

VOLUME #06



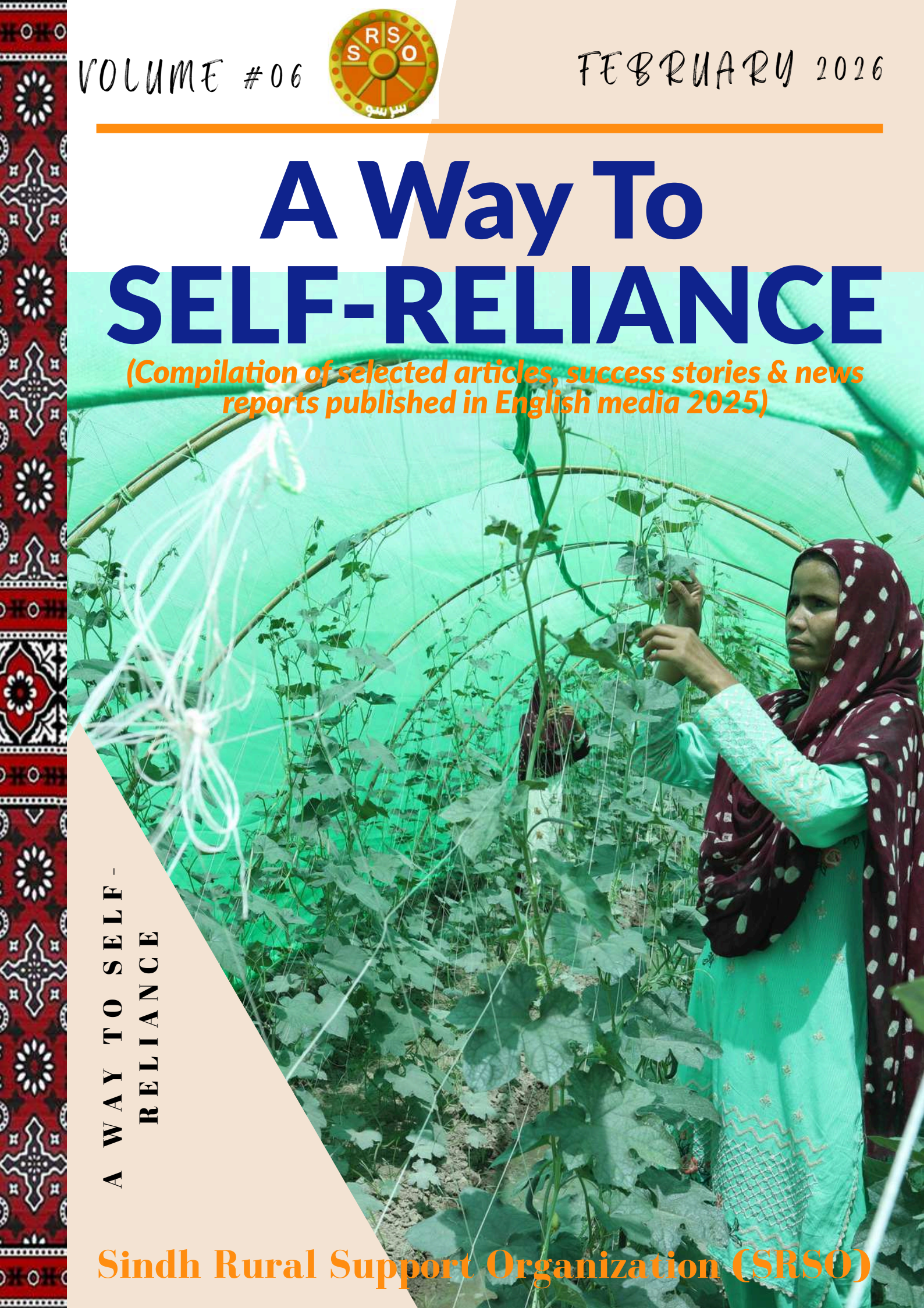
FEBRUARY 2026

A Way To SELF-RELIANCE

(Compilation of selected articles, success stories & news reports published in English media 2025)

A WAY TO SELF-
RELIANCE

Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO)





Forewords

A Way to Self-Reliance is a regular digital publication of the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), developed by the SRSO–Communication, MER Unit at the Head Office. It is the third key digital publication of SRSO, following the Monthly E-Newsletter (published until 2023) and the Weekly E-Bulletin (publishing since 2020).

A Way to Self-Reliance is essentially a compilation of selected success stories, analytical articles, and event reports that have been published in mainstream print and digital media, as well as shared on SRSO’s official social media platforms. This publication is compiled, curated, and designed on a bi-annual basis. Its primary objective is to document and showcase the impacts and achievements of SRSO-supported initiatives and community institutions, while keeping partners, government departments, media, civil society organizations, and communities informed and engaged.

This is **Volume 6, which features 30 selected articles**, success stories, and event reports published in national and international English-language print and digital media including Dawn (7), The News (6) so on during 2025 year (except one published in The Guardian on January 2026 and 2nd on December 28, 2024 in The News). The volume includes six international publications, comprising five articles from Arab News Pakistan and one from The Guardian.

The contents of this volume are categorized into three sections:

1. Articles
2. Success Stories
3. Event Reports

The media-wise distribution of published content includes: Dawn (7), The News International (6), Minute Mirror (6), Arab News Pakistan (5), Sindh Courier (2), The Guardian (1), Daily Times (1), Friday Times (1), and Express Tribune (1).

These pieces are authored by renowned writers, journalists and development practitioners such as Naazir Mahmood, Shazia Hasan, Ismail Dilawar, Vania Ali, Ghazala Fasih, Yousuf Katpar, Sumeta Afzal Syed, Sana Siddique Rahimoo and Akhar Hafeez, as well as members of the SRSO team, including Naimatullah Sawand (5 articles), GM Qazi (1 article), and Nadir Ali Shah (2 articles/success stories).

This rich compilation reflects the tangible impacts of SRSO’s initiatives and presents a comprehensive narrative of the organization’s journey and achievements. Through this publication, SRSO continues to document its institutional history as captured and reported by English-language media.

SRSO is grateful to all writers and media platforms that have highlighted its efforts to reduce poverty, empower rural women, build resilient communities, and promote inclusive rural development, in partnership with the Government of Sindh and national and international partners.



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. 'I wasn't allowed to study, but I will make sure no girl in this village hears those same words' | 04 |
| By Vania Ali (The Guardian) | |
| 2. In Pakistan's flood-hit south, women turn to zero-carbon cookstoves to curb emissions | 07 |
| By Ismail Dilawar (The Arab News Pakistan) | |
| 3. In rural Sindh, a woman-led business finds a low-cost answer to tomato price swings | 09 |
| By Ismail Dilawar (The Arab News Pakistan) | |
| 4. Resilience After The Rains: How Rural Women Rebuilt A Village In Sindh | 11 |
| By Ghazala Fasih (The Friday Times) | |
| 5. Sindh craftspersons' delicate needlework on display in Karachi | 16 |
| By Shazia Hasan (Dawn) | |
| 6. A new Sindh emerging by Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | 18 |
| 7. SOCIETY: A WOMAN ON THE VERGE by Akhtar Hafeez (Dawn) | 20 |
| 8. Sindh's struggle for survival by Naazir Mahmood (The News International) | 23 |
| 9. Scars that do not fade by GM Qazi (The News International) | 26 |
| 10. Empowered by opportunity, driven by determination by Nadir Ali Shah (Sindh Courier) | 29 |
| 11. Challenging karo-kari, strong women forge sisterhood in rural Sindh | 32 |
| By Shazia Hasan (Dawn) | |
| 12. EPICURIOUS: ROOT OF THE MATTER by Shazia Hasan (Dawn) | 34 |
| 13. DEVELOPMENT: PAKISTAN'S UNRAVELLING AID SECTOR by Naimatullah Sawand (Dawn) | 37 |
| 14. As monsoons arrive, livestock shelters stand between survival and ruin for Pakistani farmers | 40 |
| By Ismail Dilawar (The Arab News Pakistan) | |
| 15. Strategy to Combat Rural Poverty by Nadir Ali Shah (Sindh Courier) | 43 |
| 16. Voices from heat by Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | 46 |
| 17. In Pakistan's Sindh, women farmers grow vegetables against all odds, including weather | 48 |
| By Ismail Dilwar (The Arab News Pakistan) | |
| 18. Grassroots for the Climate by Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | 50 |
| 19. Greening Sindh, one hand at time by Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | 52 |
| 20. The women who rebuilt Sindh—and are building its future | 54 |
| By Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | |
| 21. Trash, Tech and Tenacity: Rural women drives silent revolution in Sindh | 55 |
| By Naimatullah Sawand (Minute Mirror) | |
| 22. SRSO working miracles in lives of low-income skilled workers, entrepreneurs | 57 |
| By Shazia Hasan (The Dawn) | |
| 23. A silent revolution in development by Naazir Mahmood (The News) | 60 |
| 24. Empowered Women, Empowered Sindh By Sumeta Afzal Syed (Daily Times) | 62 |
| 25. Empowered women, empowered Sindh: Breaking barriers & transforming lives | 64 |
| By Sumeta Afzal Syed (Express Tribune) | |
| 26. Sowing sustainability by Sana Siddique Rahimoo, (The News International) | 67 |
| 27. Gardens of cohesion by Sana Siddique Rahimoo, (The News International) | 70 |
| 28. Exquisite handicraft on display at Sartyoon sang Crafts Exhibition | |
| By Shazia Hasan (Dawn) | |
| 29. Stitching hope: Sindh's artisan program uplifts rural women through handicrafts | 72 |
| By Naimat Khan (The Arab News Pakistan) | |
| 30. How an India-inspired model empowering Sindh women socially and economically | 74 |
| By Yousuf Katpar (The News) | |



‘I wasn’t allowed to study, but I will make sure no girl in this village hears those same words’



Naushaba Roonjho, from Sindh province in Pakistan, has spent years working in family planning, polio vaccination and health initiatives in her community, and now wants to stand in local elections. Photograph: Courtesy of Leader TV

Global Development **Health worker Naushaba Roonjho was ostracised by her family in Pakistan for wanting to work but now she is campaigning for political office**

VANIA ALI

Published in Guardian

January 02, 2026

When Naushaba Roonjho became the first girl anyone in her district knew to have passed Pakistan’s national secondary school exam, the news was not celebrated. At home, in her village of Sheikh Soomar in southern Sindh, her father told her: “This is enough, you don’t need to study more. You should stay at home now.”

It was 2010 and Roonjho was 17; within weeks she was married, to Muhammad Uris, a labourer. Although, like all the girls in Thatta district, she had left school after primary, Roonjho had kept up her studies independently.

“People mocked me,” Roonjho says. “They said girls don’t need education and get spoiled if they study.”

In the early years of her marriage, she dedicated herself to raising her children, stretching her husband’s income to feed them all, and doing household chores. The couple lived with her parents, but when Roonjho saw an advert for a national rural development programme that was looking to train community workers, she applied.

Going door to door as a health worker was seen as shameful. Some accused her of dishonouring her family.

My parents stopped talking to me for two years. They didn’t accept that I wanted to study or become something in life. Naushaba Roonjho

By 2019, the conflict reached a breaking point. Her family told her to stop working or leave the house. Roonjho and Uris chose to leave, and with their savings the couple built a single-room home of their own. The separation hardened her resolve rather than weakening it and she had the full support of her husband.

"My parents stopped talking to me for two years. They didn't accept that I wanted to study or become something in life."

But working on vaccination drives and health hygiene initiatives around her district, Roonjho saw the need in her community.

"People don't wash their hands after using the bathroom or before eating. There are no midwives, and many women don't know the danger signs during childbirth." In Pakistan, the maternal mortality rate is 155 deaths per 100,000 live births, a drop from 178 a decade earlier but still far above the UN's goal of 70 by 2030.

Community health workers teach mothers about nutrition as part of a Unicef programme. Photograph: Rizwan Tabassum/AFP/Getty Images
"Some families closed the door on me," she says. "During polio vaccination they said don't give this to the children and considered the vaccination fake."

Her husband faced daily taunts. "People mocked me more than they mocked her," says Uris. "They said 'Don't you feel ashamed? Your wife is going out working with men.'"

He pushed back every time. "I told them, 'Whether you respect us or not, we will continue doing good. I'll always stay with her.' Both of us are educated. We passed the matric [secondary-school exam]," he says. "Our thinking is different from the villagers."



Community health workers teach mothers about nutrition as part of a Unicef programme. Photograph: Rizwan Tabassum/AFP/Getty Images

The couple started working on improving girls' education in the village, Roonjho going door to door.

"There were no girls in the school," he says, talking about the Sheikh Soomar government school, a school that – on paper – exists for boys and girls, but had no functioning space for girls.

"She went to each house, talked and convinced the parents, five or six girls started going." Eventually, seven enrolled, including their own two daughters. "For us, that is a very big number," says Uris. "Because before her, not even one girl was in school."

The Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) is a development body established to help build local leadership. Through their model, villages form local support organisations (LSOs), community-run groups that coordinate local development and mobilise women at the grassroots. "I was part of that," Roonjho says. "I became the president of the LSO. I worked in family planning, polio vaccination and health initiatives."



An SRSO team conducts a polio awareness session. Photograph: Courtesy of SRSO

She never asked for anything for herself, she worked for other women. That's real leadership
Zulfiqar Kalhoro, Sindh Rural Support Organisation

Zulfiqar Kalhoro, the CEO of SRSO, says women such as Roonjho are central to rural change. "We bring women together to form community organisations," he says. "The leadership comes from within the village."

For him, Roonjho stood out early. "She never asked for anything for herself, she worked for other women. That's real leadership." According to Kalhoro, the impact is visible across rural Sindh. "Today, most families are educating their daughters, and women leaders like Roonjho make that possible."

Raasti, 19, is a polio vaccinator who has been working with Roonjho, and views her as a mentor. "I look up to her as a strong woman," she says. "Seeing her work for education and health makes me feel good and feel like change is possible. She works with dedication and honesty. I admire that she goes beyond her means to achieve her goals."

As her next step, Roonjho enrolled in a disaster-preparedness programme on the Indus River. "We were taught what to do when there are floods, how to keep property documents safe, how to protect ourselves," she says.

This work helped her develop the confidence to speak in meetings and negotiate with officials, experiences that now define her next move. Roonjho, now 33, has her sights on elections in 2027, running for political office in the local authority. And she will have her village behind her, says Manzoor Ali, a 60-year-old elder. He says the transformation of Sheikh Soomar is the clearest change to the community he has ever witnessed. "She has done so much for this village without even having a seat in politics," he says. "If she gets a seat, she will do even more."



Women at an International Women's Day parade in Hyderabad, Sindh province.
Photograph: Shakeel Ahmed/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

"People here were being simple-minded," he says. "They thought girls would get spoiled or leave the family." But watching Roonjho go house to house, he says, the change has been remarkable. "Now I don't think there is a single house with a daughter who isn't sending her to school," he says.

If more women go out, learn, and take part in decisions, everything in this village will improve, and I would be very happy to see that."

In Pakistan, the lowest tier of government is the union council (UC), which oversees basic services at neighbourhood level. "The UC chairman doesn't do anything," says Roonjho. "For years, we have asked for clean water, electricity and roads. Nothing happens."

"I will stand for UC chairman," she says. "I want to solve these problems. I want to be the voice for poor people."

She has already begun visiting households, laying the groundwork for her political campaign.

"My biggest wish is that my daughters study and live with respect," she says.

"I wasn't allowed to study," she says. "But I will make sure no girl in this village grows up hearing those same words."

Note:

Vania Ali is a freelance journalist based in Karachi, Pakistan. She covers stories related to climate change and social impact.

Link:

https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/02/pakistan-women-girls-education-health-politics?fbclid=IwY2xjawPHV5zcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeXE7xvBmIFyzM1iVFJukleOOs_4PdoqHhB3GWasONwW9n3F4lmygeysSEgYs&brid=U5c4-cveJNL834s5EGFKvw#img-1

In Pakistan's flood-hit south, women turn to zero-carbon cookstoves to curb emissions



Smoke rises as the woman villagers prepare lunch on a zero-carbon Stove inside a house in Ramzan Arain village of Mirpurkhas district in Sindh, Pakistan, on December 19, 2025. (Screengrab/AN)

Ismail Dilawar

- **Pakistan faces frequent climate-induced rains and floods that killed more than 1,000 people and damaged vast swathes of crops this year**
- **Karachi-based non-profit REPL has distributed 500 zero-carbon cookstoves in rural Sindh as part of efforts to hedge against future shocks**

Pakistan faces frequent climate-induced rains and floods that killed more than 1,000 people and damaged vast swathes of crops this year.

Karachi-based non-profit REPL has distributed 500 zero-carbon cookstoves in rural Sindh as part of efforts to hedge against future shocks.

Karachi-based NGO Revive Environment Private Limited (REPL) distributed around 500 of these climate-friendly stoves in rural communities in Sindh this year, according to its senior manager operations Muhammad Ramzan.

Woman villagers in Mirpurkhas, Thatta, Umerkot and Sujawal districts have since been benefitting from these devices, which were given to them free of cost.

"This stove emits very little smoke while wood consumption is also nominal," Mitthoo told Arab News, while cooking inside her house in Ramzan Arain village of Mirpurkhas.

"The other [traditional] stoves would make us cough because they used to emit a lot of smoke."

These new stoves have been designed to ensure efficient air flow that improves combustion in the chamber, which in turn increases the temperature manifolds.

This extraordinary increase in temperature burns out small smoke particles. These climate-friendly stoves have a 4-inch opening to place pots and utensils above them, unlike wider hobs of traditional stoves that waste much of the heat, resulting in less smoke and faster cooking, according to Ramzan.

REPL plans to distribute around 2 million climate-friendly stoves over the next 5 years as Pakistan seeks global funding to hedge against future climate shocks, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) doling out a \$200 million first tranche to the country under its \$1.4 billion Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) earlier this month.

Climate Action Accelerator (CAA), a Geneva-based not-for-profit entity working to contain global warming well below two degrees and to strengthen climate resilience, says access to clean cooking stoves and fuels reduces

greenhouse gas emissions, creating positive health and wellbeing outcomes for people.

"This stove is good for us because it does not cause us any coughing and does not generate any coal," Mitthoo said.

Pakistan is ranked among the world's top climate-affected nations. Intense rains and floods this year killed more than 1,000 people and damaged crops and infrastructure worth billions of dollars in Pakistan's Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

Deforestation and glacial melting are the two leading causes compounding the climate crisis in the country.

Pakistan lost nearly 8 percent of its tree cover from 2001 to 2024, according to Global Forest Watch, a forest monitoring digital platform.

