



**Community Resource Persons in the Sindh Union
Council and Community Economic Strengthening
Support (SUCCESS) Programme
Challenges and the Way Forward**

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RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

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1. Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and Social Mobilisation

Under the European Union funded Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme, Community Resource Persons (CRPs) have been assigned major roles to carry out the social mobilisation component. The Social Mobilisation Teams (SMT) of Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) organised the 40% of the target rural households of the programmes Union Councils (UCs) in the starting phase. Thereafter, the SUCCESS Programme implementing RSPs then recruited and trained CRPs at the Village Organisation (VO) level to carry out the remaining social mobilisation activities. National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) and Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) are the SUCCESS Programme implementing RSPs.

CRPs are individuals from the community who are both active and committed to the development of their area. Specifically, they believe in bringing about betterment through their own initiatives and hard work. They are activists who are engaged by Village Organisations/Local Support Organisations/Social Mobilisation Teams (VO/LSO/SMT) to organise uncovered communities into COs, monitoring of CO meetings and savings and delivering awareness sessions to the communities on critical social and development issues using the Community Awareness Toolkits (CATs).

It is important to note that since the SUCCESS Programme only mobilises, organises and works with rural women in eight target districts, for the first time in RSPs' history that such a large number of women CRPs were engaged and given multiple tasks to assist RSPs. They have been given different trainings and on the job mentoring to carry out their work efficiently. This is an opportunity for women CRPs to work with organisations and learn different skills, i.e. training, awareness campaigns, techniques to conduct meetings and record keeping, etc.

2. Background, Rationale and Methodology of the Study

During last 3 years it was analysed that CRPs turnover has been high in the SUCCESS Programme. The Programme Manager SUCCESS at RSPN requested Specialist Social mobilisation and Programme Officer GAD RSPN to do a study to see the reasons of CRP turn over and to suggest ways and means for corrective measures.

Mohammad Ali Azizi covered Dadu district of TRDP and Larkana and Kambar Shahdadkot districts of SRSO. Sadaf Dar covered Jamshoro district of TRDP and Tando Allah Yar and Sujawal districts of NRSP. The RSPN team met with the District Programme Officers, Social Organisers, CRPs and some of CRPs who have left the Programme. The team conducted Focused Group Discussions (FDGs) with the CRPs and Social Organisers. They then discussed with the District Managers to take their views on CRP dropout and the corrective measures they had taken to face the challenge. The District Managers provided the data on CRPs to the RSPN team. The draft final report was shared with the COO RSPN, Programme Manager SUCCESS RSPN, Specialist M&E RSPN and Programme Managers of NRSP, SRSO and TRDP SUCCESS programme for review and feedbacks. The final report has been developed incorporating their feedbacks and suggestions.

3. The Role and Responsibility of CRPs and Social Mobilisation Teams

Under the SUCCESS Programme CRPs have been engaged to increase the coverage of households in COs as well as fostering new COs. As mentioned above, the initial 40 % of the households were organised by the SMT and rest of the households were then organised by CRP under the supervision of the SMT using the same process as defined in the relevant sections of the SUCCESS Programme Implementation Manual (PIM). The role of CRP thus includes:

- Organisation of remaining households (especially poor) into existing COs (where possible)
- Supporting the SMT in formation of new COs and federating them into VOs
- Providing support to the CO and VO leaders in arranging regular meetings and proper record keeping
- Conducting sessions in community on Community Awareness Toolkit (CAT) to create awareness on critical social issues including, health, education, sanitation, DRR, environment and basic civic rights.
- The SMT can also use some of the trained and competent CRPs to assist them in delivering CMST sessions to CO leaders and LMST to VO leaders after checking their maturity and ability to conduct such sessions.

The CRPs should be given proper training and field exposure to make them able to deliver such training sessions.

