Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme (SUCCESS is funded by the European Union)

“The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.”

Written by: Nuzhat Saadia Siddiqi
When legendary British author J. R. R. Tolkien wrote this poem more than 65 years ago, he may not have had the residents of Goth Hashim and Goth Ghulam Ali Laghari in Chambar, District Tando Allahyar in his mind. But the residents of these two remote Sindh villages have surely lived these lines in their quest to change their destiny by building their own roads. The roads construction project was conceived by the resilient women of the Village Organisations (VOs) in Goth Hashim and Goth Ghulam Ali Laghari under the EU funded SUCCESS Programme. The women-led Village Organisation implemented a Community Physical Infrastructure (CPI) project with technical support of National Rural Support Programme that have set fellow villagers on a journey of self-sufficiency, personal and community development, and education.

How did they do it?
Simply by organising under their VOs and COs, and reaching a consensus about what was most needed in terms of physical infrastructure to make their lives better. Without roads linking them to the main district road infrastructure, they were cut off and vulnerable at times of medical and social emergencies. Forgetting the local politicians who did not fulfill their promises about building roads in exchange for their votes, they decided to take matters into their own hands.
Aisha Bibi, president of VO Kariyo Gulsher 2 and member of the Goth Hashim Community Organisation (CO), remembers all the instances in which pregnant women of the community faced the indignity of being physically carried, to the main roads either on the shoulders of family members or on charpoys or even boards through rough agricultural land. After the twenty-minute trek they were transferred to waiting vehicles to carry them to the district medical facilities. Many other sick and unwell members of the community also faced such issues. She also mentioned how the previous mud track that served as their road sank repeatedly during rainy seasons and instead became a mud hole where children faced the danger of drowning and mosquitoes and germs thrived.
“We needed a proper road, not the potholed dirt path we had. Rain water used to pool in the area where the old dirt road used to be, making it impossible for us to go to work, for our children to go to school, for our pregnant, elderly and unwell neighbours to go seek medical aid,” says Farzana Qasim, who is a member of the CO’s procurement, operations and maintenance committee. “Our CRP Shama’s father passed away and due to water logging and no path, villagers had to bring in a tractor with very high tires to take away the janaza. The people who offered the body prayers had wet, mud caked clothes.”

Approximately 70 households in the village Goth Hashim decided unanimously to build a road in the summer of 2017 during a VO meeting where both Aisha Bibi and Farzana were present. The technical and social survey done by the SUCCESS NRSP team and the Monitoring & Reporting Waheed Haider supported this decision.
With SUCCESS and EU CPI funding of Rs. 374,000, and Rs. 11,000 as a contribution from the community members, a 833 feet long road was made with packed bricks and dirt. The VO and CO members were diligent and present as each decision was made to build the road. They demanded three price quotations from three different brick kilns to acquire bricks from the most cost effective vendor and continuously demanded the presence of the field engineer on site to make sure their road was being made at the highest standard.

The men of the community were enrolled to help build it. At least five men worked as labourers to make the road as a contribution from the community to show responsibility and ownership of the project.

The VO Community Resource Person Shama reports that the women of the VO cooked extra food for all of the labourers who built the road, providing them meals every single day as they worked on the road. She laughs and says this was also to keep an eye on their work.
Once the road was made, it not only resolved the issue of mobility for the community, but the local school saw a rise in children's enrolment in all grades. Previously, 30 children studied at the school and after the road's completion, the number of enrolled students has increased to 50. The firm road provides them sure-footing to complete their daily journey to and from their school.
In Goth Ghulam Ali Leghari, in district Tando Allahyar, not far away from Goth Hashim, the women of the local VO faced a similar situation. Zainab Bibi, Manager of the VO Larhwan, remembers when one of her neighbours, a young pregnant woman, died because they couldn’t carry her to the main road on time. She had suffered a severe hemorrhage in the last month of her pregnancy and her family members and other villagers were trying to carry her physically to the main road, where a donkey cart waited to take her to the district medical facility. The nearly two-kilometer trek through the rough agricultural terrain in the hands of family members and neighbours was too much for her to bear. Her family managed to take her to the doctor, but the doctor pronounced her and her child dead on arrival.
Zainab Bibi and her fellow CO and VO members are resolute women who have given birth to many healthy children and raise them with a collective sense of responsibility. Under the guidance of the SUCCESS programme, they have adopted a healthier way of life where they practice medical safety precautions during their pregnancies, take care of their own and children’s hygiene and ensure their children get inoculated. They also want them to study and have safe passage to their school.

They decided that building a road that leads from their settlement to the main road had become necessary for their personal, social and collective well-being and so a combined decision of making a paved road was made during a VO meeting.
The road that the women decided to build in Ghulam Ali Laghari is 933 feet long and has a culvert above a stream that flows through their agricultural land and a major bend in the road as well. The road is 100 feet longer than the one in Goth Hashim and so it costs more as well: the cost of the road was Rs. 519,000. Out of this amount, Rs. 16000 was the Operations & Management Committee share, raised by pooling together community savings amount.
Young men from the village who have volunteered to help the CO and VO members build this road are paving the road. Their labour contribution has sped up the process of construction. Looking forward to their “roads much travelled”, the women of these two villages feel confident their initiative will make their communities stronger and will have far-reaching effects for themselves and their children.
May their journey be fruitful!
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