At least 78 percent (6,870 hectares) of tree cover loss was due to logging, followed by wildfires at 12 percent (1,080 hectares), permanent agriculture (492 hectares), temporary disturbances like natural disasters (184 hectares) and new settlements and infrastructure (179 hectares).

"One big benefit of this stove is that it is fuel efficient and does not consume too much wood," said Mitthoo who sees floods inundating her village almost every rainy season, killing people and animals and forcing her family to evacuate.

Hussan Bano, an official at the government-funded Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), said REPL's cookstove pilot project WAS helping reduce deforestation and environmental degradation in rural areas.

"This [new stove] has a specialty that it uses less wood, produces less smoke and saves time," she told Arab News. "It also keeps the environment clean."

Faisal Mustafa, an SRSO organizer in Mirpurkhas, said the smoke-free cookstoves were helping women save about 70 percent of firewood, thus indirectly reducing deforestation.

"These stoves emit lesser smoke and the women of our households who were burning 10 kilograms of wood are now burning only two to three kilograms," he said.

"When the smoke is reduced, the production of greenhouse gases is reduced. When there is less greenhouse gases production, it is very good for our climate."

REPL plans to scale up the distribution of these stoves to approximately 1 million in rural Sindh, followed by an additional one million across rural Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, according to Ramzan.

The NGO is in the process of registering its cookstove project with international registry VERRA, a non-profit that operates standards in environmental and social markets, including the world's leading Verified Carbon Standard crediting program.

The fresh distribution would commence after the completion of the registry process and fulfillment of all regulatory requirements.

"We aim to commence mass distribution by the third quarter of 2026," Ramzan said, adding they intend to complete registration and fulfil regulatory requirements before that.



In rural Sindh, a woman-led business finds a low-cost answer to tomato price swings

Ismail Dilawar

- ***The company turns tomatoes into powder using a manual, sun-drying process that cuts production costs***
- ***It seeks partnerships with major food brands to expand beyond rural markets, tap into large urban centers***

MIRPURKHAS: A small but fast-growing woman-led food company in southern Pakistan is using a simple, low-cost production method to turn tomatoes into powder, a product its founder says could cut costs for major food companies by as much as 50 percent while helping stabilize prices for consumers.

The business operates without electricity-driven drying machines, relying instead on manual labor and natural sunlight to dry tomatoes during periods of oversupply, when prices collapse and farmers are forced to discard produce.

The company, Red Royal Foods (RRF), is based in Jhuddo village in Sindh's Mirpurkhas district and produces organic powder from ripe tomatoes that are sliced by hand, sun-dried over several days and treated with sea salt, without the use of artificial preservatives, additives or machines.

Founded and led by 24-year-old Zainab Munawar, RRF has grown from a small local operation into a supplier serving markets in Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad. Munawar now aims to sell her product to large local and international food brands operating in Pakistan's major cities.

"Our target is to do business with National and Shan [Foods]," Munawar, nicknamed Nainsukh, told Arab News while standing inside her factory, which she recently acquired from a wedding lawn owner.

The initiative received support after the devastating floods of 2022, which destroyed crops and livelihoods across southern Sindh.

Mahdi Hassan, a livelihood officer at the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), said RRF was backed through post-flood recovery programs implemented with Germany's Malteser International.

"After the floods of 2022, there was a lot of destruction in Jhuddo because of which people's livelihoods were greatly affected," he said, adding that SRSO had supported around 24 similar initiatives in the area, mostly led by women, with about Rs30 million (\$107,000) in funding.

Beyond livelihoods, RRF is also trying to reduce Pakistan's reliance on imported food products.

"No company is producing this dried-tomato powder in Pakistan yet," said Ahsan Khan, the company's technical supervisor.

"What is available in the market is being imported ... We are trying to manufacture this dried tomato powder locally and give competitive rates to our buyers."

During peak seasons, RRF sells up to four tons of tomato powder per month.

Munawar said she expects that volume to rise, noting that entry into Karachi's large food market could significantly boost revenues from last year's Rs650,000 (\$2,319).

"Last year we were in collaboration with Al-Noor Foods while now we have sent requests [business proposals] to National Foods and Shan Foods, who will become our customers after approving those requests," she said.

RRF has also sent proposals to international brands such as McDonald's.

"We would be targeting to double, triple our revenues this year if we get approvals from these brands," she added.

Published in The Arab News Pakistan

Link:

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2627008/pakistan>



ARABNEWS.PK

In rural Sindh, a woman-led business finds a low-cost answer to tomato price swings

RESILIENCE AFTER THE RAINS: HOW RURAL WOMEN REBUILT A VILLAGE IN SINDH



CAPTION: VIBRANT EXAMPLES OF RURAL WOMEN'S REMARKABLE ARTISANSHIP.

FEATURE BY: GHAZALA FASIH



CAPTION: ONCE A DUMPSITE, NOW A THRIVING FISH-FARMING POND



CAPTION: ZAHRA, PRESIDENT OF THE VILLAGE ORGANIZATION — A TRUE ROLE MODEL FOR RURAL WOMEN.

RESILIENCE AFTER THE RAINS: HOW RURAL WOMEN REBUILT A VILLAGE IN SINDH



CAPTION: SAFYA BHANBHRO: A STUDENT, A TEACHER, AND A DETERMINED YOUNG CHANGEMAKER.



CAPTION: SAFYA BHANBHRO: A STUDENT, A TEACHER, AND A DETERMINED YOUNG CHANGEMAKER. CAPTION: SHABANA KHASKHELI, LEADING THE FIGHT TO STOP CHILD MARRIAGES.



CAPTION: RAHEEMA — A MASTER CRAFTSWOMAN WHO LAUNCHED AN ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY WITH HER DAUGHTERS AND DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW.



CAPTION: A HOME DEVASTATED BY THE FLOODS — A STARK REMINDER OF LOSS AND RESILIENCE.



CAPTION: MR. MUHAMMAD DITTAL KULHORO, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SINDH RURAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATION (SRSO)



CAPTION: THE RESILIENT WOMEN OF RURAL SINDH



Lakho Bhanbhro, a remote village in Sindh's coastal district of Thatta, where this year's monsoon floods left a trail of destruction, is a place where mud roads and unplastered homes are the norm. Yet here, in a settlement still bearing the scars of disaster, rural women speak confidently about entrepreneurship, business models, and financial independence. Wrapped in simple chadors, these women amaze visitors with their poise, clarity of thought, and the determination woven into their everyday speech.

Their awareness of education, the environment, and their rights is striking. Working alongside the men in their families and with support from various non-governmental organisations, these women have transformed Lakho Bhanbhro into a model village.

As you enter the settlement, broad ponds glisten under the sun. Once nothing more than waste dumps, they now host thriving fish farms. Women here raise fish on a commercial scale, turning what was once an environmental hazard into a sustainable source of income.

This transformation began with interest-free loans from the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), which helped residents launch small businesses. Women of all ages are now part of this growing community of entrepreneurs.

One of them is Zahra, a soft-spoken woman in her mid-forties with only a fifth-grade education, and the president of the village organisation. Smiling confidently, she explains how five women from her group collectively secured a loan of 2.8 million rupees to establish a fish farm.

They trained with SRSO, and while the men in their families support them, the business is firmly led by women. As Zahra proudly shows her ponds, she describes how the fish and the dreams of the families involved are growing fast.

This is the first time Zahra and her group have handled such a large loan. Before this, they took smaller amounts. She laughs as she recalls the scepticism villagers initially felt when SRSO first approached them in 2017, inviting every household to contribute 100 rupees to form a local support organisation. "We refused and sent them back," she says.

Later, women from nearby villages told them how beneficial the interest-free loans had been. "We realised that if we formed an organisation, we too could earn, support our families, and fulfil our children's needs." When SRSO returned, the women welcomed them. They formed the local support organisation, received training, and soon began taking loans.

There are 900,000 registered households in the district. The government cannot provide 900,000 jobs. But through entrepreneurship, we can help people become self-sufficient

Zahra recalls her own journey, starting with a 13,000-rupee loan she repaid on time, followed by 50,000 rupees to open a small shop, then 40,000 more to buy a cow. Now she manages a fish farm. "My business partners are all women," she says. "Men help us, but we are not dependent on them." Recently, each member earned 50,000 rupees in profit.

Another group of villagers, men and women together, leased three acres of land using an SRSO loan. "We used to be sharecroppers," says a proud Shabana Khaskheli, "but now we are the contractors."

Then there is Raheema, known for her exquisite handicrafts. With an 80,000-rupee loan, she and her daughters and daughters-in-law began producing embroidered clothes and traditional Sindhi Ralli. Their vibrant, hand-stitched pieces, adorned with silk, beads, and gota, sell quickly, especially at exhibitions. SRSO organises a major handicrafts exhibition in Karachi every year, and Raheema's group has participated several times. She proudly notes that they repaid their loan within the 12-month deadline, and now their business is thriving.

One of the most remarkable women in Lakho Bhanbhro is Ami Shoro. Years ago, she was left disabled after her husband attacked her with an axe, injuring her spine. In 2017, SRSO provided her with a wheelchair and a 15,000-rupee loan. Through the embroidery skills of her hands, she now earns a dignified living for herself and her six children.

The presence of non-governmental organisations has clearly boosted the community's confidence.



RESILIENCE AFTER THE RAINS: HOW RURAL WOMEN REBUILT A VILLAGE IN SINDH

Safia Bhanbhro shares this proudly: “SRSO taught us how to work with other organisations. Before, our village was in terrible shape. Dirty water stood everywhere, people couldn’t even visit each other. Now, with support from SSEP, USAID, FAO, and the European Union’s UNIDO project, we have built latrines, kitchens, solar streetlights, a reverse osmosis plant, and even a two-room primary school with benches. We also have a community hall. Solar panels now power our homes and shops, so even with frequent outages, our work never stops.”

Across hundreds of such villages, SRSO, part of the Government of Sindh’s Peoples Poverty Reduction Program, is helping transform lives. SRSO’s Chief Executive Officer, Mohammad Dittal Zulfiqar Kalhoro, is known for his hands-on approach. A finance specialist who once worked in telecommunications, he was drawn to the social sector and joined SRSO in 2013, becoming Chief Executive Officer in 2015.

SRSO currently operates in 15 districts of Sindh, organising over 1.43 million households.

Kalhoro explains the organisation’s philosophy using a Thatta example: “There are 900,000 registered households in the district. The government cannot provide 900,000 jobs. But through entrepreneurship, we can help people become self-sufficient.”

For Thatta alone, SRSO has allocated 200 million rupees in loans for 2,000 people. The organisation targets the poorest households, ensuring no deserving family is left behind. Its process is rigorous, profiling each area, conducting household surveys, meeting with local religious leaders, and assessing poverty using a detailed 50-question form designed to prevent false claims.

Households with a poverty score between 18 per cent and 23 per cent receive grants, while those scoring up to 32 per cent qualify for interest-free loans. Individuals can access loans ranging from 15,000 to 400,000 rupees, while groups can receive up to 3 million. The loan recovery rate is an impressive 99 per cent, with only 400,000 rupees defaulted out of a total disbursement of 1 billion.

“Our 2,500 staff members meet 25,000 to 30,000 women every day,” Kalhoro says. “We see how their thinking is changing. The impact of this programme is spreading through rural society like a fragrance.”

Indeed, rural women here are not only achieving economic independence but are also actively reshaping their society.

Suraiya Lashari captures this spirit in a verse she hums:

“Plant a single tree, and the whole earth will remember you.”

Shabana Khaskheli embodies this spirit. She is fighting early marriage and has helped stop 25 child marriages so far. “We formed a committee of respected elders,” she explains. “Whenever we hear of a child marriage, we go and talk to the parents. Some listen. If they do not, we warn them of the legal consequences. Fear of the police and courts usually stops them.”

Shabana also works as a polio vaccinator. Early on, people taunted her husband, telling him his wife would “run away” if he allowed her to work. But he supported her, and today she is a frontline worker helping immunise 200 girls a day during the recent human papillomavirus vaccination campaign. “It’s not easy,” she says. “People insult us, but our officers stand with us. Together, we convince the community.”

Another inspiring figure is young Safia Bhanbhro, who says, “Education is a person’s third eye.” Having completed tenth grade, she enrolled in a boys’ college miles away and plans to sit her intermediate exams privately. She dreams of becoming a doctor. She recalls how people criticised her father for letting her study beyond primary school. “My father told them, ‘Let the relationships break if they must, I will educate my daughter.’”

Today, the entire village is benefiting from that decision. Safia now teaches at the SRSO-supported primary school and is shaping the minds of the next generation. Every girl in her class aspires to become a doctor, and every boy aims to join the police force. Elderly women now come to enrol their granddaughters in school.

The shift in mindset is unmistakable, and it is what truly makes Lakho Bhanbhro a model village.

LINK:
[HTTPS://WWW.THEFRIDAYTIMES.COM/18-DEC-2025/RESILIENCE-RAINS-RURAL-WOMEN-REBUILT-VILLAGE](https://www.thefridaytimes.com/18-DEC-2025/RESILIENCE-RAINS-RURAL-WOMEN-REBUILT-VILLAGE)

Sindh craftspersons' delicate needlework on display in Karachi



KARACHI: The three-day 17th Sartyoon Sang Crafts Exhibition organised by the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) opened at Ocean Mall here on Friday.

By Shazia Hasan

The little shop on the mall's ground floor was crowded by customers on the exhibition's first day. Some were looking at the rallis [quilts], some were trying to decide which of the embroidered kurtis, waistcoats, dupattas, stoles, ajrak and lungi they should buy, some were interested in the footwear and bags, others were busy selecting the pretty wall hangings and relic models from Mohenjo Daro. There were also planters, vases and baskets and boxes with traditional Sindhi designs available.

While showing the various craft pieces at the exhibition, Surraiya Agha, who leads the crafts brand Sartyoon Sang at SRSO in Sukkur, shared with Dawn their way of working with artisans and craftspersons. "We have built direct linkages with craftspersons, most of whom are women in the villages of Sindh," she said. "We don't just sell their work. We promote their work. We also give them the profit earned from the sales. We only keep the amount we paid to buy the material such as the cost of the cloth or the threads and our transport expenditure. The rest is for the artisans to keep," she said.

Sindh craftspersons' delicate needlework on display in Karachi

Surraiya showed some cushion covers done in sami ralli work worth Rs2,000 each. A ralli done in the same needlework was selling there for Rs60,000.

SRSO's CEO Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro said that the ralli was made by at least three craftswomen over a period of three to four months. "See, the delicate work," he said. "And it is all done in one piece. It is not little pieces sewn together," he pointed out. He added that they also pay the craftspersons for the craft pieces they take from them on the spot.

It takes rural women months to make one ralli, organiser says

"Then when we sell them and make a profit, that entire money also goes to them."

Basheera Khatoon from Larkana said that she is part of a group of artisans who make the crafts. "I am myself an expert in applique work," she said. "I learned needlework from my mother and grandmother. Back when they worked, there was no such caring organisation like SRSO. My grandmother is no longer around but my mother is. And she is so happy to see this positive change where we are enjoying the benefits of our labour," she smiled.

Iqra Bibi from Khairpur proudly showed a long velvet coat and several kurtis, which she had stitched herself. "Some crafts we learned while growing up at home. The rest we learned through training organised by SRSO," she said.

The three-day exhibition concludes on Sunday.

Published in Dawn, December 6th, 2025

link:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1959444/sindh-craftspersons-delicate-needlework-on-display-in-karachi>





A NEW SINDH EMERGING

BY NAIMATULLAH SAWAND

Women in rural Sindh have been quietly reshaping their communities for more than a decade, not through loud campaigns or sudden political waves, but through steady work, shared decisions, and a confidence that grew slowly but firmly. When the People's Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP) started in 2009, most districts of Sindh were facing heavy poverty, and women were largely missing from the spaces where development decisions were made. They worked every day—taking care of livestock, stitching clothes for small income, managing household resources, and keeping families afloat—but their contributions were treated as ordinary chores, not as economic activity. The gap between their real work and their public recognition was wide. Development programs rarely placed women at the center. PPRP chose to do the opposite.

The program built its approach around the idea that if women lead, villages change. It organized more than 1.5 million households into women-led groups across Sindh. These groups became places where women could talk openly, save money together, support each other in crises, and think collectively about the needs of their communities. What made this model different was its simplicity.

Instead of bringing outside experts to decide what villages needed, PPRP encouraged women to talk among themselves, identify the poorest households, discuss local problems, and select solutions they trusted.



This shift made a visible difference. Women who once stayed quiet during village meetings suddenly found themselves leading them. They learned to keep records, manage funds, negotiate prices, and even deal with contractors who were not used to taking instructions from women. The program provided small grants, interest-free loans, skills training, housing support, and business guidance. More than fifteen thousand women-led families built their own low-cost, climate-resilient houses under the program. Many women who had never signed a document in their lives became responsible for verifying construction quality, monitoring expenditures, and representing their village in larger forums.

The impact spread naturally. Women used small grants to start tiny businesses—tailoring, embroidery, tea shops, livestock rearing, small-scale cultivation, food processing, nurseries—and these small businesses slowly turned into community income. Over ten thousand such nano-businesses have been launched under PPRP and its complementary enterprise support. Many of these businesses started with nothing more than an idea, a little courage, and a small amount of capital.

What made them successful was not one-off support but regular mentoring and a network of women's groups who shared experiences and learned together.

A new Sindh emerging

In one village near Jhuddo, for example, a woman named Shahida began drying chillies in the sun as a small business. Through PPRP's business training inspired by the ILO GET Ahead model, she learned how to improve packaging, find new buyers, and adjust prices. Her earnings grew steadily. She hired women who previously had no income at all. Her village organization later secured improvements to a link road, making it easier to transport goods to the market. None of this happened through a grand plan. It happened because ordinary women were allowed to make decisions.

What makes the Sindh experience especially interesting is how it mirrors and differs from global development stories. China's massive poverty reduction—lifting about 800 million people out of poverty—was driven by strong state investment, large infrastructure development, and national-scale planning. Women played an important role in education, farming, and local cooperatives, and their empowerment helped strengthen social and economic outcomes. Sindh's approach, by contrast, is not top-down. It is rooted in the daily life of villages. It treats communities as active partners rather than passive recipients. This quiet, women-led structure has produced results without heavy infrastructure or large-scale government machinery.

The program also connects naturally with global models like BRAC's ultra-poor graduation approach in Bangladesh, SEWA's collective empowerment in India, and community-driven development initiatives supported by the World Bank. PPRP shares elements of all these models—asset support, training, women's organizing, community planning—but combines them in a way that fits Sindh's social fabric. The strength of this approach lies in its cultural familiarity. It does not force women into models that feel foreign. It expands the work they already understand and respects the rhythms of rural life.