- Supporting CO members in preparing their Micro Investment Plans (MIPs)
- Supporting VOs in preparing Village Profiles, and VDPs/VO development plans
- Supporting LSOs in preparing UC Profiles, and UC DP/LSO development plan
- Monitoring and reporting of COs/VOs core activities.
- Attending review meetings organised by the SMT
- Submitting monthly progress reports to SMT on prescribed format
- Support LSO book keepers in CIF recoveries and appraisals in their areas

The SMT is responsible to provide technical support to the CRPs in planning and performing their work, and supervise and monitor the work of CRPs to ensure quality. The role of SMT includes:

- Developing monthly work plan for the CRPs. Physically verifying the newly formed CO/VOs and register them in the MIS.
- Training CRPs and providing on the job coaching on conducting community dialogues, CO formation, developing MIPs, attending CO meeting, CO/VO record keeping, conducting CAT sessions, identification and appraisal of beneficiaries for SUCCESS interventions such as CIF, IGG, micro health insurance etc.
- Monitoring and reviewing the work of CRPs and providing feedback for improvement using the Monthly Progress and Monitoring Report of CRP. For this purpose, a monthly Planning and Review Meeting (PRM) is held with CRPs at the SMT / Field Unit level. It was decided that initially, (first 6 quarters) all CRPs working under the SMT will participate in this meeting at the SMT office level. Later on, these meetings will be held at the UC level in respective LSO offices. These meetings help in preparing monthly plans and review the progress of each CRP. Social Organisers and Capacity Building Officers attend this meeting, and at least 20% of these PRMs is also attended by a District Office / PIU representative. Each PRM session focusses on one of the CAT topics.

4. Identification and selection of CRP

Once the VO is formed the SMT consulted with the VO to identify a CRP. While identifying the CRP the following characteristics were kept in mind:

- The CRP should ideally be a woman, however, in some special cases male CRPs may also be selected considering the education level amongst women or mobility issues in case of scattered population or insecure areas.
- They are trustworthy and have a good rapport in the community
- They are able to travel outside their own village if necessary
- They are literate and can support CO in record keeping and savings record keeping
- In case of unavailability of the CRPs in the programme area CRPs can also be engaged from non-programme areas

The SMT then selected the individual that qualifies, possessing the maximum characteristics of being a CRP in consultation with the VO.

After informing each CRP of what their potential work would be and the level of reporting that they would have to carry out, CRPs are asked to sign an agreement with clearly identified terms of references. For added ownership, in intervened areas, CRPs also sign their agreements or contracts with the VOs/LSO. This results in the VOs/LSO taking a greater interest in the progress of their coverage and in the quality and amount of work that the CRPs carry out. As per the SUCCESS proposals of RSPs, one CRP has been budgeted for one VO and its member COs.

The CRPs are paid Rs. 250 for monitoring one CO meeting per month. In NRSP areas, a 10% annual increment is added in this amount. SRSO pays Rs. 500 per meeting if the CRP conduct meetings of additional VOs and COs. No monetary support is provided for organizing the VO meeting or supporting RSPs in implementation of programme

activities like IGG, CIF etc. in SRSO and TRDP programme areas. However, in NRSP areas, the CRPs are remunerated for conducting the monthly VO meeting as well. If CRPs conduct additional CO/VO meetings than the regular monthly meetings to implement IGG and CIF, they are paid for these meetings as well. In addition, Rs. 150 was paid for CIF appraisals during Year-I which is increasing @ 10% on yearly basis.

The number of COs vary VO to VO. The average number of COs per VO is 11. So on average, one CRP covers one VO and 11 COs. However, the CRPs who work for more than one VO and their COs work for up to 2 VOs and 17 to 22 COs. Similarly, the Pair CRPs in SRSO districts cover 10 VOs and 54 COs on average. In other words, one individual CRP of the Pair CRP covers 5 VOs and 27 COs on average.

