livelihood-related issues of the rural workers.

PILER was at the forefront of the Sindh Land Reforms Movement, a network of civil society organisations working for the rights of the peasant. Together with several partner civil society organisations this movement challenged the Supreme Court's Shariat Appellate Bench declaration that land reforms were against Islamic tenets. The movement was a success, and as a consequence, the provincial government was obligated to change its opinion and resubmit to the Supreme Court a version supporting land reforms.

Additionally, the work of PILER and partner organisations has resulted in the liberation of hundreds of peasant families long held in bondage and sold from landlord to landlord. In order to keep them from relapsing into bondage, freed peasants are encouraged to live in colonies especially earmarked from them.

In the context of livelihood rights, PILER's struggle is to fight for pro-people policies and actions and pressure state institutions to recognise the fundamental rights of the deprived and oppressed communities of Sindh. PILER emphasises on the need for the rural poor to have livelihood rights as well as opportunities that provide them with alternative livelihood and a decent income. In pursuance of this struggle under the Trocaire-funded Livelihood Project, PILER has proposed a Joint Advocacy Plan in Sindh.

Focussing on the fundamental rights of deprived and vulnerable communities of rural Sindh, the Joint Advocacy Plan includes identification and consolidation of core issues, identification of advocacy methods, chalking out joint activities of all partners and outlining the desired outcomes of advocacy campaigns. In a nutshell, the Joint Advocacy Plan states: "Vulnerable and marginalised communities of southern Sindh, in particular women and bonded labour, have greater participation in local governance processes that relate to their livelihood." PILER's role focuses on the following:

Partners' Capacity and Training Needs Assessment: To devise capacity assessment tools to identify needs of the partner organisations and to prepare, refine and implement their advocacy plans. Subsequently to assess training needs of key staff assigned to the advocacy programme by each organisation.

Training: To design training manuals and organise tailor-made training based on need assessment and accordingly train the staff of partner organisations.

Networking: PILER's secretariat becomes the platform for implementation of the Joint Advocacy Plan. Partner organisations are invited to join the already active network of Sindh Land Reforms Movement which would greatly help in mobilisation and capacity building.

Research: As a research organisation PILER has conducted research on issues at the local level. In-depth research to better understand local level issues was acquired by commissioning research by specialists.

Under this project, two district Rural Workers Groups (RWGs) have been formed with membership from haris, brick kiln workers, representatives of civil society, district bar members and media personnel. All activities related to mobilization, capacity building and sensitization of rights are done with members of these groups in these two districts. PILER also invites other partners of Trocaire's Livelihood project in other two districts – Mirpurkhas and Dadu to participate in these activities.



Geoff Brown, a trainer from the Manchester, UK is conducting a session of the livelihood project partners for making a Joint Advocacy Plan at Hyderabad.

The Life and Work of a Change Maker

Rashida Sand, a daring activist residing in the Kharoro village of Umerkot district has become the symbol of the struggle for women workers' rights in the Umerkot area. She joined the Rural Workers Group when PILER initiated its project in 2013, and soon became an active member of the group, guiding other members on their struggle and initiating various activities for unity of the rural workers. By profession, Rashida is a lady health worker, but is now more famous as an undisputed leader of the workers in the area.

Born in a farmer's family in the Mirpurkhas district amongst eight sisters and four brothers, Rashida was married at an early age after which she moved to the village of Kharoro, which is three kilometres away from Umerkot city.



The Kharoro village has a population of about 8,000, mostly farmers and artisan families. The area is surrounded by sand dunes of the Thar desert, some green pastures, long trees and Hindu temples and other archaeological sites, which attract tourists to the area. Due to the rapidly changing mode of production and market needs, the traditional skills of artisans are diminishing in the desert area. While at present, a small number of these women artisans still continue working in their traditional style, most of them do not get enough remuneration to make ends meet.

Since her school days, Rashida has dreamt of leading women in their struggle for their right to live with dignity at home, the workplace and in the society at large. "Girls education is still a dream in our area. And because I have studied till 8th class I wanted to do something for the rights of women in the neighbourhood," she explains. She began by joining the health department as a lady health worker in 1998. "Now I frequently visit towns and

suburbs in a group and sometimes alone to create awareness among women about healthcare" she explains. Her work as a lady health worker, aside from providing her with a monthly salary of Rs 9,000, also gives her the space and opportunity to engage in discussions with men and women of the area.

Like in other rural areas of Sindh that have a dominant feudal culture, women in Umerkot are not allowed to participate in most social activities such as attending meetings alongside men. Most of the women do not have the right to voice their opinions even on domestic affairs. However, with determination, Rashida defied local custom and continued rallying other women in the area to become united in their struggle. This has made her well-known to local parliamentarians, police officials, lawyers, local politicians and civil society activists. For this she accredits her husband Talib Sand, who greatly supports her in her mission.

Experience has taught Rashida that fighting for the rights of women is a struggle that needs consistency and continuous campaigning. As a lady health worker, Rashida regularly meets other working women to discuss the issues commonly faced. She has striven to find out solutions to the problems that these women face on a regular basis. However, it has not been easy for Rashida to reach out to all the working women, especially in societies as restrictive to women as Umerkot.



While Rashida was engaged in activism before her association with the RWG, she says that involvement with the group has given her better access to women in remote villages and has therefore widened the scope of her work. The RWG holds regular meetings with men and women of the workforce and Rashida leads many of these meetings with women in far flung villages.



Rashida has attained so much success in achieving her aim that she is known as the change maker in the area. "This was a challenging task for me," she explained. "When I asked the women of the area to come together and participate in the meetings, the males accused me of fallacy for motivating their women. They even banned my entrance into their homes and I wasn't allowed to talk to their women without prior permission. But slowly and gradually I have convinced the men of the area as well."



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