Over the years, staff working in districts like Sanghar, Khairpur, Badin, Mirpurkhas, Umerkot, and Thatta noticed something important. Women were not unaware of village problems. They simply lacked a space where their solutions were taken seriously. Once that space was created, their natural leadership surfaced. They kept better financial records than many men. They monitored projects with more honesty. They were more consistent in attending meetings and completing tasks. They were cautious with money, but brave with ideas. They cared deeply about fairness because they understood the everyday struggles of the poorest families.

The Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) added another layer to this change by creating a more structured path for rural entrepreneurs. Market studies, supply-chain linkages, product improvement, and business coaching helped women move from informal, home-based work to small but proper enterprises. The rural economy of Sindh is largely built on micro and small businesses, and EDF's support has helped strengthen this foundation. Many women who started with a small PPRP grant are now supplying products to district markets, improving packaging, or participating in local exhibitions. Their income may still be modest, but the dignity it brings is enormous.

There is still much that needs to be researched—how many businesses continue beyond five years, how women's leadership affects local governance, how daughters of these women view their own futures, and how communities with women-led planning compare to those without it. But even without formal studies, the change is visible. Villages look different. Conversations sound different. Women walk with more confidence. Many of them say the same thing in their own words: they were never unable, they were simply never given a chance.

Today, the transformation continues. It is not loud or glamorous. It is steady. It is patient. And it is carried forward by women who once considered themselves ordinary but now understand they are capable of shaping the future of their communities. Rural Sindh is not changing through sudden shocks; it is being rewired from within, through the hands, voices, and decisions of women who were once invisible and are now impossible to ignore.

We welcome your contributions! Submit your blogs, opinion pieces, press releases, news story pitches, and news features to opinion@minutemirror.com.pk and minutemirrormail@gmail.com





Naushaba (centre) sits alongside her mother (left) and another family member outside her house in Shaikh Soomar village, Sindh, in July 2025 | Photo by the writer

SOCIETY: A WOMAN ON THE VERGE

Akhtar Hafeez

In 2027, Naushaba Roonjho intends to do something almost unthinkable for a woman from her conservative Sindhi village: to run for political office against entrenched male politicians.

It's a remarkable ambition for a 33-year-old who, less than a decade ago, was thrown out of her family home for the simple act of working outside it. But for Naushaba, running for office is the logical culmination of a journey that began with a single act of defiance — sitting for her matriculation exam when no woman from her community had ever done so before.

"I did not want to be a conventional woman like others, who are dependent on their parents or husbands," she tells Eos from her modest home in Shaikh Soomar, a dusty village of 150 families in Sindh's Thatta district. "I chose a different and difficult life."

BREAKING THE MOULD

Shaikh Soomar village sits 10 kilometers from the town of Jhirrak, and is a collection of mud-brick houses where most girls' education ends at primary school — if it begins at all. Naushaba attended the village school until fifth grade before, like most girls of the conservative Roonjho community, her studies were abruptly halted.

But while other girls accepted this fate, Naushaba continued her education at home, studying by lamplight after finishing her household chores. In 2010, at 18, she sat for the matriculation exam as a private candidate — and passed, becoming the first woman from her community to do so.

SOCIETY: A WOMAN ON THE VERGE

Naushaba Roonjho has had a transformational impact on her conservative village in Sindh, becoming its first woman to pass matriculation, a community health leader and an education crusader. Now, she intends to contest local body elections...

That same year, she was married to her cousin Muhammad Uris, a daily-wage labourer who, unlike most men in the village, supported her educational aspirations. "I saw something different in her," says 44-year-old Uris. "She was not content with the life most women accepted. I thought, why should I stop her from becoming something more?"

For the next seven years, Naushaba lived the life expected of her — raising three children, managing household chores, stretching her husband's meagre income to feed the family. But she watched. She saw women die in childbirth from preventable complications. She saw girls pulled out of school at puberty. She saw potential extinguished by poverty and tradition.

When the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) advertised for community workers in 2017, Naushaba saw her chance. She applied without telling her extended family.

SUCCESS AND SETBACKS

"My first pay was 6,000 rupees," she recalls. For a woman who had never controlled her own money, it was transformative. The work involved going door-to-door promoting health and hygiene practices, and soon other community-based organisations began hiring her for similar outreach work.

But success came at a cost. "When Naushaba started working as a social worker, people taunted me," says 44-year-old Uris. "They would say that a decent man would never allow his wife to work and that she would ruin our honour. But I decided to stand by her through thick and thin."

The pressure intensified. In 2019, Naushaba's family issued an ultimatum: stop working or leave the family's house, where Naushaba lived along with her husband and three children.

"They said I was bringing shame on the family," Naushaba recalls. "They said I was setting a bad example for other girls, that I was destroying our traditions."

Naushaba chose to leave.

With their combined savings and Uris' earnings, they built a one-room house on a small plot of land. It was cramped and basic, but it was theirs.

The struggle taught Naushaba the importance of financial independence.

Through the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), she acquired a loan of Rs300,000, which she invested in livestock. "I bought cattle and sold them after a year," she reveals. "We used the money for improvements to our mud-brick house and to invest in future endeavours."

She began working on vaccination drives, water and sanitation projects, and health initiatives across multiple villages. But one mission consumed her more than any other: getting girls into school.

THE EDUCATION CRUSADE

Shaikh Soomar has one government school that serves boys and girls together — a reality that keeps many girls at home, their parents unwilling to send them to a mixed environment.

"We don't have a separate school for girls, which is a deterrent for their parents," Naushaba explains. To counter that, she went door-to-door to convince parents to enrol their daughters.

SOCIETY: A WOMAN ON THE VERGE

“Akram Roonjho, a teacher at the school, says that over 100 girls have enrolled over the last few years due to Naushaba’s efforts. Naushaba’s own daughters — Naila, 13, and Nadia, 11 — are among the enrolled students, along with her eight-year-old son.

Still, the school has no separate building for girls, which remains a barrier for conservative families. Naushaba has repeatedly petitioned local Union Council (UC) representatives for a separate girls’ school, but her requests have gone unanswered — a fact that fuels her political ambitions.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Maternal and infant mortality is another issue that haunts Naushaba. “Most of the village women are negligent about their health issues and many expectant mothers of Soomar Shaikh village die during delivery,” she tells Eos.

According to The Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey 2019, in Sindh, 224 women die per 100,000 live births — well above the national average of 186 — with such tragedies more common in rural areas. The under-five mortality in the province stands at 77 deaths per 1,000 live births, also higher than the national figure, according to the World Bank.

Naushaba found a way to address the issue while attending a medical camp organised by the charity HANDS. Working with local community organiser Qasim Dal, she convinced the organisation to establish regular services in Shaikh Soomar.

Now, a sonologist and a doctor visit the village every fortnight. Initially, though, locals were reluctant to send their women to doctors. Again, it was Naushaba who intervened, explaining women’s health issues to men and convincing them to let their wives and children seek advice and treatment from professionals. She has since trained two other women to conduct such sessions in her village and those around it.

“After getting expert advice from doctors, women are using birth control pills and children are getting better access to medicine and nutrition,” Naushaba reveals.

THE POLITICAL TURN

By 2024, Naushaba had established herself as one of the most effective community mobilisers in her area. But she’d also hit a wall — she could advocate and organise, but couldn’t convince local government officials to implement solutions.

This realisation has led to her decision to contest the next local body elections, slated for early 2027.

“I have tried too hard to facilitate my village, but these efforts are not enough until I get a chance in politics,” she tells Eos. “We have voted but failed to see the impact. Our local political leaders appear unconcerned by our basic needs and issues.”

It’s an audacious move for a woman who, less than a decade ago, was ostracised for simply working outside her home. She’ll be running against established political figures with deep pockets and extensive patronage networks.

Khadim Shar, who works with SRSO, believes women like Naushaba are catalysts for broader social change. “In societies where cultural taboos and rigid traditions dominate, her story stands as a powerful example,” he says.

For Naushaba, the decision to enter politics stems from a simple realisation: advocacy has its limits without institutional power. She believes political parties and local leaders have continuously ignored her community’s issues and she wants to be a strong voice in political corridors.

“My village is my world and I want to make it a better place for everyone who lives here,” she affirms. “Our women are suffering from different issues. That is not their destiny, but due to administrative flaws. I am hopeful that, through collective efforts, we will bring change in every sphere of life.”

The writer is a Sindhi fiction writer and journalist. He can be reached at akhterhafez@gmail.com
Published in Dawn, EOS, November 9th, 2025
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953908/society-a-woman-on-the-verge>

SINDH'S STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Dr. Naazir Mahmood



The representational image shows a view of huts submerged in rainwater in Larkana in 2022. — APP

The Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) has quietly become one of Pakistan's most effective engines of resilience. In a country where bureaucracy often confuses motion with progress, the SRSO has distinguished itself through the rare combination of compassion and competence. It began modestly, with the idea that communities – especially women and the poor – should not merely receive help but shape it.

Over two decades, it has turned that principle into practice across Sindh's flood-prone districts. When the province was submerged in 2022, the SRSO turned its field offices in Shikarpur, Jacobabad, Larkana, Khairpur and Sukkur into lifelines. They distributed food and medicine, but also wages and dignity. 'Cash-for-work' schemes rebuilt roads and morale. Women artisans revived embroidery clusters that became symbols of both income and identity. Even housing reconstruction acquired a climate-conscious twist: elevated eco-homes designed to resist the next deluge rather than commemorate the last one.

The publication of 'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh' (Climate Change and Sindh) marks the SRSO's entry into the intellectual arena.

The 152-page volume is less a vanity project than a statement of intent: that the climate debate must be written and read in Sindhi if it is to matter. In that, it continues the SRSO's evolution from a relief agency to a knowledge institution – one that translates floodwater into public policy. The volume's compiler, Zubair Soomro, embodies the bridge between activism and analysis. A development worker turned editor, he understands that people are more likely to act on ideas they understand. Hence his insistence on linguistic ownership: climate literacy, he argues, cannot survive translation into bureaucratese.

The essays he curates draw their imagery from the Indus delta, the Kotri barrage, the Thatta mangroves and the brittle rhythms of fishing and farming life. The result is a body of writing that feels lived rather than borrowed. Soomro's editorial hand ensures diversity without dilution.

Sindh's struggle for survival

The 17 contributions range from scientific exposition to moral argument. They avoid the twin traps of despair and technocracy that often plague environmental writing. Instead, they weave empirical evidence with cultural intuition – what might be called Sindh's environmental vernacular. This, more than anything, is Soomro's quiet triumph: turning climate change from a donor-driven slogan into a people's conversation.

No such conversation would be complete without Naseer Memon, the province's most persuasive chronicler of rivers and rights. His career – spanning civil society, journalism and research – has made him both witness and conscience. Memon's writings have long argued that the Indus Delta's decline is not an act of nature but of neglect. His notion of the 'right of rivers to exist' predates global debates about ecological personhood and makes a philosophical claim with practical urgency: if the Indus dies, so does Sindh.

In 'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh', Memon contributes three essays that distil decades of thought. He reimagines the river as a living being, dissects the politics of Pakistan's flood mismanagement and explores how the erasure of land erodes identity itself. Few writers connect hydrology to history with such clarity. Together, Soomro and Memon have forged an intellectual alliance that transforms climate anxiety into cultural critique. Where one edits from within the development sector, the other writes from the margins of power. Between them, they map a new moral geography for Sindh – one where environmentalism is as much about justice as it is about weather.

'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh' opens with forewords by Durrani and Kalhor, both of whom anchor the collection in lived experience rather than abstract concern. They remind readers that climate change, in Sindh, is not a forecast but is yesterday's floodwater still standing in today's fields.

The first essay, 'Sarhadan Kaan Azad Mausam' ('Climate Without Borders'), by Ali Tauqueer Shaikh, stretches the reader's horizon beyond the provincial. Shaikh, a veteran climate strategist, examines compound extreme weather events – the deadly cocktail of heatwaves, droughts and floods that increasingly defines South Asia. His central message is that adaptation must be as borderless as the atmosphere.

The essay links Sindh's fate to regional cooperation – a hard sell in a neighbourhood addicted to rivalry, but a necessary one. Next comes M Ehsan Leghari, whose essay on the Indus's lower Kotri stretch introduces a chilling idea: ecocide. A biologist and conservationist with decades of experience in Sindh's irrigation ecology, Leghari documents the loss of fish species, the intrusion of seawater and the collapse of delta ecosystems. He reminds readers that biodiversity is not aesthetic but existential. His writing bridges science and ethics, turning ecological decline into an indictment of state apathy. The Indus, he implies, is being murdered in instalments.

The book then widens its scope. Imdad Hussain Siddiqui, the Sindh ombudsman, contributes a thoughtful piece titled 'Climate Change and the Leadership Role of the Sindh Ombudsman'. A career jurist and administrator, Siddiqui argues that climate adaptation is as much a question of governance as of geography. His essay shows how oversight institutions – often dismissed as ceremonial – can enforce climate accountability by ensuring that local officials protect the rights of affected citizens. He frames environmental justice as a constitutional duty, not a bureaucratic favour. In a province where redress is rare, his voice lends moral authority and administrative realism. Equally compelling is 'Sindh and the Climate Crisis' by Nasir Ali Panhwar, an environmental policy expert and executive director of the Centre for Environment and Development. Panhwar's career has long intertwined research and advocacy; his focus on water management and urban resilience makes him one of Sindh's most informed commentators. In this essay, he traces the historical evolution of Sindh's vulnerability – from colonial canal construction to modern urban sprawl – and argues that climate policy must move from reaction to foresight. His prose is spare but sharp: If we continue to treat the river as a pipe and the desert as waste, we will have neither.



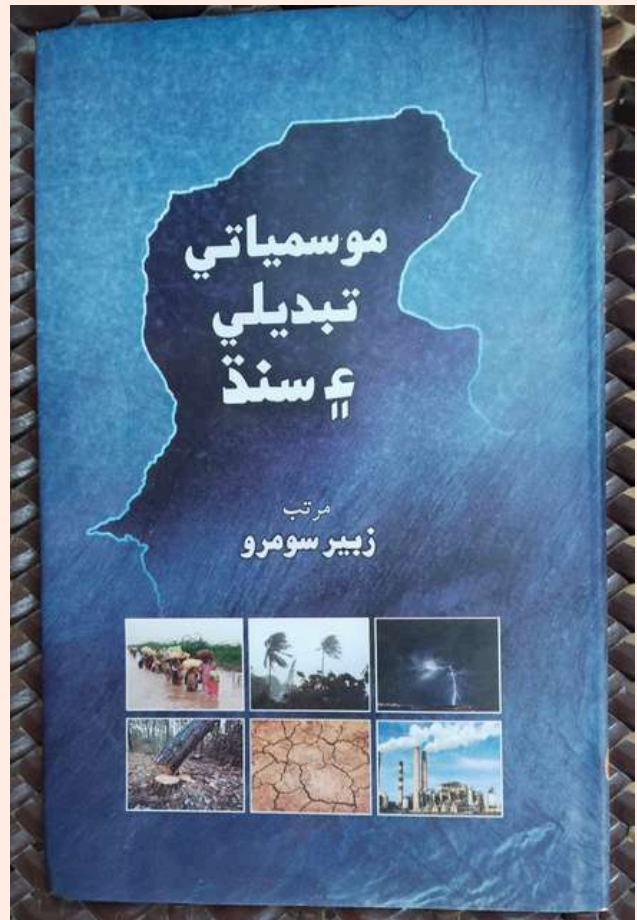
Sindh's struggle for survival

Together, Siddiqui and Panhwar remind readers that climate change is not only a scientific concern but a political one. Where Leghari writes as a naturalist, Siddiqui speaks as a reformer, and Panhwar as a planner. Their essays, distinct in tone but united in urgency, reveal a spectrum of Sindh's intellectual response – from the courtroom to the delta, from the policy bench to the field trench. A cluster of other articles turns to adaptation, agriculture, and the gendered experience of crisis. Several authors – teachers, journalists and development workers – offer firsthand observations from flood-affected villages, proposing micro-solutions such as floating gardens, seed banks and women-led disaster committees.

Yet it is again Memon's trilogy that gives the book its spine. In one essay, he declares that rivers possess an existence beyond their economic use; in another, he skewers the flood empathy cycle, where sympathy peaks after catastrophe and ebbs with the waters. His third essay reflects on cultural displacement – the drowning of memory when geography disappears. What sets the collection apart is its accessibility. The Sindhi prose is clean, the layout elegant, and the tone serious without self-importance. Citations from the IPCC and COP meetings coexist with local proverbs. The mix is refreshing – a reminder that sophistication need not be foreign.

As a whole, 'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh' is both a document and a diagnosis. It records the human cost of climate change in a province already living its future and it exposes the institutional lethargy that allows disaster to repeat itself. More importantly, it establishes Sindhi as a language of environmental scholarship. That alone is an achievement. The SRSO and its collaborators have done something rare in Pakistan: they have created a book that belongs equally on an academic's desk and in a villager's home. It argues, persuasively, that adaptation begins not with infrastructure but with understanding – and that understanding grows best in the language of the people.

In that sense, 'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh' is not merely a book about climate change. It is a reminder that the struggle for survival, like the Indus itself, flows from the same source: memory, dignity and the refusal to surrender to the tide.



The writer holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK. He tweets/posts @NaazirMahmood and can be reached at:mnazir1964@yahoo.co.uk

In that sense, 'Mausamyati Tabdili Ain Sindh' is not merely a book about climate change. It is a reminder that the struggle for survival, like the Indus itself, flows from the same source: memory, dignity and the refusal to surrender to the tide.



Scars that do not fade

A TALE OF SURVIVING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

By Qazi GM

When I first saw Aami Shoro in Thatta, she was sitting in a wheelchair under a makeshift shelter, working on an appliqué artwork. The colours of her embroidery stood out against the dullness of her surroundings and shone in the afternoon sun. At first, she looked like any other lady sewing to make money. But Aami's story is written on her body in scars that go across her neck, back and arms. They are reminders of brutality so bad that she can no longer walk.

Aami was married to a man considerably older than her when she was only 15. By the time she was 27, she had six children. When her life fell apart, her youngest child was nine months old and nursing.

One afternoon, while she was cooking, her husband told her to leave right away to help him with work. She told him to wait till the supper was ready. That simple answer led to horrific suffering.

She recalls, "He suddenly hit me in the neck and back with an axe. I passed out as blood spilt out of me. He raced away, yelling "blood, blood." My child was left alone in the cradle and cried.



Her brother rushed to her side, but it took about an hour to get her to the nearest hospital. The damage to her spinal chord was irreparable by the time she got medical attention. The delay wasn't accidental. "They said it was a case of domestic violence and therefore not urgent," Aami remembers.

For two years, Aami lay flat on a wooden wagon. She couldn't move and had no dignity and no wheelchair. "I felt like I was dead, but I was still alive," she adds. In the end, she got a rickety wheelchair. Subsequently, with the support of the Sindh Rural Support Organisation, she got a sturdier one.