5. Training of CRPs

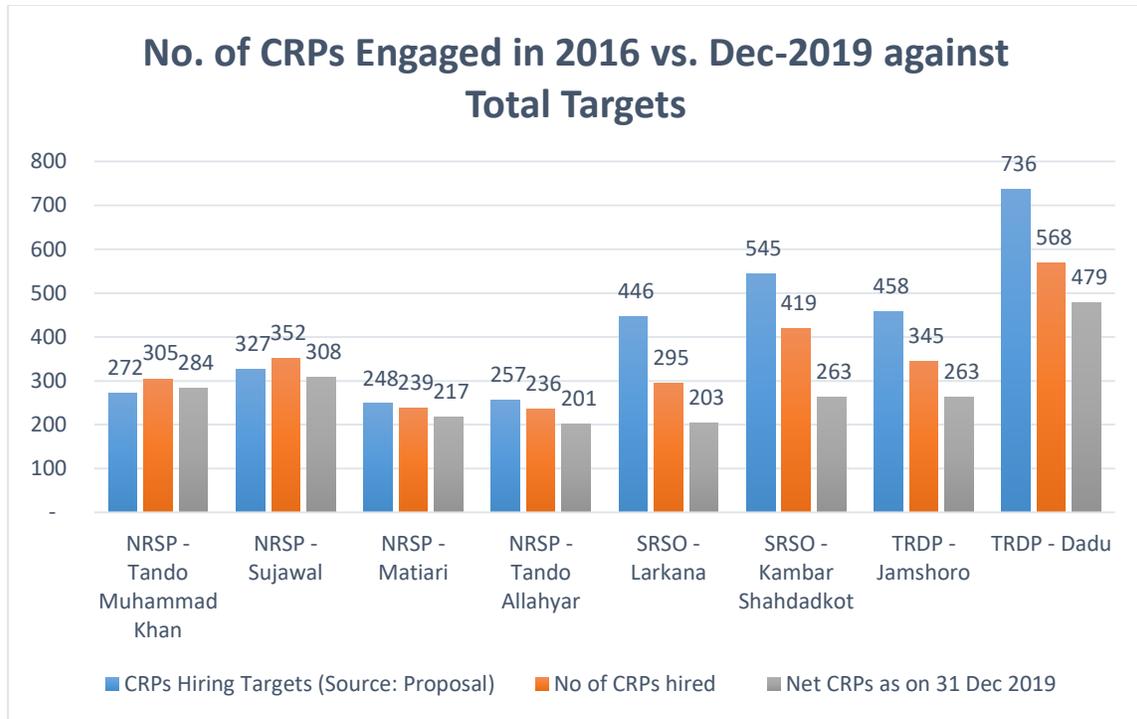
The CRPs were then trained and capacitated through a three-day training event organised at Field Unit level on social mobilisation, CO formation processes, and an orientation of the SUCCESS Programme.

The CRPs were also trained in CAT and its manual and a copy of it was given to each CRP for future reference and use. After completion of training, these CRPs become responsible to conduct at least one session in each of their assigned COs on CAT. The SMT in consultation with the concerned LSO/VO nominates the CRPs for training. The Capacity Building Officer (CBO) based at SMT/District level takes sessions in these trainings.

