



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



## **POLICY BRIEF**

### **Study on Pathways to Social and Economic Empowerment of Rural Women through SUCCESS Programme**

#### **CONTEXT**

Pakistan cannot achieve economic growth and prosperity when nearly half (49%) of its population is left out of the sustainable development equation. Ironically, the inactive half are affected by behavioural and attitudinal animosity of a patriarchal society, and excluded from the mainstream development institutions. This impedes their economic empowerment, and prevents them from being visible, and actively participating in, democratic and political processes. A call for their empowerment, development and representation would require courageously dislodging those power structures that subjugate them, and demand radical institutional and policy reforms.

#### **ABOUT SUCCESS**

Funded by the European Union, the Sindh Union Council and Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme supports the provincial government in developing its local Community-Driven Development (CDD) policy, allowing for a wider geographical outreach and providing financial means to reduce poverty at the household level in rural Sindh. The programme aims to improve the living conditions of the rural populations by building local social capital through organising around 700,000 women into their own community institutions for better access to basic social and economic services provided by the government and providing means for income-generating and diversification activities. The programme was rolled out in October 2015 by the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and its three-member RSPs in Sindh, namely, Sindh Rural Support Organisation, Thardeep Rural Development Programme, and National Rural Support Programme. It spans over eight out of the 24 districts of the Sindh province for a period of six years with an overall budget of EUR 82.13 million.

#### **THE STUDY**

This study used qualitative methods and relied on 18 Focus Group Discussions, 30 in-depth interviews, 24 key informant interviews and one ethnographic study to collect data from six out of the eight programme districts. The study addressed the following key aspects of empowerment in relation to SUCCESS interventions: How have community institutions triggered socio-economic and political empowerment? What auxiliary interventions induced empowerment in poor and marginalised community members? How community institutions have induced political participation and political empowerment? What have been the various challenges and opportunities? The complete study can be accessed at

<https://success.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Women-Empowerment-Final.pdf>



## FINDINGS

### **Social mobilisation improves power relations**

The social mobilisation strategy of RSPs, has been successful in empowering the women in the underserved areas of Sindh. Social mobilisation has played an effective role in awakening the consciousness and realisation of '*power within*' women. The program polishes '*power to*' through various vocational, technical, leadership and management capacity building training and has been effective in inculcating the importance of mobilising savings for micro-investments. The alterations in the *power within*, and the *power to* has shown evidence of improved societal power relations and changes in the social fabric of society that is more acceptable to women's economic and productive role. Evidence exists of how SUCCESS has addressed gender inequality, time-poverty (work-life balances), women's mobility, restrictions on girls' education, gender-based violence, and women's access to, and control over, resources.

### **Ensures inclusion**

The women led community governance tiers are based on the values of promoting diversity and inclusion, participation and cohesion, and democratic decision-making. These institutions have been developed through a bottoms-up approach, i.e. from individual, to household, to community and overall society level. This approach of organising the under-represented, marginalised, unreachable, vulnerable and disempowered segments of society has proven effective for sparking women's empowerment in large numbers, and should be replicated in other parts of the country.

### **Building linkages and making them work**

SUCCESS is both innovative and transformative. The findings show that the programme has seeded, nurtured and harnessed the potential of women-led and women-managed community institutions. Through a well-thought through and researched approach of inclusive development, the programme has created a network of community institutions (Community Organisations (COs) at hamlet level, Village Organisations (VOs) at village level, and Local Support Organisations (LSOs) at union council level), all owned and managed by women, that serve as a bridge or vehicle between grass roots communities and line departments responsible for effective public services delivery. Through the programme, the capacity of the community leaders and members is built so that they are able to not only recognise and articulate their rights, but are able to negotiate its practical implementation through demanding their rights from the duty bearers at micro, meso and macro levels.



A major advantage of the community institutions is that it provides the line department an effective and efficient delivery system or mechanism to deliver its supplies and services to the poor. A number of line departments are already routing their services through these well-structured community institutions, e.g. CNIC registration, polio vaccination, livestock immunisation, tree plantation, reopening of schools, health centres,

etc.) A win-win situation is where the Government of Sindh links the line departments with these women led grassroots community institutions for a variety of services delivery. This would reduce government's cost of service delivery while enhancing its efficacy. It would also directly validate the women-led community institutions' credibility, and thereby its sustainability. We believe that this is the key to growth, progress and prosperity of the local communities in the underserved parts of Pakistan.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **What needs to be done and by whom?**

#### **Ensure sustainability**

One of the important learning from the Study is that the community institutions must survive beyond the project period of SUCCESS. They must therefore be financially viable. This is possible only if they can create 2-3 revenue streams that will allow them to meet their operating costs in the years to come. One such source of income is the Community Investment Fund – a revolving fund through which the LSOs provide loans, at a very affordable rate, to their women members and families. The other avenue to generate income is if these LSOs were to establish a social enterprise, i.e. an entity that would directly address a social issue, while simultaneously generating an income that will sustain the institution. There are many opportunities in this regard that the government can extend to the LSOs, given the variety of extension services that the communities need. For example, instead of having full time salaried employees, the Government could train community resource persons from the LSOs to provide veterinary services, and be paid for it.

#### **Invest on safe transport to foster women mobility**

Another lesson learnt from SUCCESS is that the mobility constraints due to the non-availability of public transport infrastructure has been a major impediment to women's social and economic empowerment. SUCCESS has played a role in empowering women towards greater mobility related decisions by providing them safe transportation to ensure project activities. However, mobility is the major barrier for rural women, and most of their savings and earnings are spent on arranging transport or commuting long distances for the communal gatherings, economic activities, or sessions with political entities. If such mobility is to continue beyond the life of the programme, it is



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recommended that the government provide or leverage safe spaces and public transport to social and economic empowerment of rural women for the sustainability of the established community institutions.

### **Public investment for scaling up**

Like any other project, SUCCESS is also limited in terms of resources, including funding and time. It is therefore imperative that the Government of Sindh (GoS) uses this opportunity to closely monitor the inputs, outputs and outcomes, and identify ways to sustain SUCCESS, and its achievements, beyond the life of the project. SUCCESS is already showing clear and evident pathways to women's empowerment. There are amazing examples of how women's empowerment is occurring with regard to *power within, power with, power of, and power over*. For the Government of Sindh, this is a scalable, replicable and transformable model to women's economic empowerment. This model can easily prove to be a key contributor to local development and growth that can be adopted across Sindh and other provinces.

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