The scars are all over her person. Aami says, "After all those years, I still feel the pain all over my body. The agony atn a man's hand, especially if he is your husband, is more than just a cut. It heals but never leaves the heart."

Forgiveness under duress

Eventually, Aami's spouse was detained by the police. During the trial, Aami, who was taken to the court in a wheelchair, did the unthinkable. She forgave him.

"I asked the court to let him go," says. "I don't know why, but I had the heart of a wife and a mother of six."

The judges and the lawyers said she was "kind." Some women's rights activists say that forgiving in such circumstances is not always a free choice. "Women have to make up with their abusers because of social pressure," says Marvi Awan, a gender activist. "They are told to put the children first, not their own safety."

Forgiveness under duress is not justice; it is survival.

Aami's decision had consequences. After he got out, her husband tried to assault her again, this time hitting her sister and fracturing her arm. He ended up in jail.

A life rebuilt in fragments

Aami never lived with her husband again. She is raising her six children by herself. The SRSO runs a programme to help women become more independent. In 2017, she got a Rs 15,000 grant to start a business. She used the money to start an appliqué work business.

Her appliqué is beautiful, strong, detailed and patient. Each piece is a bit of survival sewn into cloth. She says, "Work became my dignity. I feed my children with this craft. Even if I can't stand, I can stitch."

Aami built a katcha house with her own money. She still lives there. It's a fragile structure, but it's hers. She says she no longer lives in fear anymore, but the trauma is still there. She admits, "Sometimes, when I look at my children, I feel the same pain."

Forgiveness under duress

Eventually, Aami's spouse was detained by the police. During the trial, Aami, who was taken to the court in a wheelchair, did the unthinkable. She forgave him.

"I asked the court to let him go," says. "I don't know why, but I had the heart of a wife and a mother of six."

The judges and the lawyers said she was "kind." Some women's rights activists say that forgiving in such circumstances is not always a free choice. "Women have to make up with their abusers because of social pressure," says Marvi Awan, a gender activist. "They are told to put the children first, not their own safety." Forgiveness under duress is not justice; it is survival.

Aami's decision had consequences. After he got out, her husband tried to assault her again, this time hitting her sister and fracturing her arm. He ended up in jail.

A life rebuilt in fragments

Aami never lived with her husband again. She is raising her six children by herself. The SRSO runs a programme to help women become more independent. In 2017, she got a Rs 15,000 grant to start a business. She used the money to start an appliqué work business.

Her appliqué is beautiful, strong, detailed and patient. Each piece is a bit of survival sewn into cloth. She says, "Work became my dignity. I feed my children with this craft. Even if I can't stand, I can stitch."

Aami built a katcha house with her own money. She still lives there. It's a fragile structure, but it's hers. She says she no longer lives in fear anymore, but the trauma is still there. She admits, "Sometimes, when I look at my children, I feel the same pain."

A hidden epidemic

Asmi's story is one of many in rural Sindh, where gender-based violence (GBV) persists, often hidden behind traditional silence. Instances similar to her ordeal frequently go unreported. The practice is attributed to lack of awareness, societal stigma and the perceived futility of pursuing justice.

The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18 found that 28 percent of women aged 15-49 reported suffering a physical assault. Activists say that the actual figures are likely greater, particularly in rural regions. Recent statistics reveal a dire situation: in 2024, Pakistan documented 32,617 incidences of gender-based violence. These included almost 5,300 rapes, 2,200 incidents of domestic abuse and 547 'honour' killings. Conviction rates are abysmal: 0.5 percent for rape and honour killings, and 1.3 percent for domestic violence.

Last year, more than 1,700 incidences of gender-based violence were reported in Sindh; there were no convictions. The data indicates not only under-reporting but also a systemic failure at all levels of the legal system.

Women's rights organisations emphasise that economic dependence ensnares women in abusive relationships. Research indicates that rural women's participation in the formal labour force is less than 30 percent. A significant portion of is unpaid for.

The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women recognizes the discrepancy between the law and its application. According to Additional Deputy Commissioner, Thatta, Ghulam Dastgir Shiekh, implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013, has been inadequate, particularly in rural regions. "Survivors are compelled to return to abusive environments in the absence of legal aid, medical assistance and shelters."

Research gaps

Recent feminist scholarship underscores the failures of Pakistan's GBV response. A 2023 study in the Asian Journal of Women Studies found that rural survivors often face "secondary victimisation" – humiliation, delays and disbelief in medical and legal systems. Another 2024 UN Women report highlighted that less than 10 percent of reported GBV cases in Pakistan result in prosecution.

These findings demand a re-examination of official statistics. While 32,617 GBV cases were "recorded" in 2024, activists argue that the figure barely scratches the surface. A majority of rural cases remain invisible, erased by silence, stigma and indifference.

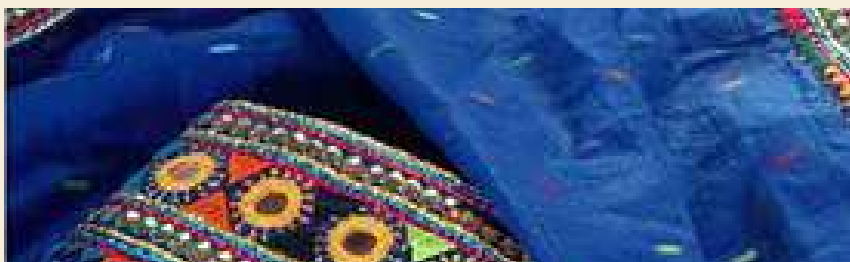
Survival as resistance

Aami sees living as a fight back. Every stitch she does in the cloth is a way for her to say no to the quiet forced on her. "I only think about surviving with dignity," she murmurs, her hands calm on the fabric.

She still has her scars but Aami says she lives in her appliqué, in the mud house she has built and in the six children she is raises by herself.

Pakistan must heed cases like hers to address the scourge of violence against women. Laws on paper don't mean anything if they aren't enforced. People like Aami who have survived should not have to choose between forgiving someone under pressure or staying quiet to stay alive. Without this, the wounds of violence will not go away.

***The writer is a researcher and writer working as a Development Practitioner in Hyderabad, Sindh. He has a master's degree in English literature. He can be reached at qaxigm@gmail.com
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/1353577-scars-that-do-not-fade>***





EMPOWERED BY OPPORTUNITY, DRIVEN BY DETERMINATION

NADIR ALI SHAH

- Wahedan has placed more than 30 different items of cosmetic and general store
- Wahedan transformed her life from hardship to stability through determination and opportunity
- In Pakistan, the demand for interest-free microfinance has grown rapidly in recent years

In the quiet village of Chaudero, Sindh, Wahedan transformed her life from hardship to stability through determination and opportunity. With support from the Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) under the EU-funded Ex-SUCCESS Program, she turned a small interest-free loan into a thriving home-based business that now sustains her family and inspires other women in her community.

Wahedan (EDF beneficiary) said, "I remember when feeding my family twice a day was difficult. Today, my shop gives us comfort, dignity, and hope." Through the EDF interest-free loan, Wahedan turned opportunity into lasting change, building a business that now supports her entire family.

Wahedan, 40, is married and a mother of five. She completed matriculation and lives in Village Chaudero, UC Chaudero, Taluka Nasirabad, District Kamber-Shahdadkot Sindh. According to SRSO's Poverty Scorecard Survey (PSC-2016), the village has 250 households and around 1,900 residents. About 55% of children are enrolled in school, while 45% remain out of school. Nearly 46% of households fall within the poorest PSC category (0-23). Wahedan's own household scored 23 on the PSC, qualifying her for support under the Ex-SUCCESS Program, funded by the European Union and supported by the Government of Sindh and the Rural Support Programs Network (RSPN).

Wahedan at her cosmetic and general store (shop) inside her house, village Chaudero, Kamber-Shahdadkot, Sindh



Wahedan is an active member of Community Organization (CO) Mehak, Village Organization (VO) Chaudero, and serves as President of Local Support Organization (LSO) Sobh. Between 2023 and 2025, she received three interest-free Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) loans, PKR 130,000, PKR 100,000, and PKR 300,000. With this financial support, she started a cosmetic and general store inside her home, which she operates daily from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. She is also a BISP beneficiary, receiving PKR 12,500 quarterly for the past six years, and received a solar panel from SRSO under the Solar Home System (SHS) project. Her husband, Abdul Majeed (45), a matric-pass laborer, assists her in managing the shop and purchases wholesale items from markets in Larkana.

The Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) initiated by the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) builds on global and regional evidence that access to finance can help poor households start small businesses and improve their livelihoods. Over the past two decades, microfinance has evolved as a major development tool aimed at reducing poverty and promoting women's economic participation. Studies from multiple countries show that microcredit enables poor families to invest in income-generating activities, accumulate productive assets, and increase household resilience. However, the long-term impact of microcredit remains mixed, as many borrowers struggle to grow their businesses beyond subsistence levels. Scholars emphasize that microfinance works best when combined with training, market access, and institutional support rather than credit alone.

With determination and support from Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), Wahedan's business has grown steadily. Her shop now offers over 30 items including cosmetics, clothes, jewelry, and household goods. The total value of her shop inventory is around PKR 1,000,000. Her daily sales average PKR 5,000, with PKR 1,000 in daily savings, resulting in monthly savings of PKR 30,000. Her husband contributes PKR 15,000 per month from labor work, while her two sons earn PKR 9,000 monthly through street vending, an initiative supported by PKR 25,000 from her third EDF loan of PKR 300,000.

During festive seasons such as Eid and wedding months, their sales rise significantly, reaching up to PKR 450,000, with savings of PKR 150,000. Their household expenses are around PKR 30,000 per month, against a combined monthly income of approximately PKR 54,000. The family also participates in a PKR 200,000 committee, contributing PKR 11,000 monthly, and has purchased a second-hand motorcycle for business use. According to her husband, "This interest-free loan (EDF) has truly empowered us financially, helping us meet our family's basic needs with ease."





Across South Asia, women-focused microfinance programs have been linked to improvements in household decision-making, self-confidence, and community participation. Yet, several studies caution that access to finance alone does not guarantee empowerment. Social norms, mobility restrictions, and limited exposure to markets can restrict women’s ability to benefit fully from financial inclusion. Successful models in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka demonstrate that integrating microcredit with social mobilization, vocational training, and collective enterprise models leads to more sustainable outcomes. These lessons are relevant for SRSO’s approach, which embeds the EDF within a broader framework of community institutions such as Community Organizations (COs), Village Organizations (VOs) and Local Support Organizations (LSOs). This structure not only facilitates financial access but also strengthens social capital, trust, and collective decision-making among rural women.

Wahedan and her husband plan to apply for another EDF interest free loan of PKR 1,000,000 to start a fairy clothes business. They aim to expand their household income and create bright future for their children. In Wahedan’s words, “I am confident and determined now to start another small business from the EDF interest free loan to get maximum financial benefits and economic strengthening support for my household. I feel so empowered with this opportunity of EDF.”



In Pakistan, the demand for interest-free microfinance has grown rapidly in recent years. Research shows that interest-free credit (Qarz-e-Hasan) enhances participation among low-income and conservative households that might otherwise avoid conventional microfinance due to religious or social concerns.

Evaluations of interest-free loan schemes in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reveal increases in small business activity and asset ownership, particularly among women engaged in livestock and home-based enterprises.



Within this national context, SRSO’s EDF model stands out for combining financial inclusion with social mobilization and technical support. Evidence from SRSO’s monitoring reports (2023) indicates that EDF participants have improved household incomes and demonstrated stronger financial independence.

However, limited empirical research has examined the long-term impacts of EDF on poverty reduction and empowerment. Future studies are therefore needed to assess the sustainability, scalability, and equity outcomes of interest-free enterprise financing in rural Sindh.

Note: Nadir Ali Shah is an Anthropologist and works as a Regional MER Professional at Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO). He can be reached at naadir.shaah@gmail.com <https://sindhcourier.com/empowered-by-opportunity-driven-by-determination/?fbclid=IwY2xjawNsJdZleHRu>

Published in Sindh Courier October 25, 2025





Challenging karo-kari, strong women forge sisterhood in rural Sindh

SHAZIA HASAN

SUKKUR: Slowly but surely there is a silent revolution under way in many cities of Sindh and it is because of a movement started by the government-financed Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), which works towards women-focused community mobilisation and development.

The SRSO basically works towards the uplift of talented folks by making them realise that they 'can' do anything. This they do by providing them training for setting up businesses followed by giving them interest-free loans to make them self-reliant.

But in giving their lives new directions, even the SRSO is pleasantly surprised to notice a positive "side effect" to its efforts — women's empowerment. It not only makes them financially independent, but also resilient, bold, and confident enough to stand up for their rights and challenge illegal practices like karokari. They have become role models who give strength to others to stand up against such dark traditions. It is a sisterhood like no other.

Hafeeza from Ghotki said that she had proved herself by running small businesses, for which she got training from the SRSO. "They also taught us how to save money besides making a respectable income," she said. Hafeeza said that it was through the sisterhood of strong women she met at the SRSO and her union council that she was able to save her son and niece, who were wrongly accused and being sentenced in a case of karo-kari.

"My son and niece — my sister's daughter — were locked up due to a misunderstanding by the people of my village. They would have been killed for sure had I not reached out to the women in our working group.

They said to me that I am always there for them so they will be there for me when I need help. Seeing our numbers, the mob was also taken aback. Somehow we locked up their leaders while freeing our children whom we helped escape. Safe now, they have both moved on with their lives individually.

Naseem Khoso of Shikarpur said that earlier if anyone, even the police, heard of any domestic issue or accusations of karo-kari they would not interfere saying that people should be allowed to handle their personal issues.

“But the SRSO works through local support organisations of which we are also a part. The local support organisation in our union council heard about a case where the husband of a woman would gamble. During a gambling argument he accused the man he had lost money to of having ‘illegitimate relations’ with his wife. No one in the village came to the woman’s rescue until we got to hear of the matter,” she said.

“It was pressure from our women groups that the Superintendent of Police sent out as many as seven mobiles to the house of the wrongly-accused woman to rescue her. We also got her to divorce her husband. Today, she has started life afresh somewhere else and is happily married,” said Naseem. “All this courage we could only gather after realising our worth and potential. We don’t need anyone to depend on. We have to help ourselves or no one will come forth to help us,” she added.

SRSO is actively working to empower communities, making them self-reliant and courageous through mobilisation, training, and awareness

When Mahnaz Mahar’s older son fell sick, the poor peasant woman could not afford the medicine prescribed for him by the doctor. “He had prescribed an antibiotic which cost 350 rupees. I sold my nose pin then which fetched only half of the amount so I bought fever medicine and cough syrup for my son from that money. It could not help him and I lost him,” she said.

But that day, I promised myself to never be caught in such a helpless situation again,” she added.



“Through a loan of just Rs15,000 from the SRSO in 2009, Mahnaz bought a little calf. In three years it fetched her Rs120,000. She also enrolled in training through the SRSO, and met many like-minded women, there.

“I had studied only up to class three. But I’m a matriculate today,” she says. She also runs a small restaurant in Shikarpur. I also started working with the union council of my area. If I find anyone sick or in pain, I don’t leave them alone. I take them to doctors, hospitals, I’m there for whoever needs me, and it is all because of gaining awareness about what I’m capable of,” she concludes. Khalida Paveen of Ghotki said that things started changing for the better as they changed themselves for the better. “When we changed, the attitudes of people towards us also changed,” she pointed out.

Rukhsana Sarki of Jacobabad said that the SRSO was a dream of the late prime minister Benazir Bhutto for the women of Sindh. “She wanted to see us empowered and strong. Today, Bilawal and Asifa, her children are witnessing the realisation of their mother’s dream,” she said, becoming a little emotional.

Aliya Mirani of Sukkur said that they were a part of many of the SRSO’s projects, which tell them about their legal rights. “For instance, in 2020, we also took part in some training sessions organised by the UN Women against violence,” she said.

Samira Laghari of Qambar Shahdadkot said that after attending the various courses and being part of the SRSO’s projects, she felt that she had the courage not to accept any decision made about her without first asking herself what she thought of it.

“Earlier, we just used to be kept under the thumb of landlords because we used to be dependent on them for our livelihoods. We had no schooling, no money, no awareness and no respect so we wouldn’t question anything. But now after becoming aware, we can also snatch our rights from those who don’t give them to us readily,” she said.



DAWN



EPICURIOUS: ROOT OF THE MATTER

SHAZIA HASAN

PUBLISHED IN DAWN, EOS, AUGUST 17TH, 2025

As the sun sets in Mohenjo Daro, Allah Dino — the guard at the gates of the excavation site — stops people from venturing inside while urging those there already to wrap up, as he prepares to lock the gates. The museum upstairs is already closed. Still, the people are hungry for more.

The vast gardens leading to the entrance beckon as does the aroma of freshly brewing tea in a neat little stall there. Hakim Zadi and her husband Owais are more than happy to sell not just tea to the visitors who come here from all over the world but anything else that they'd want to order from her menu. It being a rare delicacy of Sindh, Hakim Zadi's beh sabzi is a popular choice. On the menu, she has mentioned it simply as 'Lotus'. But she tells me that, besides its local name 'beh', it is also known as kanwal kakrri or lotus root.

Hakim Zadi cooks two lotus root options: plain with tomatoes and yogurt or with spinach. "I inherited my cooking skills from my mother and grandmother but that was not enough to feed my six children," the woman smiles. She was able to set up the stall at Mohenjo Daro after getting a loan from the Sindh Rural Support Organisation. Now, she also runs a catering business. "Of course, beh is always on the menu because it is Sindh's delicacy," she tells Eos.

A few tips from her about cooking beh and how to find the best lotus root in the market proved helpful when I went looking for it in Karachi, where it is not easily available. You can either find it in Empress Market, Garden East or around Numaish, provided you know what you are looking for.



Looking for something white, similar to horseradish, resembling an old telephone dial, because of the many holes, I did not recognise beh when I actually saw it in Empress Market.

It was completely covered in mud. “You must make sure that both sides are intact and sealed otherwise the dirt enters the holes, making it difficult to wash off,” Hakim Zadi had warned. But here, the ends were not even visible. They were completely covered in hardened mud.

Soaking the beh in water for a while helps get rid of the mud but cleaning also involves scraping the skin. Thankfully, both ends were sealed. After cleaning and slicing each root, you must soak it in water mixed with white vinegar before cooking because it tends to change colour, similar to a peeled potato or apple.

Following are some options of how you can cook beh.



Beh chips

A couple of medium-sized lotus roots may be cleaned and sliced thinly before being soaked in water with a couple of tablespoons of white vinegar for about one hour. After drying the slices, deep fry them until they turn golden brown. Sprinkle salt to taste, with black pepper and garlic powder before relishing the crunchy delight.