6. Current Status of CRPs in SUCCESS Programme Areas

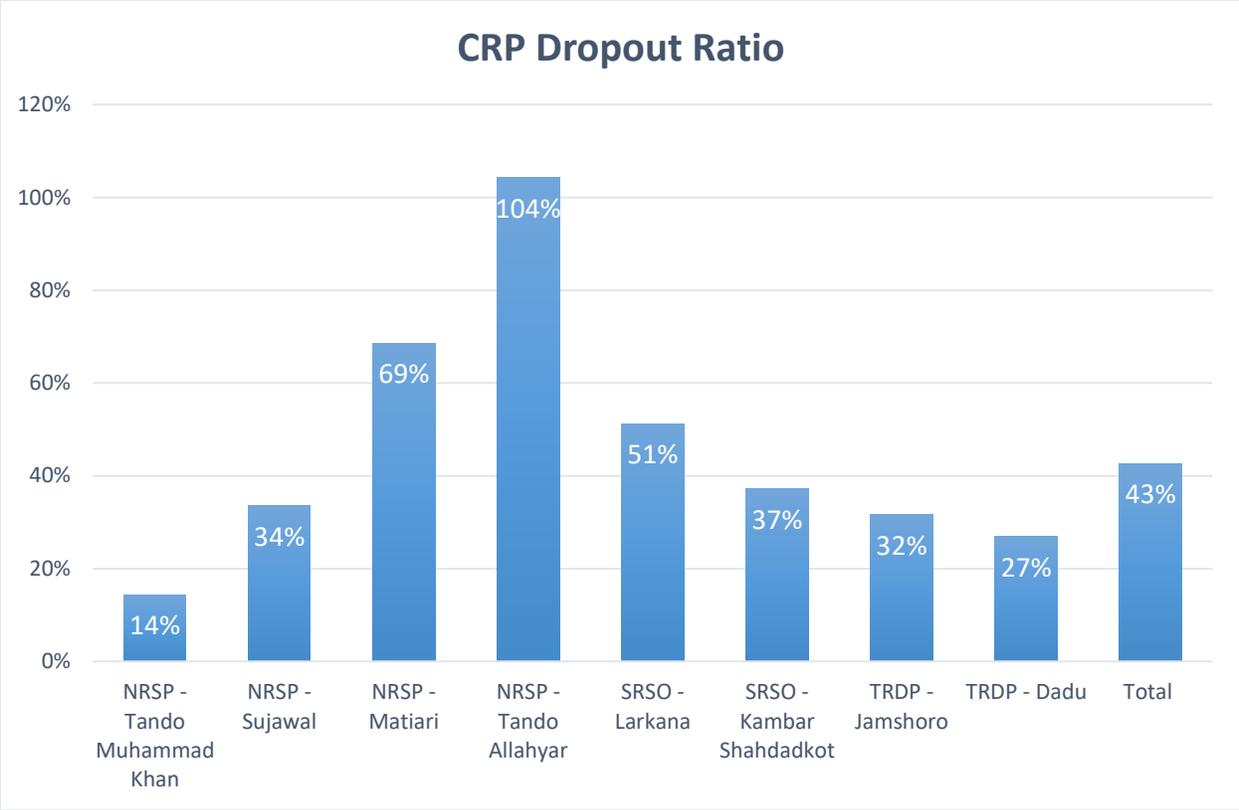
According to the SUCCESS proposals of RSPs, the targeted number of VOs has been budgeted as 3,289, therefore, 3,289 CRPs should have been hired during the year 2016. By the end of December 2019, RSPs report to form 3,427 VOs in the eight SUCCESS Programme districts. Ideally, there should be 3,427 CRPs, i.e. one CRP for each VO. However, in the year 2016-17, the RSPs hired only 2,759 CRPs, which is 84% of the targeted number. As the graph shows, the ratio of CRP hiring varies across RSPs. The highest hiring ratio was in NRSP districts of Tando Muhammad Khan (112%) and Sujawal (108%) while the lowest hiring ratio of CRPs was in Larkana (66%) of SRSO. The main reason given by SRSO for not hiring the required number of CRPs is that they could not find literate women willing to work as CRPs.

