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## An upward journey through collective action - Community Organisation Godo Thaheem-I

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Godo Thaheem village is located in revenue village Bail, union council Dad Khan Jarwar, taluka Chambar, district Tando Allahyar. A broken road connects this village to the main road. This village has 97 households with a total population of 543. Majority of the occupants in the village are tenant farmers and unskilled labourers.

“Six months ago, a team from the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) visited our village, urging the poor women of the village to organise themselves into a Community Organisation (CO), and save money. I had never heard of such a thing before and thought this might be a good idea to secure our future”, said the Community Organisation (CO) manager Ms Husna. In March 2017, the women community organisation Godo Thaheem-I was formed with a total of 21 women members.



**Members of Community Organisation Godo Thaheem - One**

During the CO formation meeting, members decided that each member will deposit Rs. 20 (USD 0.2) per month. However, there have been delays by the members in depositing their savings. Thus, in five months, they have deposited their saving only twice, with each member submitting Rs. 80 (USD 0.8) in April, and then Rs. 100 (USD 1) in September making a total of Rs. 4000 (USD 40) as the CO’s current saving. Ms Zeenat CO president said, “Two members have not deposited their saving, they will deposit within a few days.”

Currently, CO members are willing to save more than Rs. 20 (USD 0.2) in a month. Ms Husna CO manager and a few other members narrated, “At present, we can deposit more than Rs. 20 (USD 0.2) in a month as these days we pick cotton from the fields and we can afford to save more. In other times we will save as per our household’s financial condition.”

Ms Zeenat, the CO president, is not-literate but she is a beacon of hope for the poor households. She believes they can defeat poverty if they are provided support and are willing to work for their

own betterment. Ms Zeenat spends most of her time in mobilising the poor households to and motivate them to plan for their own small-scale businesses and savings. She says, “there was a time when I had nothing with me as I was thrown out of my in-laws’ home. My husband and I went to a plot of land given to us by a rich man of our village. At that time we had nothing except a Chaarpai (a bunk/local bed). I wore second-hand clothes of my sisters in law. We started our life by tenant farming; saved money and my husband took bank loans. Now, we own six acres of agricultural land. I run a shop inside the home and we are living a prosperous life.”

The members of CO Godo Thaheem-I have different ideas to utilise their saving and initiate businesses such as: selling scarfs, embroidered pillow sheets, cosmetics for women and selling vegetables on a cart. However, at the same time, they are suspicious of the male members, most of whom are involved in gambling, and are likely to lose any gain made out of any enterprise by the women. Besides this, sometimes they face criticism of their community members. Sabhagi, a CO member shared, “we often hear from people that this organisation will not do anything for our betterment, it is just engaging us in non-beneficial activities.” She continued, “as we know about the SUCCESS programme already, we ignore their criticisms and continue with our CO activities.”

Zuhra a CO member shared, “I borrowed Rs. 1000 (USD 10) from CO savings for my delivery and returned the money after one month.” Another CO member added, “now we know the importance of saving money as it provides us with backup for rainy days. Our village has no health facility, the road is broken and narrow that two vehicles cannot cross. In an emergency situation, we feel helpless. I wish this programme could also resolve those issues.”

The CO manager and president are approaching the community households to enrol their children in Faiz Public School set up in the adjacent village Haji Haroon by Sindh Education Foundation (SEF). There is a school in the village but it is closed due to the unavailability of a teacher. So far, the CO has enrolled 12 children including male and female children and rest of the children are enrolled by other COs as there are seven COs in the village. Besides, this CO is planning to develop a list of members who do not have CNIC-citizen card; the CO will help these members to get their CNICs.

*“I feel indebted to the SUCCESS programme which gave us this opportunity. I am trying to encourage more and more women to join this programme. I do this because I would like to see all families improving their quality of life”, Says Ms Zeenat CO president, Godo Thaheem-I.*

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