Beh curry

Clean thoroughly and cut one kilogramme of beh into thick slices. Pour a little oil into a cooking pot to fry half a cup of chopped onions, with half teaspoon each of salt and turmeric powder. Add 10 cups of water and let it cook on low heat until tender.

Prepare the curry in a separate pot by frying another half cup of chopped onions until they turn golden. Add two chopped tomatoes, with a teaspoon each of red chilli powder and coriander powder, another half teaspoon of turmeric powder and a quarter teaspoon of garam masala [mix of ground spices] powder with salt to taste. Also, add one teaspoon each of ginger and garlic paste. You may also add one or two green chillies to add flavour and aroma.

Pour in one cup of yogurt and stir for two minutes before transferring the boiling beh to the other pot, along with whatever water remains in it. Cook curry to the consistency you desire and sprinkle chopped coriander before serving.



Beh in spinach

Boil one kg of beh cut into thick slices in a separate pot with 10 cups of water, mixed with one teaspoon of turmeric powder until the beh is tender. Also, clean and slice the spinach leaves before placing them in another pot over heat, without adding water as the water in the spinach itself will help it cook. Set aside while the spinach water evaporates.

Now, pour in one cup of cooking oil into a fresh pot and fry before adding a quarter teaspoon garam masala, half a teaspoon of white cumin seeds, and one teaspoon each of red chilli powder, turmeric powder and coriander powder with salt according to taste. Then, add one teaspoon each of ginger and garlic paste. Stir for two minutes before adding two chopped tomatoes. Stir until the tomatoes are tender. Add a couple of green chillies for flavour and aroma before adding the spinach.

Stir for around five minutes before adding the boiled beh and stirring further. Cover with a lid for 10 minutes and leave on low heat until you notice oil seeping out from the sides.

This piece would not be complete without Hakim Zadi stressing the benefits of beh. “It has a number of health benefits,” she had told me. “The fibre found in it is good for the heart. It helps in diabetes, too. Besides, it is the ideal vegetable to have in the hot summer as it carries properties that normalise body heat.”

And where did she hear all that?
“From my mother and grandmother.
Any doctor will back this claim.”



RELIEF WORKERS TAKING PART IN RESCUE EFFORTS DURING THE 2022 FLOODS IN PAKISTAN | WELT HUNGER HILFE

DEVELOPMENT: PAKISTAN'S UNRAVELLING AID SECTOR

NAIMATULLAH SAWAND

For the last seven years, Amanullah Dayo had been part of a project on tuberculosis (TB) control of the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) in Sukkur. "I built my life around this work," says Dayo, who was serving as a coordinator until the project was abruptly halted. "Over 135 employees lost their jobs overnight," Dayo tells Eos.

Mohammad Dittal Kalhor, the executive director of SRSO, says they were forced to shut down "all three of their US-funded health initiatives." It included the one on TB, another on climate-smart agriculture, valued at \$24 million, and the third on building healthy families — part of an \$86 million nationwide project, called the Integrated Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery Initiative.

Further south in the small town of Matiari, four out of eight projects on domestic violence, run by the Legal Aid Society, had to be put on hold, says Muhammad Asif, who works as a protection officer. A vocational training project for women in Mirpurkhas met the same fate, as did another on community mobilisation in Umerkot.

At the other end of the country, in the merged tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a project to improve governance and administrative systems valued at \$40 million has also been halted. Another one, for the rehabilitation of Mangla Dam, valued at \$150 million, went the same way.

After the floods of 2010, and again in the wake of the 2022 climate emergency, the development and relief sector opened doors. For many young graduates – especially women – these programmes were more than just jobs. They offered a pathway to financial independence and social recognition.

Now, the very professionals trained to support vulnerable Pakistanis have themselves become victims of decisions made far beyond their control. This is more than just a story about job losses. It is a story of broken hopes, abandoned services and lives left hanging in the balance. In Pakistan, when those who help others are in need themselves, there is no safety net to catch them.

THE RESILIENCE PARADOX

There's a bitter irony in this unfolding crisis. For years, international agencies and NGOs urged communities to "build resilience" – to diversify income, prepare for future shocks and cope. But when the crisis struck the aid sector, it exposed a painful truth: it had failed to build any resilience within.

When the US cut aid and the UN slashed budgets, there were no safety nets for those on the front lines. Many were laid off without warning or support. How can institutions preach resilience to villages if they themselves collapse under pressure? The sector remains tied to a narrow donor base. When funding stops, entire programmes vanish. Careers, hopes and the livelihoods of thousands – especially women and youth – disappear with them.

There has been little investment in internal strength: no local fundraising, no contingency plans. This gap between policy and practice is now eroding trust.

The cracks run deeper than budget cuts. USAID alone provided nearly 20 percent of global humanitarian funding managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The abrupt halt of over \$845 million and sweeping job cuts in UN agencies reveal just how fragile the sector truly is.

The tragedy is not only in the loss of services, but in the gap between what's preached and what's practised. This disconnect is not just operational; it is ethical. Trust is breaking down inside organisations and across communities.

The 2025 crisis is not the first. A similar funding shock occurred in 2018, when the US decided to hold back \$300 million in aid to Pakistan. Yet, many UN agencies and NGOs were again caught off guard this time. Why didn't they prepare?

There were no back-up plans, staff protections or efforts to diversify donors. The entire sector remains vulnerable to politics abroad. What's needed now is change. Aid organisations must support their staff, create emergency plans and find more stable local funding. If not, the next foreign policy shift will again leave workers – and the people they serve – without support.

**The writer is a development practitioner working with SRSO. He can be contacted at naimatullah@iba-suk.edu.pk
Published in Dawn, EOS, July 13th, 2025**

Pakistan's humanitarian workers spent years preaching resilience to vulnerable communities. But when the US pulled the plug on their fundings, they discovered their own sector had none...

Pakistan's humanitarian workers spent years preaching resilience to vulnerable communities. But when the US pulled the plug on their fundings, they discovered their own sector had none...

In each instance, the shutting down of the project resulted in dismissals, including mass layoffs such as the one carried out by SRSO.

"Three years of work experience, various trainings and nothing today, not even a reference letter," one disgruntled youth officer from Umerkot tells Eos. "It's as if we were disposable," he adds.

OVERNIGHT FREEZE

The abrupt project closure and mass layoffs are a result of an order by US President Donald Trump – made soon after his return to office in January this year – to cut funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which officially closed its doors earlier this month.

According to official data, the USAID's budget in 2023 was around \$40 billion, with the vast majority of it spent on Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The heavily criticised decision has had global ramifications and, according to a warning published by researchers in the Lancet medical journal, the aid cuts could cause more than 14 million additional deaths by 2030.

In Pakistan, the decision led to the suspension of 39 major projects across sectors, worth \$845 million. At the same time, the UN began a global downsizing of its operations. For years, donor-backed programmes served as a lifeline for communities vulnerable to disasters and poverty. But now, they are vanishing. Programmes focused on women's rights, healthcare, education for girls and income support for climate-hit communities have come to a halt.

A BLEAK FUTURE

In Sindh, the pain is concentrated. The Christian Workers' Solidarity Association had to let go of 32 staff members. Organisations like HANDS and the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) have made sweeping staff reductions.

The brunt of this collapse is falling on women, who make up a large part of the humanitarian workforce in Sindh. Female project officers, nutrition experts, disaster preparedness trainers and community workers – many serving in far-flung areas – are now jobless, dragging entire families back into hardship. According to one former employee, 70 percent of those laid off by SRSO were women.

Meanwhile, the UN system is also shrinking. Restructuring within the UN is cutting into offices in Karachi and rural Sindh, weakening coordination and service delivery. For a province already battling poverty and climate-related displacement, this couldn't come at a worse time.



THE PICTURE TAKEN ON JUNE 17, 2025, SHOWS CATTLE TIED AT A CLIMATE-RESILIENT SHELTER BUILT IN THARI MIRWAH IN PAKISTAN'S KHAIRPUR DISTRICT BY THE GERMAN RELIEF ORGANIZATION MALTESER INTERNATIONAL. (AN PHOTO)

AS MONSOONS ARRIVE, LIVESTOCK SHELTERS STAND BETWEEN SURVIVAL AND RUIN FOR PAKISTANI FARMERS

ISMAIL DILAWAR

KHAIRPUR: Pakistan: Three years after floods drowned Rasool Bux's village in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, he still fears every drop of rain.

The 52-year-old farmer from Gul Muhammad Sanjrani village in Khairpur worries another deluge could wipe out what little he has rebuilt. His animals are the main source of income for his family of seven. He sells about five kilograms of milk daily to keep the household running.

The 2022 floods were among the worst climate disasters in Pakistan's history, pushing millions into poverty and devastating agricultural regions in the Sindh province. As new monsoon rains lash the province, farmers and experts say protecting livestock, often the only safety net for rural households, must be a national priority.

"We are afraid because of what we saw during the 2022 floods," Bux told Arab News while feeding his two buffaloes and three cows at one of around 200 new climate-resilient shelters built by German relief organization Malteser International in collaboration with the Sindh government.

- *Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, Farmers still recovering from 2022 floods say livestock losses pushed entire communities into deeper poverty*
- *Local groups are building climate-resilient animal shelters, experts call for larger policy shifts to protect rural livelihoods*

"Most villagers decided to leave their houses. We are poor people, so we stayed here on the road. Some of our animals perished.

"Then, there were also so many mosquitoes here. The nights were spent in sadness. We didn't have the money to keep our remaining animals under mosquito nets."

Today, the shelters are helping local farmers like Bux recover what the disaster swept away. "These [shelters] are very beneficial to us since we used to have a lot of trouble while gathering our livestock," he said.

“Our animals are at peace now.”

Livestock is the backbone of rural Pakistan’s economy, especially for families who may own no land. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan issued in June, the sector supports over 8 million rural households, providing about 40 percent of their incomes and around 15 percent of the country’s GDP.

In a year when agriculture overall grew by just 0.6 percent, partly due to extreme weather, livestock still contributed 4.7 percent to the sector, the largest share.

Sindh, Pakistan’s second-largest crop-producing province, is especially vulnerable to floods. Around 930 kilometers of the Indus River snake through the region, making it one of the most flood-prone areas in the country, according to the International Growth Center.

In May, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved around \$1.4 billion in climate financing for Pakistan under its Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), designed to strengthen the country’s defenses against future climate shocks and promote sustainable growth.

Local groups working on the ground hope the government will channel some of that money toward projects like climate-resilient animal shelters in flood-affected areas like his village.

“The need for animal shelters here is huge,” said Muhammad Junaid Soomro, a project engineer at the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), which is partnering with Malteser. “Even 300 to 400 such units will fall short of the need we have here on a union council basis.”

“We are working in five union councils only, while there are 89 union councils in this district,” he added, urging the government to prioritize livestock and agriculture in flood-hit areas once the IMF funds become available.

“They [Malteser] have made these shelters with a small amount of available funds. These can be made more climate resilient with the IMF’s climate resilient funding,” Soomro said. In a written response to Arab News, the IMF said the RSF financing is meant to back broader policy reforms, not specific projects like livestock shelters.

“However, there are a number of ways in which the RSF will help to build climate resilience in Pakistan that will benefit Pakistanis living in flood-prone areas, such as farmers,” the IMF’s resident representative in Pakistan Mahir Binici said.

He said the RSF supports reforms targeting water management and irrigation infrastructure, aiming to improve reliability and tackle issues like waterlogging, salinization, groundwater depletion and water insecurity.

“The RSF’s reforms take a whole-of-government approach, with some to be implemented at the provincial level,” the IMF representative added, noting that improved coordination between federal and provincial authorities will be key.

We felt the need for building these here as the disaster, the flood had devastated our animal shelters as well as our homes in the community,” said Kanwal Hussain, a project officer at SRSO.

“M“LIVING BANK”

While larger, policy-level shifts are awaited, groups like Malteser and SRSO are meanwhile focused on immediate fixes, building small, elevated shelters that offer some protection from future flooding.

“We felt the need for building these here as the disaster, the flood had devastated our animal shelters as well as our homes in the community,” said Kanwal Hussain, a project officer at SRSO.



The bamboo, plastic and mud shelters are raised about three feet above ground level, with canopy walls to stop rainwater from pooling and weakening the roof.

“We have built a canopy wall so rainwater does not stay there and damage the roof,” Soomro said. Imdad Hussain Siddiqui, who served as a director of operations at the Provincial Disaster Management Authority of Sindh during the 2022 floods, described livestock as a “living bank” for rural families.

“Animals are the sole remaining resource where land and crops are swept away by flooding because they provide rescue, safety and the sole avenue through which families can recover and rebuild their lives,” Siddiqui told Arab News.

He said the loss of 1.1 million animals during the 2022 floods meant “direct destitution and long-term poverty” for many families.

“Strong infrastructure of livestock will enable such linkages to recover in the near future, permitting economic activity and income-generating opportunities for the affected people,” Siddiqui explained.

In 2022, the international NGO Germanwatch ranked Pakistan first on its Climate Risk Index due to extreme weather events including floods, landslides and storms during the intense monsoon season.

Pakistan is already in the grip of another punishing monsoon, with over 60 people killed in rain-related incidents in just one week, a reminder that the next flood is never far away.

For farmers like Rasool Bux, every storm brings up the memory of what was lost in 2022 – and what could be lost again.

“More such shelters should be built in our village where some people can afford to build them while others cannot,” he said.



As monsoons arrive, livestock shelters stand between survival and

KHAIRPUR: Pakistan: Three years after floods drowned Rasool Bux's village in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, he still fears every drop of rain. The 52-year-old farmer from Gul Muhammad Sanjrani

AN Arab News PK / Jul 6, 2025

Published in Arab News
Pakistan
July 06, 2025 09:32



RURAL WOMEN ARE BENEFITING FROM THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT FUND, A MICRO-INVESTMENT LOAN FOR INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

By Nadir Ali Shah

Field evidence indicates that rural women are benefiting from the Community Investment Fund (CIF), a micro-investment loan for income-generating activities previously under the EU-SUCCESS program.

Ms. Irshad Khatoon (CIF beneficiary), shared, “After my husband’s passing, my family endured extreme poverty and hardships. We saw no way out until the SRSO team visited,

enrolled me as a CO member, and introduced me to the CIF and its advantages. I have accessed the CIF five times, which has financially supported my family. This interest-free loan has empowered us, helping us earn enough to cover our household expenses.”

The Bukhsho Sario settlement, located in Hyder Chandio Union Council, Taluka Sijawal, District Kamber-Shahdadkot, Sindh, has 191 households with a population of 1,205, including 307 women, 302 men, 272 girls, and 324 boys, as per a Poverty Scorecard Survey (PSC) conducted by Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) in 2016. Among them, 2 women, 7 men, 2 girls, and 3 boys are disabled. Based on this PSC, CIF beneficiaries are 208 who are benefiting from the fund, with a total loan amount of PKR 5,500,000 disbursed five times since 2018. The recovered CIF loan amount is approximately PKR 2,937,000, with PKR 2,563,000 still outstanding.



Strategy to Combat Rural Poverty

Field evidence indicates that rural women are benefiting from the According to the World Bank's Poverty & Equity Brief, Pakistan's poverty rate in fiscal year 2025 is estimated at 42.4% (based on the US\$3.65/day 2017 PPP), nearly unchanged from the previous year. With a population growth rate of almost 2% annually, this equates to an additional 1.9 million people falling into poverty this year. Despite economic stabilization and declining inflation, Pakistan's 2.6% economic growth is insufficient to alleviate poverty. The Washington-based Global Lender reports that Pakistan's poverty rate increases to 44.7%, with extreme poverty rising to 16.5% from 4.9%. The new international poverty line, reflecting updated prices for goods and services, is set at \$4.20 per person per day for Pakistan, a lower-middle-income country, up from \$3.65 in the wake of COVID-19 and the 2022 floods.



The Pakistan Economic Survey indicates that 24.3%, or one in four Pakistanis, lives below the national poverty line. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened this, reducing the working population from 55.74 million to 35.04 million. The survey shows Pakistan's current gross domestic product GDP growth rate at 2.6%, projected to rise to 2.7% in fiscal year 2025. While rural poverty rates (51%) in Pakistan surpass urban ones (17%), the majority rural population relies on agriculture and livestock, primarily as sharecroppers and farm laborers, with minimal investment in these sectors.

Amid this challenging economic situation, addressing escalating rural poverty requires prioritizing interest-free loans like the Community Investment Fund (CIF), which has proven effective in supporting rural women with income-generating activities. According to the PSC survey (2016) by SRSO, CIF beneficiary Ms. Irshad Khatoon had a poverty score of 15, and Ms. Gulzar scored 16, both falling within the chronically poor category.

Ms. Irshad Khatoon, a beneficiary of the Community Investment Fund (CIF), received five disbursements ranging from PKR 10,000 to PKR 50,000 between 2018 and 2024. As a member of the Sujag Community Organization (CO) in Bukhsho Sario village, she accessed these funds through the Saria Village Organization (VO) under an annual lump-sum instalment. She invested in livestock, specifically goats, which she reared for six to eight months and sold during Eid-ul-Azha to maximize profits. The goats also produced offspring, which she sold at a substantial profit during the Eid festival. After repaying the loans to her VO, she channelled the profits into establishing a successful pakora (fritters) and ice stall for her disabled son, Irshad Ali Sario, in the village. Irshad Khatoon has sustained this cycle of securing CIF loans, purchasing and raising goats, selling them during Eid-ul-Azha, repaying loans, and reinvesting the profits to support her son's thriving business.

Mr. Irshad Ali Sario, a 44-year-old with nyctalopia and partial paralysis affecting one arm and eye, operates a pakora (fritters) and ice stall in his village. He buys ice daily for PKR 3,000, sells it for PKR 4,000, earning PKR 1,000 profit (PKR 30,000 monthly) from April to mid-October 2025. In addition, he sells pakora (fritters) from 1:00 PM to 8:00 PM, spending PKR 3,000 daily and earning PKR 4,000, yielding another PKR 1,000 daily profit (PKR 30,000 monthly). His combined monthly income of PKR 60,000 supports his livelihood despite his disabilities.

As per the words of Irshad Ali Sario, "I felt hopeless as I was a disabled person until my mother used a CIF interest-free loan providing profits to start my pakora and ice stall. This venture now generates an epic income, enabling me to support my household successfully. I credit the CIF loan for transforming my life."





Ms. Gulzar, wife of Punhal Khan Sario, a 47-year-old disabled man, joined CO Sujag in Bukhsho Sario village and received two interest-free CIF loans (PKR 40,000 and PKR 50,000). Following her mother-in-law's strategy, she invested in goats, sold them during Eid-ul-Azha, and used the profits to buy a second-hand loader and establish a stall selling kulfi (frozen dairy dessert), juice, and cold drinks in the village. Punhal earns PKR 1,000 daily from both juice/cold drinks and kulfi, totalling PKR 60,000 monthly, while they currently own two goats from the CIF loan.