Over the last four years, 1,141 (41%) CRPs were dropped out. RSPs tried to hire new CRPs to replace them but they could hire only 581 new CRPs. SRSO also experimented hiring of Pair CRPs, whereby a wife and husband or sister and brother from the same family were hired as CRPs. Their honorarium was raised and they were assigned more VOs and COs. So by the end of December 2019, a total of 3,414 CRPs (Women: 3,191, Men: 223) have been hired and trained by RSPs under the SUCCESS Programme and 1,141 were dropped out. Therefore, by end of December 2019, a total of 2,292 CRPs (2,218 single and 74 as pair CRPs) were working in the SUCCESS Programme districts. This includes 2,069 women and 223 men CRPs. The following graph shows the number of CRPs engaged at the initial phase of programme implementation along with the status of Dec-2019 against total targets:



The aggregate turnover ratio of CRPs is 41%. The highest turnover of CRPs is in the NRSP districts of Tando Allah Yar and Matiari. According to NRSP staff, the major reasons for drop out is mobility of women CRPs to COs. The second reason is that the amount of honorarium is not attractive for them. (see detailed reasons for CRP turnover in chapter 3).

The district wise CRP drop-out ratio has been given in the following graph:



In VOs, where no female or male was available to work as CRPs, RSPs tried the following strategies:

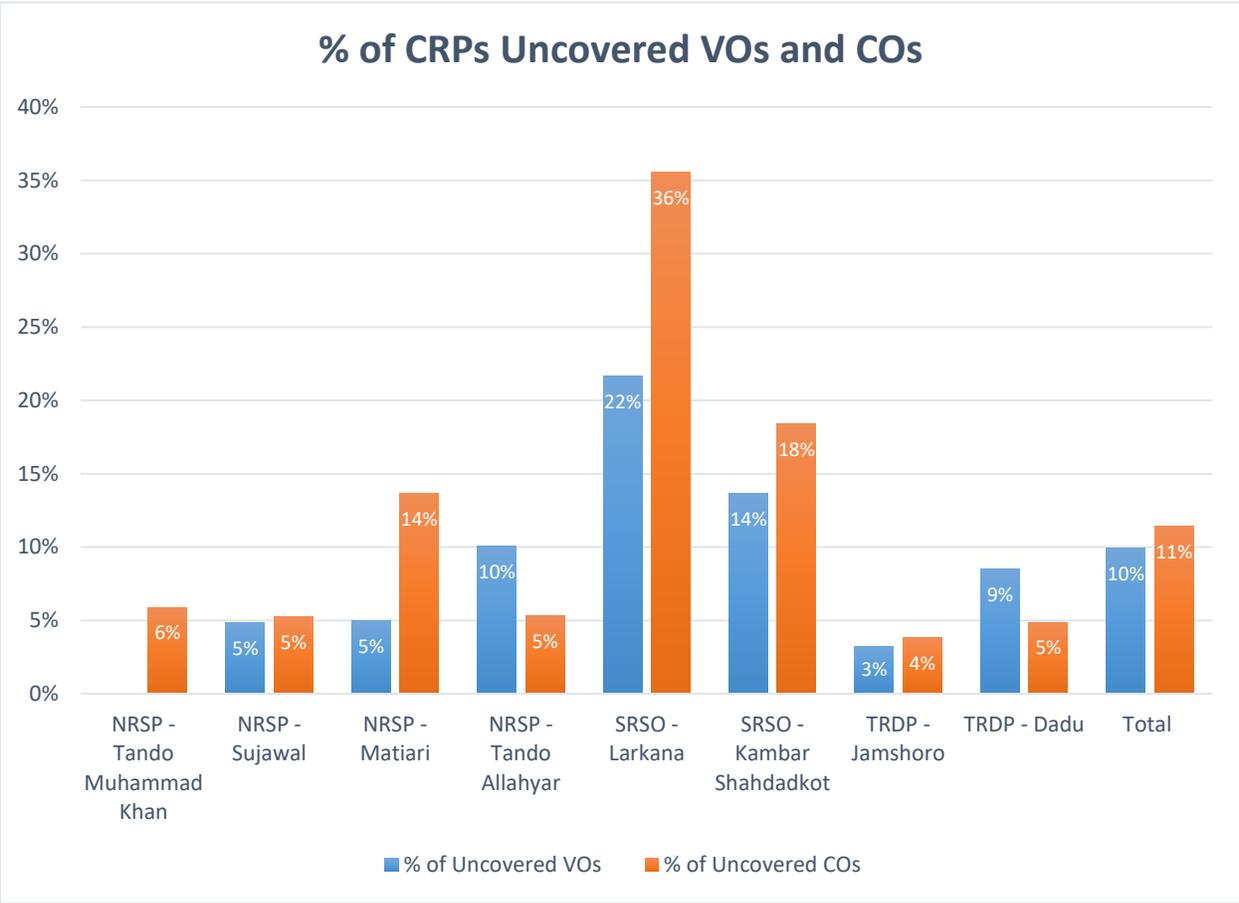
1. Assign additional VOs and COs in the neighbourhood areas to the active CRPs who were willing to go and work beyond the boundaries of their own villages. This was practiced by all three RSPs.
2. SRSO decided to hire pair CRPs, i.e. wife and husband or sister and brother in pair, so that the men CRPs could provide transport to the female CRPs while working himself also as CRPs. SRSO has hired 74 CRPs in 37 pairs. On average, the pair CRPs provide services to 10 VOs and 54 COs. Therefore, their honorarium has been fixed to Rs. 15,000 per person per month. In other words, one Pair CRP is paid Rs. 30,000 per month.

