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Dynamics of women empowerment – An insight from Mohammad Ismael Mehrani Community Organisation (CO – 2)

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Mohammad Ismael Mehrani village is situated in revenue village Bail, union council Dad Khan Jarwar, taluka Chambar, district Tando Allahyar. There are a total of 142 households with a total population of 869 in Mehrani. Under the SUCCESS programme, the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) formed seven Community Organisations in this village. Mohammad Ismael Mehrani Community Organisation CO-2 came into existence on 20 February, 2017, after continuous efforts of the NRSP staff. The membership of CO-2 consists of 23 women. Each household represented at the CO has a different poverty score, where 10 households have a poverty score above 23. These women became members of the CO because of their interest in the well-being of the community.



Figure 1: Members of Mohammad Ismael Mehrani Community Organisation CO-2

“It was not an easy task to form COs of women in this village because of backwardness, conservative traditions and male domination. Therefore, it was no less of a challenge for us to convince male members of the community through dialogue and seek their consent to allow women of their households to be a part of this programme,” shared Aslam, Capacity Building Officer-NRSP. Due to the lack of education, women were shy and unwilling to take part in CO formation as they thought that leaving

their house or village to go to meetings and trainings would be difficult for them. The NRSP staff had to make a lot of efforts to bring the female members in the fold of this programme. After successful social mobilisation and conducting meaningful dialogues, the NRSP staff successfully convinced all members of the community to be a part of the programme for the development of their village.

Ms. Janat, 47 years old, a widow who holds primary education is the president of this CO. She is a mother of four children, two sons and daughters each, all of whom have completed their intermediate studies. Her household's poverty score is 53 and she is motivated to work for the uplift of her community. Now, she is leading her CO very well through her vibrant coordination and effective communication skills. She has successfully been arranging meetings every month and has collected 3500 rupees (35 USD) in savings for the CO. Each member of the CO contributes 20 rupees (0.2 USD) per month for these savings. In her words, "I keep the CO savings with me because the members trust me. But I face slight difficulty in collecting money from the members; some of them appear reluctant to deposit this monthly amount (20 rupees) as they do not understand the importance of saving. I keep trying to convince them that it is better for us to save some money for the rainy days."

One of the CO members, Ms. Samina requested the CO president to let her borrow a 1000 rupees (10 USD) from the CO saving to get treatment for her one month old daughter who was seriously ill. After consenting all CO members, the CO-president gave her this amount. Samina took her daughter, who was suffering from acute diarrhoea, to the hospital but she died on the way. She returned this amount to the CO president after a month and thanked the CO members for their support. Another member, Ms. Shamoo requested the CO president for 1000 rupees (10 USD) to purchase new clothes for her children on Eid. Once again, with the consent of all members, the president disbursed this amount to Shamoo. She returned it soon after a month. According to Ms. Fatah Khatoon, "initially, I did not understand why we were saving money this way but later on I realized its importance when some CO members took money from the CO savings at a time of need. They returned it in a month's period. These instances motivated me to participate more actively to contribute to CO savings."

Another CO member, Ms. Amnat continued, "we are thinking about increasing the amount of our monthly saving from 20 rupees (0.2 USD) to 50 or 100 rupees (0.5 or 1 USD) to save a bigger amount. Then, we will be able to borrow around five to ten thousand rupees. From this amount, any member in need can open a small shop, purchase a sewing machine or buy livestock. The member can later on return it in instalments from the earning they get." In the upcoming meeting of the CO, this matter of increasing the amount of CO saving contribution from 20 rupees (0.2 USD) to more will be discussed by the CO members. If all members develop a consensus, the monthly saving amount would increase so that it's more helpful to all the members. Therefore, earnest efforts are made to make this more active and vital for future actions.

In addition, under the SUCCESS programme, the CO has nominated two members for a Micro Health Insurance (MHI) plan. One of the nominees, Ms. Dhiyan received her MHI card on September 18, 2017, with her household's poverty score at 9. Another CO member, Ms. Fatah Khatoon (household poverty score 12), hasn't yet received it because of her misplaced CNIC. She will receive the card as soon as she produces her CNIC to NRSP staff. In Ms. Khatoon's own words: "I am so happy that my household has been nominated for MHI under the SUCCESS programme which is of great support for us. I will soon visit the NADRA office for my CNIC card because without it I will not be able to avail the services of MHI."

The CO president Ms. Janat remarked that, “a big challenge, we are facing at present, is criticism from male members of our society. They discourage us that we will not get anything from this programme and it will be a failure. I think they do not like our organizational role and use derogatory language against us. Even my son, sometimes, asks me to refrain from the activities of the CO after hearing critical remarks from people. However, my daughter encourages me to continue my work as a CO-president and lead the group of women that have come together.” She added further, “it is the main challenge for us to sustain the criticism of our male community members because we face social and cultural barriers in this male-dominated society. We are working under certain limits. But after having worked for 8 months, we have realized that our organization has a great potential to bring positive change in our community.”

Another CO member, Ms. Rehmat further added that, “it seems that men do not like our work but we have understood that we have a brain to use for our benefit and welfare. If all CO members are united, then we can be successful. We are optimistic that we will convince the male members of our community with our positive work and successful results. We have high hopes for this programme. We will learn new skills or ways through training or from each other that can help us lessen the level of our poverty and our misery.” Despite all of this, all CO members require encouragement and moral support from the male members of their community. If not supported by the male members, they will not be able to continue their work as CO members.

This CO story was documented by the author during field visits conducted in the third week of September 2017.