Mr. Punhal Khan Sario shared, "After losing my leg in a firing incident, I was hapless and faced severe poverty as I was unable to earn money. As days went by, my wife received a CIF interest-free loan, which helped me start a kulfi and juice stall. With this support, I now feed my family and believe one should never be upset and lose faith in life." Thus, it proves that CIF is a viable strategy to combat rural poverty.

Nadir Ali Shah is an Anthropologist and works as a Regional MER Professional at Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO). He can be reached at naadir.shaah@gmail.com

SINDH
COUNER
Sindh Courier
Connecting Continents

July 2, 2025

By Naimatullah Sawand

In rural Sindh, climate change is making life harder. This year, places like Jhuddo and Thari Mirwah faced extreme heat and unpredictable weather. These problems hit women the hardest, but they are not just victims. They are becoming strong leaders in fighting climate change. As a project coordinator, I have seen this change closely. Through the SRSO Social Capital Platform, women are using their local knowledge, leadership, and teamwork to protect their communities. They are quietly leading a strong movement for climate resilience.

Rising Heat, Rising Strength

Climate change affects everyone, but rural women face the biggest challenges. They manage water, food, and families. Despite the hardships, they are stepping up to learn, teach, and lead.

With support from Malteser International and BMZ, and through SRSO, we trained 40 women as Master Trainers in Disaster Risk Management. These women then trained 670 more. At first, some male leaders doubted them. But when they saw real results, their attitudes changed.

VOICES FROM HEAT



I remember a session in Jhuddo where Fatima Bibi, one of the trainers, stood up and showed an emergency plan. She had drawn a map with safe places for children, pregnant women, and the elderly. It was practical and clear—made by women, for their community.

Women Know the Land

Women in rural areas know the land better than anyone. They notice small changes in the weather and the soil. This knowledge is a big help for climate projects. In Thari Mirwah, Aisha told me how her grandmother taught her to save strong local seeds. These seeds grow better in their dry land. In another village, I saw women making compost from kitchen waste. They also built small walls to catch rainwater and reused greywater for gardens. These small actions are smart and effective.

From Caregivers to Community Leaders

Women-led community groups (called Social Capital Institutions) are now key in disaster planning. These groups help create real solutions for their villages. In Khairpur, even women from poor and minority groups are involved. I met Zainab, a local leader, in Thari Mirwah. She told me, “We used to wait for help. Now we go to the government and tell them what we need.” These women are now part of planning for their future.

Spreading Knowledge and Hope

The trained women are also great teachers. They talk to families, children, and other women about climate risks and solutions. We added climate education to literacy and skills training. I saw young girls planting trees with their mothers, understanding both why and how it matters. Women are also finding new ways to earn money. Some are learning tailoring, others are growing native plants or starting solar energy businesses. One woman, Sana, said: “The floods destroyed our fields, but the sun is still here. We are learning to use it for income and light.” These ideas are helping both people and the environment.

Planning for Everyone

When women lead disaster planning, they include everyone—children, elderly people, pregnant women, and those with disabilities. Their care and attention create better plans. I’ve seen exit plans made by women that include space for new mothers and people who can’t walk easily. These are thoughtful, useful plans.

New Ways to Earn a Living

Women are trying new jobs to deal with crop losses from floods and droughts. They sew, grow drought-resistant plants, and even try vertical farming using less water. These new skills help families earn money and reduce climate stress.

Pushing for Better Policies

Women are also speaking up in policy spaces. Awards like the Gender Climate Awards 2025 are helping recognize women who lead in clean energy, farming, and climate action. This gives them a voice in national discussions and helps close the gap in resources.

Stronger Communities

Women build unity. In disasters, they lead relief efforts, share resources, and comfort others. This trust and cooperation is very important when help is slow or missing. Their role keeps the community strong.

A Model for Other Places

What’s happening in Jhuddo and Thari Mirwah is not just local—it’s a model for other areas. A UN report says giving women equal access to land and tools can increase farm yields by 30%. In Sindh, we are already seeing this.

As Pakistan writes its National Adaptation Plan, it should learn from these women. We don’t just need foreign help. We need to support local women who are already doing the work—with skill, strength, and care.

The Future is in Their Hands

The women of Sindh are leading the way in climate action. Their work is practical, smart, and full of hope. As someone working closely with them, I can say this: they are not just adapting—they are building a better future for all of us.



Published in MinuteMirror
Date: July 1, 1015

In Pakistan's Sindh, women farmers grow vegetables against all odds, including weather



A FARMER PLUCKS VEGETABLES FROM HER FARM IN THARI MIRWAH VILLAGE IN PAKISTAN'S SOUTHERN KHAIRPUR DISTRICT ON JUNE 17, 2025. (AN PHOTO)

- **Women farmers in Khairpur protect crops from adverse weather by growing them in artificial environment**
- **Project targets members of vulnerable communities who suffered immense losses during 2022 floods**

ISMAIL DILAWAR

KHAIRPUR: Sukhai intently moved about the tunnel farm, plucking out bitter gourds under the harsh, relentless sun. The vegetable is grown usually during the summer months but in the fields of Sindh's Thari Mirwah village, that isn't necessarily so.

Sukhai, a 23-year-old intermediate student, is one of several women in her village in district Khairpur battling the effects of climate change through tunnel farming. The agricultural technique extends the growing season of crops by using plastic-covered, greenhouse-like structures to create a controlled environment. These tunnels protect crops from adverse weather conditions, allowing for earlier or later harvests of vegetables.

At Thari Mirwah, these tunnels are formed by fixing rods into the ground in an arch shape, forming a row of hoops. During the winter months, these rods are covered with polythene sheets to protect the crops from rain and cold weather, extending their growing season

"In these tunnels, we grow off-season and seasonal vegetables," Sukhai, who only uses her first name, told Arab News. "We now have cultivated bitter gourd, sponge gourd and cucumber," she said, carrying the vegetable in a basket. Pakistan is consistently ranked among the world's worst-affected countries due to climate change. Irregular weather patterns, which include excessive rains and droughts, have hit the country's agriculture sector. For example, cotton has been the worst-hit crop, with its produce decreasing to five million bales a year this financial year from a record 15 million.

Cataclysmic floods, triggered by the melting of glaciers and unusually heavy rains, killed over 1,700 people and inflicted damages worth \$33 billion in June 2022. To help locals recover from the economic losses of the floods, international relief organization Malteser International BMZ and the Sindh government-funded Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) joined hands to build 10 tunnel farms in Kharirah, Pir Budhro, Sabar Rind, Mehar Veesar, and Hindyari areas in the southern Sindh province.

Sukhai said the floods of 2022 destroyed all of her crops and agricultural lands, dealing a massive economic blow to her family. Now her and several other women of the village are trying to make ends meet through tunnel farming.

Kanwal Hussain, a district project officer at SRSO, said the women farmers are producing 10–15 kilograms of vegetables daily on their 50 by 50 tunnel farms. Malteser International has provided 570,000 euros in funds for the tunnel farming project.

“For tunnel farming, we have selected vulnerable communities which have very little land available for farming,” Hussain explained, adding that all they required to make a tunnel farm was land 100 feet in length and width.

In its recent assessment, the World Bank said 45% of Pakistanis live below the poverty line, up from the previous rate of 39.8%.

Rukhsana is one such 50-year-old mother of five, who is fighting off poverty in Thari Mirwah by growing climate-resistant vegetables.

“I have five kids and my husband is jobless so we grow these vegetables,” Rukhsana told Arab News. “We eat these vegetables as well as sell them when the villagers come to buy some.”

The women farmers say they earn as much as Rs50,000 (\$176) profit every month, which is then shared between a three-member Business Development Group that cultivates each of the 10 tunnel farms.

Rukhsana is one such 50-year-old mother of five, who is fighting off poverty in Thari Mirwah by growing climate-resistant vegetables.

I have five kids and my husband is jobless so we grow these vegetables,” Rukhsana told Arab News. “We eat these vegetables as well as sell them when the villagers come to buy some.”

The women farmers say they earn as much as Rs50,000 (\$176) profit every month, which is then shared between a three-member Business Development Group that cultivates each of the 10 tunnel farms.

“We are three members who work and grow these vegetables together and share the profits,” Sukhai, who is using her earnings to support her family and complete her education, said.

And the going is getting tough for her as she has a widowed mother and nine siblings to look after.

Hussain, on the other hand, is a bit concerned about the surging temperature in Pakistan. She hoped to convince her foreign donors to extend the tunnel farming project to other areas prone to floods and climate disasters.

“The temperature here stays between 45 to 50 degrees [Celsius] during the daytime and surges to as much as 51 degrees Celsius,” Hussain said.

Tunnel farming is not only a means of sustenance but is also helping people like Sukhai dream big. She wants to complete her studies and help her family out with the money she earns.

“I want to complete my studies to do a job. I want to become a doctor,” Sukhai said.



In Pakistan's Sindh, women farmers grow vegetables against all odds, KHARIPUR: Sukhai intently moved about the tunnel farm, plucking out bitter gourds under the harsh, relentless sun. The vegetable is grown usually during the summer months but in the fields of Sindh's.

Arab News PH | Jun 21, 2023

Grassroots for the Climate

BY NAIMATULLAH SAWAND

As the world commemorates World Environment Day 2025 with the theme “Beat Plastic Pollution”, a powerful story of hope and grassroots innovation is unfolding in Tehsil Jhuddo, Mirpurkhas, where rural women are rewriting the narrative on plastic waste and economic empowerment.

In a region historically sidelined from formal environmental and economic systems, a digital barter movement called ScrapXchange is revolutionizing how waste is managed—led not by governments or corporations, but by women entrepreneurs at the grassroots.

The Plastic Crisis Hits Rural Pakistan Hard:

Plastic waste is a growing menace in Pakistan, with up to 40% of the Indus River’s solid waste reportedly consisting of plastics. While urban centers receive some attention, rural and peri-urban communities remain largely unsupported, lacking basic waste management infrastructure.

The Sindh government’s plastic bag ban marks a key policy shift—but in places like Jhuddo, sustainable transformation hinges on local, community-based responses. That’s where ScrapXchange, under the GET (Gender Entrepreneurship Together) framework and BDG (Business Development Group) platform, is stepping in to fill the void.



ScrapXchange: Barter, Bytes & Behavior Change:

ScrapXchange operates on a digital barter model. Using a mobile app, women collect and trade plastic waste for essential goods—such as hygiene kits, kitchen utensils, or even plant saplings. The plastic is then sold to over 35 registered buyers in Jhuddo and nearby towns, ensuring waste never reaches rivers or landfills.

At the village level, women oversee the sorting and collection of plastic, while men assist with transportation and logistics. The central hub in Jhuddo’s market serves as both a storage facility and an exchange center.

This approach is more than just recycling—it’s a circular economy in action. The mobile app records transactions, calculates earnings, and offers a digital dashboard—introducing financial transparency and digital inclusion for rural women, many of whom are earning for the first time.

Grassroots for the Climate

Empowerment Through Innovation

For women like Pari w/o Gulab Rai, who now heads a local business development team, ScrapXchange has become a platform for leadership. Her journey inspires others in a region where women's economic roles have historically been limited.

"We're not just cleaning up—we're building futures," says Iyan w/o Kheemon, another ScrapXchange member. "Plastic used to be a problem in our streets. Now it's a source of income and pride."

Beyond the economy, ScrapXchange fosters behavioral and environmental change. More than 1,200 community members have been trained on climate awareness, digital literacy, and waste segregation through sessions held in local institutions like COs, VO, and LSOs. Even barren courtyards are being transformed—thanks to the plant barter initiative, saplings are being traded, planted, and nurtured, forming green enclaves that cool local temperatures and foster biodiversity.

Why This Model Works—and Can Be Replicated

ScrapXchange succeeds because it addresses multiple needs: economic insecurity, plastic pollution, and gender exclusion. It combines technology, local entrepreneurship, and sustainability, making it a scalable and replicable model for other rural communities.

Unlike traditional, centralized waste management systems, this community-owned, decentralized network offers agility, accountability, and deeper reach. And while many global efforts struggle to engage the informal sector, ScrapXchange places women from that very sector at the heart of change.

From Policy to People: Making Plastic Bans Work

As Sindh's plastic bag ban takes effect, efforts like ScrapXchange are critical to ensuring policy translates into practical impact. While government rules provide structure, it's community initiatives that bring long-lasting change.

Indeed, community-led plastic cleanups are more sustainable than government policies alone. They offer direct, localized action, build ownership, and provide income—elements absent in many top-down initiatives. They also foster social capital, uniting residents, NGOs, local leaders, and buyers in a shared mission.

A Blueprint for Change

From digital dashboards to dirt-covered hands, the women of Jhuddo are showing what real climate action looks like. They aren't waiting for global summits or billion-dollar funding—they are taking action now, for themselves, for their communities, and for the planet. This is not just about waste—it's about worth. It's about turning trash into triumph, plastic into pride, and isolation into inclusion.

As slogans from the movement rightly say:

"Empower Her, Elevate the World"

"Empowering a Woman Empowers Generations"

And in the quiet alleys of Mirpurkhas, those slogans are more than words—they're a reality lived every day.

About the Author

Naimatullah Sawand is a development practitioner and humanitarian working with SRSO. An alumnus of Sukkur IBA University, he brings deep expertise in programme management, M&E, and rural empowerment. Passionate about community-led change, his work bridges grassroots resilience with sustainable development across Sindh.

Greening Sindh, one hand at a time



Shift Begins With Spark Learning Rooted in Local Soil From Waste to Wealth Women Build Green Futures Climate Action, One Connection at Time Growing Culture of Sustainability

By Naimatullah Sawand

In the disaster-prone tehsils of Jhuddo (Mirpurkhas) and Thari Mirwah (Khairpur), the signs of climate change are as brutal as they are familiar—flash floods tearing through fields, scorching temperatures wilting crops, and wells running dry as the sun bakes the land. For decades, this has been the rhythm of life here, a constant struggle against nature's fury.

But something is changing.

A quiet, determined force is rising from this cracked soil: the women of rural Sindh. Long seen as silent sufferers of environmental disaster, these women are now at the forefront of a transformation—charting a new path of climate resilience and green entrepreneurship. Their innovation and resilience, once hidden behind veils of hardship, are now becoming powerful tools in redefining what survival and prosperity can look like in one of Pakistan's harshest environments.

Shift Begins With Spark

For generations, coping with climate extremes meant doing what little could be done—patchwork fixes, borrowed wisdom, and silent endurance. But as the climate crisis deepens, those old ways no longer suffice. And so, where there once was only endurance, a new spirit of reinvention has emerged

These women—many of whom have never stepped into a classroom—are now stepping forward as climate innovators. Historically marginalized and often bearing the brunt of food and water insecurity, they are now the first to respond, the first to adapt, and the first to lead.

The spark behind this shift is an innovative program jointly implemented by [the Sindh Rural Support Organization \(SRSO\)](#), Malteser International, and BMZ Germany. Recognizing that traditional aid models fall short, the program turns the spotlight toward women, equipping them to become architects of their own future.

Learning Rooted in Local Soil

At the heart of this transformation is a bold reimagining of how knowledge is shared. In a world racing ahead with artificial intelligence and digital revolutions, rural women in Sindh still struggle for something as basic as a school for their children. The barriers are many: absentee teachers, indifferent landlords, and systemic neglect by provincial elites and political representatives. And yet, in this very environment, a seed of accessible learning has been planted.

Instead of depending on written manuals, the initiative brings intuitive, image-based digital tools and experiential learning into the hands of women. The approach draws from both modern science and the ancient wisdom these women carry—lessons passed down through generations of reading the land, predicting the weather, and knowing when to plant or harvest by instinct. Here, innovation isn't a gadget—it's the bridge between empowerment and centuries of exclusion.

From Waste to Wealth Women Build Green Futures

Change isn't just visible in attitudes—it's growing in greenhouses, sprouting in nurseries, and being stitched into recycled crafts. Across Jhuddo and Thari Mirwah, women-led Business Development Groups (BDGs) are breaking barriers and building climate-resilient enterprises.

What began as informal, often invisible labor has now taken the shape of structured businesses: from low-walking tunnels growing off-season vegetables, to kitchen gardens, green fodder farms, and even hydroponic systems that conserve water while producing high-value crops.

Through the program's incubation model, women receive support in every aspect—from generating business ideas to training in marketing, finance, and operations. Some are creating products from recycled materials; others are restoring the environment by cultivating native tree species in 21 community nurseries, all while tracking business data through offline mobile apps. These aren't just income-generating projects. They are life-changing legacies—sowing seeds of hope in some of Sindh's most challenging landscapes.

Climate Action, One Connection at Time

Beyond the greenhouses and the nurseries, something else is taking root: digital inclusion. In remote areas where internet signals are weak and opportunities even weaker, women are learning to navigate smartphones and digital tools, connecting them with markets, climate alerts, and each other. Young people in these villages are also stepping up as "[Climate Change Champions](#)", promoting grassroots innovation and climate awareness. And

in an inclusive twist, the program brings persons with disabilities into the fold—fostering a spirit of collective learning and shared progress.

This isn't just adaptation—it's community resilience in motion.

Growing Culture of Sustainability

Already, the transformation is visible. Where once there was seasonal dependency and uncertainty, families are now building multiple income streams. Communities are becoming more resistant to climate shocks. And most powerfully, women—once voiceless in public life—are stepping into leadership roles, reshaping what it means to be resilient, capable, and in control. But such momentum cannot rest solely on grassroots effort. It requires committed support—from government institutions, donors, and the global development community. There is a growing need for gender-sensitive climate policies, long-term financing models, and scalable innovations that place women at the center of climate strategy.

Sindh's rural women have proven their will. What they need now is a promise from the world—to walk with them toward a future where resilience is not the exception, but the norm.

In a time when climate anxiety is growing around the globe, the women of Sindh offer a powerful counter-narrative. They show that even in the most arid, forsaken patches of earth, hope can bloom—when cultivated by the determined hands of those who refuse to be left behind.



The women who rebuilt Sindh—and are building its future

By Naimatullah Sawand

In Sindh's villages—Khairpur, Thatta, Mirpurkhas—you hear stories of struggle everywhere. You see it in the cracked fields. In the broken roads. In the faces of women who, for as long as anyone remembers, were told to stay home, stay quiet, stay out of decisions.

For generations, these women worked from before sunrise until after dark. Farming, cooking, raising children, keeping homes together while the world outside moved on without them. They weren't asked what they thought. They weren't given choices.

But something changed.

From Whispers to Action

It didn't begin with speeches or protests. It started in whispers. In small rooms. In villages where women began gathering—not just to talk about their problems, but to solve them.