According to reports by SUCCESS RSPs, by December 2019, a total of 3,087 (90%) VOs and 26,314 (89%) COs are provided social mobilisation support by the CRPs. Around 340 (10%) VOs and 3,391 (11%) COs are not covered by CRP services. However, this is a snapshot status of CRP coverage on a particular date. Otherwise, since the dropout and re-hiring of CRPs keep on changing, even these uncovered VOs and COs reported as on end of December 2019 had CRPs in the past. Therefore, according to RSPs, there is no VO and CO which had never have a CRP in its entire institutional life.

The Social Organisers and other SMT members are mandated to visit the CRP uncovered VOs and COs to monitor their meetings and support them in updating their records. However, due to their heavy workload, it is not possible for them to attend their meetings on regular basis. Therefore, lack of CRPs seems to have negative impacts on the organisational strength and maturity of the CRP uncovered VOs and COs.

The SMT staff said that the SUCCESS programme targets are quite heavy and they are already overburdened. Therefore, the extra work of conducting meetings of CRP uncovered VOs and COs, especially maintaining their records significantly increase their work load and they feel immense stress due to this extra work load.

The district wise details of COs and VOs who were uncovered by CRPs on 31 December 2019 have been given in the below graph:



7. Women CRPs' Perception about Their Work

The women CRPs feel excited about their work. They said they learnt a lot while working as CRPs. The CAT sessions are very informative for them. They feel like an active member of society. They also feel that they are important as they are helping and guiding many people. One CRP said, "working as CRP give us pleasure that we are using our education and helping other women". They think that more women should come out. Some of them shared that they are preparing their daughters and other young girls to work with other NGOs. The CRPs shared that their work is important for self-growth and recognizing self-worth for rural women. They shared that working for the development of women gives them pleasure as well as improving their confidence and skills. They shared that due to this work they are well contacted with outer world other than their villages. Now they know about other organisations and develop contacts with them.

8. Achievements of Women CRPs

During the discussion with CRPs, they all said that they feel proud for working as CRPs, because they can serve their communities and help them resolve their communal, family and even personal issues. They mentioned the following important benefits of CRPs:

1. The CRPs reported that the moral of community women become high when they see women CRPs working for themselves.
2. Women's voices have been increased, as they are meeting government officials to resolve their development issues.

3. The awareness of community women on mother and child health, family planning, women rights and citizen rights have drastically increased because of these women CRPs.
4. Community women feel comfortable discussing their issues with women CRPs i.e. domestic, resistance in girls' education etc.
5. Women CRPs have been talking to the Assistant Commissioner (AC), village notables and male members of communities to advocate for girls' education.
6. CRPs also accompany women CO/VO members to convince parents and families to stop early marriages, promoting deliveries at health facilities, etc.
7. In Tando Allah Yar (TAY) CRPs shared that paralegals trainings were important to work on women issues and citizen's rights.
8. The CRPs do conflict resolution at household level, like domestic violence, daughter and mother in law issues etc.