They formed Community Organisations (COs)—small groups where they could speak openly, maybe for the first time. From there, they built Village Organisations (VOs). And later, they formed Local Support Organisations (LSOs)—institutions they ran themselves. They didn't wait for men to give them permission. They gave it to themselves.

They managed interest-free loans—and unlike big banks, they had a 99% repayment rate. Because these women had already been managing homes on nothing for decades. Now, they were managing money for entire villages.

Building on Trust, Not Charity
They had support. The Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) worked beside them. Malteser International stood with them. BMZ, the German government's development arm, funded the efforts. But these organisations didn't lead. The women did. No one handed them solutions. They were given space—and respect—to lead.

When the Floods Came

Then came the 2022 floods. Water swallowed their homes, crops, animals. It was the worst many had ever seen. Most communities would have waited for the government or NGOs to respond. But these women already knew: waiting gets you nowhere.

Through their LSOs, they set up complaint desks to ensure aid reached the right people. They organised emergency cash transfers, helped run mobile health clinics, and delivered food, medicine, and supplies faster than any major agency.

When the waters receded, they didn't wait. They rebuilt:

- o 190 flood-proof animal shelters
- o 10 km of damaged roads
- o 10 broken water wells
- o Irrigation systems, restored and improved

All of it led by women. All of it planned and executed by the communities themselves.

TRASH, TECH AND TENACITY: RURAL WOMEN DRIVE SILENT REVOLUTION IN SINDH

BY NAIMATULLAH SAWAND

MAY 7, 2025

 MinuteMirror
PAKISTAN'S INDEPENDENT DAILY NEWSPAPER



In the dusty plains of Jhuddo, a remote tehsil of Mirpurkhas, Sindh, where the winds still carry memories of floodwaters and the fields often wait in vain for the river's mercy, something remarkable is happening—quietly, but with extraordinary force.

It begins with the women.

These are not women who were handed opportunity. They are women who created it—out of wreckage, out of waste, and out of a deep, unshakable belief that they could be more than what the world had allowed them to be.

In a region battered year after year by climate disasters and deep-rooted poverty, where education is a privilege and tradition still writes the rules, rural women are quietly rewriting the story. They are turning scraps into income, smartphones into strategy, and homes into hubs of innovation.

This quiet revolution didn't come overnight. Since 2017, the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) has worked steadily in these communities, building trust, mobilizing groups, and planting seeds of economic self-reliance. After the devastating floods of 2022, the tide began to turn. With support from Malteser International and funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the focus shifted from relief to recovery—and from recovery to transformation.

The idea was radical: empower women not just to survive disaster, but to own their future.

Women Who Work With Waste—And Win

Take a short walk into the Jhuddo market, and you'll find a warehouse that's unlike anything else in the town. Five women—mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law—from a minority community who grew up around the scrap trade, decided they were done watching men run the show. They formed ScrapXchange—a women-led recycling and barter enterprise that turns household waste into a sustainable livelihood. Residents now bring their scrap—metal, plastic, paper—and leave with essential items: utensils, cookware, even soap. What was once thrown away now has value. What was once shameful is now a source of pride.

The women behind ScrapXchange own motorcycles, a loader rickshaw, and wooden carts. They manage the warehouse, oversee workers, track sales, and negotiate prices. Ten people, mostly from underemployed families, now earn a living through the enterprise.

“We didn't go to business school,” says Jiya, one of the co-founders. “But we knew the worth of what others threw away—because we had lived among it all our lives. The difference is, now we make it work for us.”

Their logo—a green circle of arrows around a handmade bowl—and the tagline “Turn Scrap into Smiles” reflect their ethos: transformation rooted in dignity and design.

Branding, Belief, and a Smartphone Revolution

Scrap Xchange is just one of over 120 businesses launched by women in the region under this project—garment units, nurseries, cafés, mobile repair shops, even auto workshops. The goal is to reach 407 individual and 24 group businesses by 2027.

But beyond the numbers lies the real story: women who once hesitated to speak up are now building brands. With guidance, they've learned to craft names and logos inspired by their culture, design packaging that meets both hygiene and beauty standards, and tell the story behind their work—not just what they sell, but why they do it.

Many of these women had never held a smartphone before. Today, they use them to upload inventory photos, manage expenses, track daily sales, and even market on social media. With a mobile app tailored to their businesses, they generate monthly reports, manage stock, and analyze profits. “Our phone is our office,” says one entrepreneur. “We don't guess anymore. The app tells us what works.”

Behind this confidence is a powerful mechanism: interest-free loans under the Government of Sindh's People's Poverty Reduction Program (PPRP). These loans don't just provide capital. They send a message: you are worthy of investment.

“I used to think, who would ever trust me with money?” says Bai Dhani, a first-time entrepreneur. “When I got the loan, I cried. Not because of the money—but because it told me I was seen.”

From Recipients to Leaders

The women in this movement are no longer beneficiaries. They are businesswomen, negotiators, decision-makers. They know how to track profit and loss, negotiate vendor deals, and read the market.

“This isn't about charity,” says the SRSO Project Coordinator. “It's about systems—smart, sustainable systems that put women in charge of their own futures.”

Formal registration is underway for many enterprises. Women are being connected with microfinance institutions, wholesale buyers, and digital payment platforms. Climate-smart business practices are being introduced so that the enterprises are not only resilient to disaster—but part of the solution.

A New Story for Rural Pakistan

In Jhuddo, there was a time when girls barely finished school, when women rarely spoke at village meetings, and when floods washed away more than homes—they drowned dreams. But today, something is rising in the place of all that loss.

With every recycled item, every recorded transaction, every product photo uploaded online, these women are reclaiming their place in the economy—and in the narrative of what it means to be rural, poor, and female in Pakistan.

This is not just income. It's identity.

And if Jhuddo is any indication, the future of rural Pakistan might just be led by women who know how to turn trash into triumph—and silence into strength.

SRSO working miracles in lives of low-income skilled workers, entrepreneurs

Shazia Hasan

MIRPURKHAS: Jaswant Kumar used to work at a charpoy shop. Joining the four wooden beams and legs of the bed together, he would weave the colourful nylon ribbon across the length and breadth of the frame.

Making 10 to 12 charpoys this way he would earn a daily wage of Rs500. Then one day he met a customer who, being impressed by Jaswant's workmanship, asked him if he would like to own a charpoy business of his own?

The customer worked with the Sindh Rural Support Organisation's (SRSO) Poverty Reduction Programme. "He told me about SRSO's interest-free loans," Jaswant, who pronounces SRSO like 'sarson' [mustard], told Dawn.



A proud Jaswant Kumar poses with his colourful charpoys. — Photo by the author

"It took some careful costing on my part to apply for a 260,000 rupees loan to start my own business. Today, I am my own boss. I make the same amount I used to make after an entire day's work on every charpoy that I make," the young man beamed

Hammaduddin of Gharibabad, Mirpurkhas, heard about SRSO from a friend. "I wanted to own my own business but I had no seed money. Then I borrowed Rs500,000 from SRSO to purchase sports goods from Hyderabad. I have opened a sports goods shop here in Mirpurkhas. It is giving me good returns," said Hammaduddin.



Hammaduddin with some sports goods from his shop. — Photo by the author

Virma, a mother of seven children, whose husband sold earthenware pots, stitches school bags with zips, buttons and velcro fasteners on her old manual sewing machine.

She says that people from SRSO visited her home to tell her about their interest-free loans and skill training. "I started stitching school bags after receiving training for a month about how to run my own business," she said.

Teeja's husband was in an accident which left him unable to earn a regular income for his family. Teeja wanted to do something from her home as she was needed there to take care of her husband and their children.

"I knew embroidery and appliqué work, taught to me by my mother and grandmother. But I had no money. My children were also studying. I needed to do something quick as we were eating into whatever little savings we had. That was when I got a loan for Rs100,000 from SRSO. The training I received from them helped put me in touch with a market for my kind of skills. Today, after taking orders for embroidery and appliqué work, I have been able to pay back the loan while also earning enough to run my house," she said.



Virma sells the school bags she made. — Photo by the author

"Sindh Rural Support Organisation has many such success stories of empowering rural artisans," said Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro, the Chief Executive Officer. "We are into harnessing people's potential to fight poverty," he added.

He himself was drawn to the organisation due to its fine work. "I was working with PTCL in Hyderabad and Sukkur which was when I started hearing about SRSO, a project of the People's Poverty Reduction Programme, budgeted by the Sindh Government. It was the start of an affiliation.

"Then in 2013, I joined SRSO. Since 2015 I have been running SRSO as CEO. When I arrived, SRSO had 400 employees. Now there are 2,500 employees," he said.



SRSO's CEO Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro explains their work model. — Photo by the author

"It is our job to tell more and more people with vision about our work. We work in all of Sindh's districts. We offer training and we provide interest-free loans to individuals and companies," he said.

Sky Garments Industry was a good model of a thriving business thanks to SRSO. Housed in a shop in a commercial area of Mirpurkhas, the company had workers busy sewing different parts of cargo shorts on their industrial machines. One was seen sewing together parts of pockets, the other was sewing zippers and another waist belts. Narumal, a partner at a garment factory, said that they had heard of an organisation that gave interest-free loans. "We thought maybe we should find them and visit their office," he smiled.

"At the time we had no idea of costs or where to get orders from. But we knew so many people who were let off from one garment factory or the other. We wanted to give them work by opening a garment factory of our own," said Narumal.

“SRSO helped us do that. Of course, they also had their conditions. First of all, they needed surety that the loan will be paid off with all the installments coming in time. Then they were helped by SRSO in getting orders. The cloth, thread, etc., all came from the client.

We only prepared the orders, which came to us from foreign countries. Sometimes, we get orders for 7,000 pieces a month. And we get 60 per cent of the cost of each piece,” he explained.



Narumal speaks about the success of his interest generating garment factory. – Photo by the author

Sky Garments Industry borrowed Rs3 million from SRSO. They worked with 35 workers who were paid on a daily basis according to the work they did. Some were experts and some came as apprentices.

From the Rs30m borrowed, Rs1.9m were used for buying second-hand Juki machines. As they paid their loan installments, they also upgraded their factory. They were able to also install a solar system which helped them go completely off grid.

“We were able to pay off our entire loan in 22 months though we had been given 28 months to do that by SRSO. Now we are only making profits, while also providing employment,” said Narumal.



DAWN.COM
SRSO working miracles in lives of low-income skilled workers, entrepreneurs

Published in Dawn, May 4th, 2025

[https://www.dawn.com/news/1908289?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1908289?fbclid=IwY2xjawKFHtZleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHh_5joZcb_OKqjQbOT1hgBbqZtHqUz689Xk9qRAXZaIIUYmOB_76Da3oIf_q_aem_2nmmfALWZpP2jRVOrEKr6w)

[fbclid=IwY2xjawKFHtZleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHh_5joZcb_OKqjQbOT1hgBbqZtHqUz689Xk9qRAXZaIIUYmOB_76Da3oIf_q_aem_2nmmfALWZpP2jRVOrEKr6w](https://www.dawn.com/news/1908289?fbclid=IwY2xjawKFHtZleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHh_5joZcb_OKqjQbOT1hgBbqZtHqUz689Xk9qRAXZaIIUYmOB_76Da3oIf_q_aem_2nmmfALWZpP2jRVOrEKr6w)

A silent revolution in development

By Dr. Naazir Mahmood

'Revolution' is a term used rather loosely lately. From a regime change in Bangladesh to a green initiative claiming to transform agriculture in Pakistan, so many big and small changes have had the moniker of 'revolution' attached to them that it has almost become a cliché.

A majority of development practitioners and NGO professionals also tend to call their contribution to society as 'revolutionary'. A Marxist definition of 'revolution' would require a change in the ownership of the means of production in society before any political or social change could qualify as such. Many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have had military coups that their juntas touted as revolutions. In Pakistan, perhaps the first such example was the military takeover of the government under the command of General Ayub Khan which he called a 'revolution'.

Irrespective of any right or wrong definitions of this word, there are examples of little transformations that take place in society under the guidance of individuals who make extraordinary efforts for social change rather than personal gain. There have been many such initiatives in Pakistan that have played a crucial role in bringing about changes in society but not many people know about them at the national level. One reason may be a lack of interest in such initiatives in the mainstream media that prefer political stories over any stories of the common people.

Irrespective of any right or wrong definitions of this word, there are examples of little transformations that take place in society under the guidance of individuals who make extraordinary efforts for social change rather than personal gain. There have been many such initiatives in Pakistan that have played a crucial role in bringing about changes in society but not many people know about them at the national level. One reason may be a lack of interest in such initiatives in the mainstream media that prefer political stories over any stories of the common people.

Now Fayyaz Baqir, Mahnoor Zaman and Maryam Hussain have compiled a book of interviews with socially committed activists and professionals who have contributed to social development in one way or another. 'Silent Revolution in Pakistan: From Othering to Belonging' is a book spanning over 350 pages that the Knowledge Executive has recently published. Fayyaz Baqir has taught development practice at the School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, whereas Mahnoor Zaman is the president of McGill International Development Studies Students' Association. Maryam Hussain is a visiting lecturer at the Karakoram International University in Gilgit.

The book is the brainchild of Fayyaz Baqir who approached civil society leaders so that they could share their stories of accomplishments and the challenges they faced. It is a thought-provoking book that describes the development practices of outstanding individuals who had a certain vision for themselves and for the area they were working in. Many community-based development practices go unnoticed by a larger audience in Pakistan, resulting in gross ignorance about the success stories that could inspire more people to take up similar challenges. If they remain hidden, no inspiration is likely to come from them.

The compilers have divided the book into several topics such as civil society, education, environment, health, justice and governance, market and state, poverty alleviation, water & sanitation, and wellbeing. The interviews of the selected development actors show that, despite an overall despondency in society, some activists prefer to lead from the frontlines and by doing so they build trust in the communities they work for. Working with marginalised local communities, these leaders have been able to foster solidarity over the past decades, especially in the 21st century which otherwise witnessed unprecedented extremism and violence in the country.

A silent revolution in development

'The narratives of these community leaders convey clear messages of the transformative power that each community holds, provided the development initiatives make sense to the community members. These leaders have been able to offer an inclusive spirit rather than following an exclusive agenda that many faith-based organisations follow by excluding the 'other'. Essentially, this process of cultivating a sense of belonging plays the most significant role in community transformations. A major problem with a host of donor-funded initiatives that fail is a lack of long-term planning and a near absence of sustainable outcomes.

Perhaps it is safe to say that a majority of the donor-funded projects that fail to deliver adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. They tend to be more interested in repeated 'goal settings' and a near-perpetual revision of project documents that are never complete. The best aspect of these interviews is that none of these community leaders promised any miracles to the communities they worked with. Rather than reproducing a predefined development agenda, the leaders here offered a different set of agendas that were more aligned with the local communities than with anything coming from the so-called Global North.

The missions that these leaders espoused centred on an enlightening practice that the local people could associate with. The book introduces its readers to individuals who have been working inconspicuously and their work has largely remained undocumented. The stories presented here are easy to read and accessible to an average readership who may feel daunted by any academic discussions so prevalent in the development sector the world over. One recurring feature in nearly all interviews is that the spirit of belonging is pervasive throughout, and all leaders have advocated for this spirit.

The approach that these community leaders adopted was both creative and pragmatic in that it engaged not only local communities but local governments as well. They have advocated for working with the system rather than antagonising the officials who control the strings of the bureaucracy working at the district and sub-district levels. Another distinguishing feature of these community leaders is that they did not rely on development aid from rich donors. They preferred to mobilise local resources and opened up access to public accounts and social services which were available.

Of the over two dozen interviews included in the book, most are worth reading. Some of the most prominent case studies are of the author Rumana Hussain, Dr Abdul Bari of the Indus Hospital, Arif Hasan of the Urban Resource Centre, Hafeez Arain of the Lodhran Pilot Project, Mukhtar Ahmed Ali of the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Fauzia Saeed, Zubair Bhatti, Jameel Yusuf, Zia Awan, Dr Khalid Suhail, Shama Khan of the SOS Children Village, Seema Aziz of CARE Pakistan and Mehnaz Mehar of Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO).

One of the most inspiring stories is of Dr Abdul Bari, a Dow graduate, who co-founded the Indus Hospital as the country's first free paperless health facility. In 2017, it expanded to become the Indus Hospital and Health Network (IHNN) that is now one of the largest healthcare systems in Pakistan, with 13 hospitals across Sindh and Punjab. Dr Bari is a role model in the health sector in the country as he began his journey as the project director of the first voluntary blood bank in the country the students of Dow Medical College founded in 1982 when Bari was still a freshman.

The book does not only include interviews with some big names such as Bari and Arif Hasan. It also contains stories of some little-known individuals such as Mehnaz Mahar coming from a family with no educational background in Shikarpur. She began her journey with the SRSO in 2009 and overcame immense challenges to uplift her community. She formed a women's organisation focusing on savings, health and cleanliness. Her organisation eventually expanded to 180 women across nine organisations. Through the community investment fund and income-generating grants, she encouraged women to invest in livestock to improve their financial standing.

Arif Hasan in his story narrates how he managed to raise his voice on urban challenges in both the Global North and South. He has contributed immensely to people-friendly architecture, community development, and social research in Pakistan. He recalls his association with Akhtar Hameed Khan and Parween Rahman at the Orangi Pilot Project which has inspired many replications. Interestingly, we find Akhtar Hameed Khan repeatedly in several interviews as he was one of the pioneering and most respected development leaders who has inspired at least two generations of development professionals in the country and abroad.

'Silent Revolution' is a book that is informative and instructive – a must-read for anyone interested in people's initiatives for social development.

The writer holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK. He tweets/posts @NaazirMahmood and can be reached at: mnazir1964@yahoo.co.uk <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1294373-a-silent-revolution-in-development>

Empowered Women, Empowered Sindh



Sumeta Afzal Syed

During my recent visit to various regions of Sindh, I witnessed a remarkable transformation—stories of resilience, empowerment, and progress that fill the heart with hope and satisfaction. The Sindh government's visionary initiatives have touched countless lives, fostering economic independence and social upliftment. Today, I want to share one such inspiring story—that of Zakia Khanum from the village of Muhammad Saleh Warar in Badin.

Just a few years ago, Zakia Khanum's life was a relentless struggle. She, along with other women from her village, toiled as daily-wage labourers on a landlord's farm. Their work changed with the seasons—harvesting tomatoes, collecting paddy, and gathering sunflower seeds. Yet, despite their hard labour, their wages were so meagre that affording two meals a day was a constant challenge. A single unforeseen circumstance—a bout of illness or an unexpected day off—meant going to bed hungry. Life was an unending test of endurance.