9. Issues and Challenges

The implementing RSPs of the SUCCESS Programme are facing multiple challenges both for the recruitment and retention of CRPs, including:

9.1. Low Literacy

The main challenge of RSPs for hiring the targeted number of CRPs is lack of availability of literate women and even men in the respective villages. The literacy level is very low in most of the programme districts, especially in remoter villages. The literacy and numeracy skills of a number of CRPs hired by RSPs was so weak that they could not manage record keeping requirements of VOs and COs. Therefore, they felt discouraged and left the job.

9.2. Mobility Issue

During interview of women CRPs who have left the job it was learnt that a lot of women CRPs left due to long distances of the assigned areas of work from their homes. It became difficult for them to continue their work. All CRPs shared that they enjoy their work and were excited about it. Many CRPs shared that they have to hire a Rikhshaw to go to the COs and it costs them too much. Most of their honorarium was spent on the travel cost and they left with nothing. It is also important to mention that most CRPs are between age of 20 to 30. Some are unmarried as well and have passed middle or matric. They are not allowed to go to far flung areas from their homes but they are allowed to do work in their nearby areas or if they have transportation facility from the organisation. The CRPs who are still working also shared that the travel cost is high and they are left with a very small amount of money to spend on their needs. Most of the CRPs are accompanied by their male relatives who provide transportation services. In some cases, the reason of CRP leave their job was that their male relative stopped his support.

9.3. Low Paid Services

CRPs shared that usually two of them have to move together due to security issues. They work whole day to complete CO meetings, fill registers, attend VO meetings and do awareness sessions. They feel that they are very low paid compared to the work /services they give and after the ever increasing inflation the amount they get means nothing to them. Their payment also comes after 3 months as they received Rs. 3,000 per month via a cheque and banks are very far. After three months, the amount becomes significant and then they go to bank to cash their cheques. The CRPs urge that their payment should be according to their services. This issue should be looked into. It was also reported that as now these CRPs are trained and well contacted some other organisations are also approaching them to community work. The CRPs said that the work load of other organisations is low and their payment is better than SUCCESS programme.

9.4. Male Dominancy

The women do not get permission from male relatives to go out of their houses and visit neighbouring settlement to conduct meetings and CAT sessions. This is a cultural issue, and will take time to change.

9.5. Cultural Challenges

One of the reasons women CRPs left is because men community members often talk bad about them. It was also shared by CRPs that community men think that women when work with NGOs and do Jobs they get out of hands of men “**Aurtoon Kay Par Nikal Atay Hian**” (women grew wings). Women CRPs shared that men do not care about women meetings going on and they start taking bath in open using hand pump water installed in the veranda which is embracing for the women. They also sometimes come and sit in meetings and women then feel uncomfortable to discuss their personal issues. CRPs are also sometimes scared of dogs in the villages and at homes.

During these discussions, women Social Organisers (SOs) said that they also face similar cultural issues i.e. inappropriate comments, staring and requests for sexual favours from community members. NRSP management shared that two such cases were brought into the notice of NRSP officials, one in district Tando Allahyar and the second in district Sujawal. Both issues were resolved after reporting to Police in Tando Allahyar by NRSP and to police and FIA by the concerned staff in Sujawal. RSPs should develop and adopt Beneficiary Safeguarding Policy and implement it strictly to avoid such incidents in future.

9.6. Personal Affairs

In one UC of Tando Allah Yar (TAY) a community male member had an affair with a woman CRP and they got married without the consent of their families. This created a negative impact on work of women CRPs. In three UCs, women CRPs are not allowed to work because of this incidence.

9.7. Timings Issue

Women CO members sometimes work in agriculture fields and they are available for meeting only in evening. But CRPs who are traveling from other settlements cannot come in the evening. Therefore, they leave the job.

9.8. Reproductive Roles and Impact on CRPs

The rural women are already heavily engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, children caring, dish and cloth washing and cooking. Therefore, some of the CRPs leave their job when they do not have anyone to take care of children at home. A number of CRPs faced some other challenges and issues from the house hold members due to which they could not continue their duties as CRP which include getting married at young age and getting pregnant, therefore, could not continue any more.

9.9. Getting Better Opportunities

Due to their training and abilities to work in communities, some of the CRPs are now able to get other jobs. For example, some CRPs started courses as midwives. They also get Rs. 5,000 per month for a three years course. Some CRPs feel that they are more educated i.e. Bachelors, Masters etc. and they are getting low payment. Therefore, whenever they find better chances of working in other organisations, they quit.

9.10. Cheating and Financial Embezzlement by CRPs

Some CRPs did not work efficiently and honestly. They submitted CO resolutions with the thumb impression of only one person. Some CRPs were asking for money from the IGG and CIF beneficiaries. In the cases of cheating, the CRPs were told that they should accept that they had cheated and promise not to repeat such practices in future. If they did that, their services were not terminated. Otherwise, RSPs discontinued their agreements. In the cases of financial embezzlement, the CRPs were fired immediately.

9.11. Late Payment of Honorarium

In NRSP districts, CRPs are hired by LSOs. NRSP pays honorarium of CRPs into the LSO account one quarter in advance. However, sometimes, the Community Book Keeper (CBK) of the LSO cannot complete his LSO accounts on time, therefore, as per EU financial rules, the LSO cannot make payments to CRPs. In such cases, the CRPs get their honorarium after 3-4 months which also discourage them to work. To address this issue, NRSP has hired two additional Capacity Building Officers (CBOs) with finance education background so that they provide handholding to the CBKs to complete their financial books on time. But sometimes, the CBK quit her/his job, and it takes a while for NRSP to hire and train a new CBK, and the CRPs cannot get their honorarium on time.

10. Recommendations & Way Forward

RSP management had tried their best to recruit and retain CRPs across the SUCCESS Programme. They have tried various effective ways and means like making active CRPs responsible for more than one VO and its member COs, hiring male CRPs, and hiring pair CRPs etc. However, the following recommendations are made to improve the situation further:

- a) Where possible, additional VOs and COs should be assigned to the active CRPs.
- b) During our discussion with the CRPs, they said that monetary benefits are not that important to them to perform the role of CRP. Non-financial considerations like serving their communities, recognition in communities, personal development in terms of confidence building, increased mobility etc. are more important motivational factors for the CRPs. Having said that, financial incentive is essential to motivate their male relatives to provide them transport and time. Therefore, RSPs should think about increasing their honorarium. This is especially true for those CRPs who are working in far flung places than in their own villages. This will serve as an incentive for them.
- c) The experience of pair CRPs should be explored properly by other RSPs, and if it is found effective and cost efficient, they should also adopt this model for the UCs with quite scattered settlements and longer distances.
- d) Engaging women in such a big number is a big achievement. It is important that while designing of programmes and projects the safety and security from communities and staff should be discussed and measures to protect them should be ensured properly. Community sensitisation on gender issues and women working for them as CRPs or SOs should be further increased, especially in highly sensitive communities where CRPs and staff face challenges.
- e) The past experiences of RSPs with CRPs suggest that CRPs stop working after discontinuation of their agreements. This means that they will not continue their roles as CRPs without any monetary support. The reason is that the cost of travel itself is quite high for them. Therefore, RSPs can try to link CRPs with other government and non-government programmes and projects so that they hire them and their communities keep on benefiting from their services in one way or other even after the closure of the SUCCESS programme.

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