The turning point in Zakia's life came when she and other women in her village came into contact with the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), an NGO funded by the Sindh government. The SRSO team encouraged them to farm independently rather than work on someone else's land. To facilitate this, the women formed a business development group comprising fifteen members and were granted an interest-free loan of PKR 1.39 million. With this financial support, Zakia and her group leased farmland and cultivated tomatoes.

SRSO not only provided them with high-quality seeds but also guided them through every step of the cultivation process. A few months later, as their lush tomato fields flourished, these women experienced a rebirth—this time as entrepreneurs, reaping the full rewards of their labour. Their first harvest generated a remarkable profit of PKR 620,000.

Inspired by this success, five members of the group branched out to establish their own ventures. The remaining ten, including Zakia, utilized their earnings to cultivate sunflowers in the Rabi season, yielding another PKR 450,000 in profit. When the original landowner reclaimed his fields, they refused to be discouraged. Instead, during the Kharif season, they leased a larger plot and planted rice—securing a net income of PKR 818,000 after covering all expenses.

When I met Zakia Khanum, she spoke with immense pride and optimism. This season, they have cultivated muskmelons, with expectations of earning at least PKR 2 million in profit. Her eyes shone with gratitude as she shared how, for the first time in years, no one in their households had gone to bed hungry. Their children now eat nutritious meals and dress in better clothes. The SRSO team continues to support them, guiding them in crop selection, market linkages, and financial planning.

Zakia's journey is not just a personal triumph; it is a beacon of hope for countless women. Her success has ignited a movement of economic empowerment, inspiring other women across Sindh to break free from the cycle of poverty. Under the leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Sindh government is materializing the vision of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, fostering self-sufficiency and prosperity among marginalized communities.

Comprehensive Empowerment Initiatives

The Sindh government's Poverty Reduction Program, implemented through SRSO, extends beyond agriculture. It provides financial assistance and expert guidance in livestock farming, poultry farming, fisheries, handicrafts, and various entrepreneurial ventures, ensuring diverse opportunities for economic stability.

Another groundbreaking initiative is the Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affectees (SPHF)—the world's largest free housing project, aiming to construct 2.1 million homes in flood-affected areas. In a significant step toward women's empowerment, 1.2 million of these homes will be registered in women's names, with 800,000 women designated as sole beneficiaries. These women have been provided with bank accounts, enabling them to manage financial transactions independently—an achievement that marks a historic shift in their economic agency.



Sindh's commitment to women's empowerment is not just commendable—it is revolutionary.

Real Change Comes from Action

True progress is not achieved through mere rhetoric but through concrete action—and the Sindh government is proving this through its people-centric policies. The initiatives led by Chief Minister Sindh are reshaping the socio-economic fabric of rural communities, ensuring that women are no longer confined to the sidelines but are active participants in economic growth.

Zakia Khanum's story is just one among thousands of untold success stories emerging from Sindh's villages. These women, once burdened by poverty and dependency, are now pioneers of change—nurturing hope, fostering economic resilience, and paving the way for a more prosperous, self-reliant Sindh.

Sindh's commitment to women's empowerment is not just commendable—it is revolutionary. The province is setting a benchmark for inclusive development, proving that when women are uplifted, entire communities thrive.

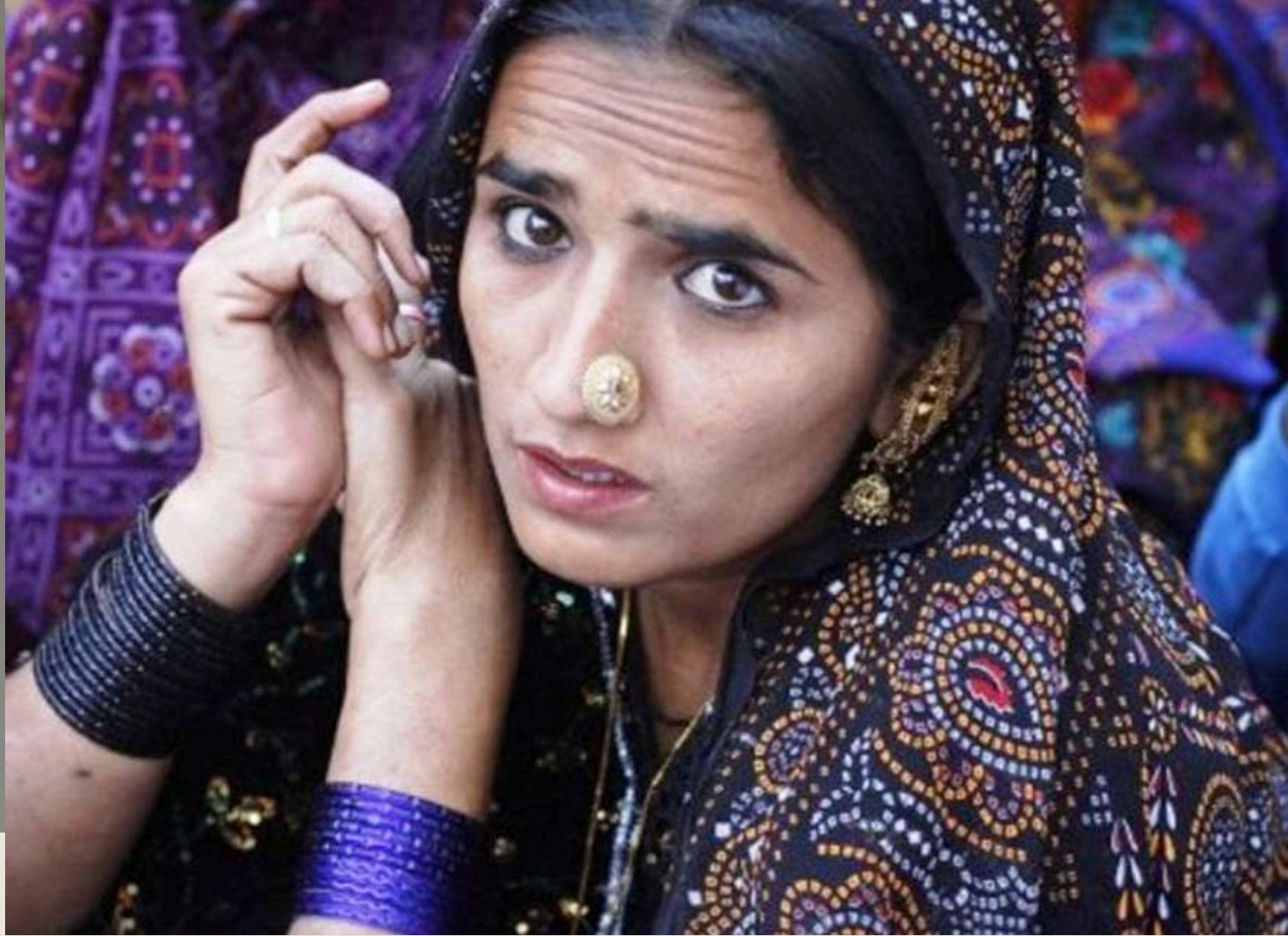
The dawn of economic independence and social prosperity is spreading across Sindh—one empowered woman, one empowered family at a time.

***The writer is
Spokesperson (Sindh
Government)***

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/1277898/empowered-women-empowered-sindh/>

Daily Times
Your right to know Friday, March 21, 2025





EMPOWERED WOMEN, EMPOWERED SINDH: BREAKING BARRIERS & TRANSFORMING LIVES

SUMETA AFZAL SYED

The writer is a spokesperson for the Sindh government.

During my recent visit to various regions of Sindh, I witnessed a remarkable transformation—stories of resilience, empowerment, and progress that fill the heart with hope and satisfaction. The Sindh government’s visionary initiatives have touched countless lives, fostering economic independence and social upliftment. Today, I want to share one such inspiring story—that of Zakia Khanum from the village of Muhammad Saleh Warar in Badin.

Just a few years ago, Zakia Khanum’s life was a relentless struggle. She, along with other women from her village, toiled as daily-wage laborers on a landlord’s farm. Their work changed with the seasons—harvesting tomatoes, collecting paddy, and gathering sunflower seeds. Yet, despite their hard labor, their wages were so meager that affording two meals a day was a constant challenge. A single unforeseen circumstance—a bout of illness or an unexpected day off—meant going to bed hungry. Life was an unending test of endurance.

The turning point in Zakia's life came when she and other women in her village came into contact with the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), an NGO funded by the Sindh government. The SRSO team encouraged them to farm independently rather than work on someone else's land.

To facilitate this, the women formed a business development group comprising fifteen members and were granted an interest-free loan of PKR 1.39 million. With this financial support, Zakia and her group leased farmland and cultivated tomatoes.

SRSO not only provided them with high-quality seeds but also guided them through every step of the cultivation process. A few months later, as their lush tomato fields flourished, these women experienced a rebirth—this time as entrepreneurs, reaping the full rewards of their labor. Their first harvest generated a remarkable profit of PKR 620,000.

Inspired by this success, five members of the group branched out to establish their own ventures. The remaining ten, including Zakia, utilized their earnings to cultivate sunflowers in the Rabi season, yielding another PKR 450,000 in profit.

When the original landowner reclaimed his fields, they refused to be discouraged. Instead, during the Kharif season, they leased a larger plot and planted rice—securing a net income of PKR 818,000 after covering all expenses.

When I met Zakia Khanum, she spoke with immense pride and optimism. This season, they have cultivated muskmelons, with expectations of earning at least PKR 2 million in profit. Her eyes shone with gratitude as she shared how, for the first time in years, no one in their households has gone to bed hungry. Their children now eat nutritious meals and dress in better clothes. The SRSO team continues to support them, guiding them in crop selection, market linkages, and financial planning.

Zakia's journey is not just a personal triumph; it is a beacon of hope for countless women. Her success has ignited a movement of economic empowerment, inspiring other women across Sindh to break free from the cycle of poverty. Under the leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Sindh government is materializing the vision of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, fostering self-sufficiency and prosperity among marginalized communities.

Comprehensive Empowerment Initiatives

The Sindh government's Poverty Reduction Program, implemented through SRSO, extends beyond agriculture. It provides financial assistance and expert guidance in livestock farming, poultry farming, fisheries, handicrafts, and various entrepreneurial ventures, ensuring diverse opportunities for economic stability.

Another groundbreaking initiative is the Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affectees (SPHF)—the world's largest free housing project, aiming to construct 2.1 million homes in flood-affected areas. In a significant step toward women's empowerment, 1.2 million of these homes will be registered in women's names, with 800,000 women designated as sole beneficiaries. These women have been provided with bank accounts, enabling them to manage financial transactions independently—an achievement that marks a historic shift in their economic agency.

The Thar Coal Project is another testament to Sindh's commitment to gender inclusivity. The project has not only transformed the region's energy landscape but has also uplifted its women.

Today, in an unprecedented development, women in Thar are driving heavy dumpers, working in solar energy projects, operating reverse osmosis (RO) plants, and taking on various technical roles. Their contributions have been globally recognized, with UNESCO officials acknowledging Sindh's efforts as a rare and exemplary model of women's empowerment.

Real Change Comes from Action

True progress is not achieved through mere rhetoric but through concrete action—and the Sindh government is proving this through its people-centric policies. The initiatives led by the Chief Minister of Sindh are reshaping the socio-economic fabric of rural communities, ensuring that women are no longer confined to the sidelines but are active participants in economic growth.

Zakia Khanum's story is just one among thousands of untold success stories emerging from Sindh's villages. These women, once burdened by poverty and dependency, are now pioneers of change—nurturing hope, fostering economic resilience, and paving the way for a more prosperous, self-reliant Sindh.

Sindh's commitment to women's empowerment is not just commendable—it is revolutionary. The province is setting a benchmark for inclusive development, proving that when women are uplifted, entire communities thrive.

The dawn of economic independence and social prosperity is spreading across Sindh—one empowered woman, one empowered family at a time.

Empowered women, empowered Sindh: Breaking barriers & transforming lives

The writer is a spokesperson for the Sindh government.

Sumeta Afzal Syed | March 21, 2025

f X



SOWING SUSTAINABILITY

Kitchen gardens are helping foster social cohesion in rural Sindh



“Food security is not just about filling bellies; it’s about dignity, health and the very foundation of a thriving society.” - Rajendra Pachauri

Sana Siddique Rahimoo ●

Rural Sindh faces significant challenges, including widespread food insecurity. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, a significant portion of the rural population in Sindh experiences acute food insecurity. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification for April 2023 showed that a substantial number of people in Sindh were facing crisis (IPC Phase 3) and emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity. The situation is exacerbated by factors such as climate change, poverty and limited access to resources.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations recognises home gardening as a crucial strategy to enhance household food security and nutrition, particularly in vulnerable communities.

Recognising these critical issues, the Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project, a World Bank-funded initiative, implemented a Kitchen Garden HEIS Drip Kit intervention. This component aimed to address both food security and women’s empowerment by providing 15,100 households with a comprehensive package: drip irrigation kits, 200-litre water storage tank, essential tools, quality seeds and a capacity building programme.

Sowing sustainability



Families cultivating fresh, nutritious vegetables significantly improved their food security and dietary diversity. This increased access to fresh produce directly addressed the issue of malnutrition, particularly among children. Moreover, the ability to sell surplus produce in local markets generated additional income for households, empowering women to contribute to their families' livelihoods and improve their economic standing.

The selection of beneficiaries was done by engaging non-governmental organisations such as Sindh Rural Support Organisation, National Rural Support Programme, Thardeep, Secure Islamique France and Shah Sacha Sami Foundation. These organisations have been working for many years, ensuring transparency in beneficiary selection and identifying the most deserving households. The collaborative approach was a key pillar in the success of the Kitchen Garden initiative.

Syed Nadeem Shah, the On-Farm Water Management director general and SIAPEP project director said the impact of this intervention had been profound. Impact evaluation revealed that before the project, 45 per cent of the beneficiaries had not had daily vegetable meals. After the installation of the Kitchen Garden kits, this number dropped dramatically, with 56 per cent of the beneficiaries enjoying at least one vegetable meal daily while 44 per cent had two.

This significant increase in vegetable consumption directly addressed the issue of malnutrition, particularly among children

By cultivating fresh, nutritious vegetables, families significantly improved their food security and dietary diversity. This increased access to fresh produce directly addressed the issue of malnutrition, particularly among children.

Sowing sustainability

Furthermore, the ability to cultivate fresh, nutritious vegetables not only improved dietary diversity but also generated additional income for some households.

97 per cent of the beneficiaries of the Kitchen Garden initiatives were women. The project had an empowering effect on this segment of the population. The high female participation not only provided women with an opportunity to access fresh vegetables and improve the health of their families, including women, girls, children and the elderly, but also empowered them to earn income by selling surplus produce. Economic independence fostered a sense of well-being and contributed to community development in the rural communities.

Muhammad Riaz Khan, a former senior agriculture specialist for World Bank and a SIAPEP task team leader, said that “the success of the Kitchen Garden initiative under SIAPEP was evident from the impact it had on the lives of rural women and their families in terms of improved food security, nutrition and income.”

SRSO’s presence in Sindh at community, village and local support organization level has enabled the identification of vulnerable households and ensured equitable resource distribution through engagement of local community members. The transformative impact on women’s lives – from improved nutrition to greater economic empowerment – has been rewarding. The Kitchen Garden Initiative helped around 200,000 households revive the tradition of growing vegetables at home, a practice dating back 2–3 decades, says Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro, CEO of the Sindh Rural Support Organisation.

The success of the SIAPEP Kitchen Garden initiative by the On Farm Water Management wing of the Agriculture Department has highlighted the need to empower rural communities, especially women and vulnerable groups, and promote sustainable development through well-planned initiatives.

By scaling up this programme and similar initiatives that prioritise women’s empowerment and food security, the Sindh government can make significant strides toward building a more prosperous and equitable future for all its citizens. Extending this program across Sindh and potentially other regions of Pakistan will enable policymakers to address several Sustainable Development Goals, including

SDG 1: No Poverty by alleviating poverty and hunger among rural households.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger by improving food security and access to nutritious food.

SDG 5: Gender Equality by empowering women through economic opportunities.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by improving access to resources and opportunities for rural communities.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production by promoting sustainable and local food production.

This holistic approach will not only improve the livelihoods of millions of rural households but also contribute to overall development of the country.

The author is a gender expert and development professional. She can be reached at sanakhanzada4@gmail.com, LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/sana-siddique-6290a9177 and at X <https://x.com/sanasrahimoo?s=21>.

Link:

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/1276002-sowing-sustainability>

Gardens of cohesion

FAO recognises home gardening as crucial strategy to enhance household food security and nutrition, particularly in vulnerable communities.



Internally displaced people gather to receive free food near their makeshift camp in the flood-hit Chachro of Sindh province. — AFP/File

BY SANA SIDDIQUE RAHIMOO

Rural Sindh faces significant challenges, including widespread food insecurity. According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), a significant portion of the rural population in Sindh experiences acute food insecurity.

For example, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, such as the IPC Pakistan Acute Food Insecurity Snapshot for April 2023, indicates that a substantial number of people in Sindh are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity. This situation is exacerbated by factors such as climate change, poverty, and limited access to resources. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognises home gardening as a crucial strategy to enhance household food security and nutrition, particularly in vulnerable communities.

Recognising these critical issues, the Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP), a World Bank-funded initiative, implemented a 'Kitchen Garden HEIS Drip Kit' intervention. This component aimed to address both food security and women's empowerment by providing 15,100 households with a comprehensive package: drip irrigation kits, 200-liter water storage tank, essential tools, quality seeds and other input, and capacity building programme.

• Gardens of cohesion

Beneficiaries were selected through engaging NGOs including the Sindh Rural Support Organization, National Rural Support Program, Thardeep, Secure Islamique France, Shah Sacha Sami Foundation, etc. These organisations have been working on the ground for many years, ensuring transparency in beneficiary selection and identifying the most deserving households. This collaborative approach was a key pillar in the success of the Kitchen Garden initiative.

Impact Evaluation revealed that before the project, 45 per cent of beneficiaries had no daily vegetable meals. After the installation of the Kitchen Garden kits, this number dramatically decreased, with 56 per cent of beneficiaries enjoying at least one vegetable meal daily, while 44 per cent had two.

This significant increase in vegetable consumption directly addressed the issue of malnutrition, particularly among children.

The ability to cultivate fresh, nutritious vegetables not only improved dietary diversity but also generated additional income for households. Importantly, 97 per cent of the beneficiaries for the Kitchen Garden initiatives were women, demonstrating the project's significant role in empowering this segment of the population.

This high female participation not only provided women with an opportunity to access fresh vegetables and improve the health of their families, including women, girls, children, and the elderly, but also empowered them to earn by selling surplus produce.

This economic independence fostered a sense of well-being and contributed to community development within the rural communities.

SRSO's deep-rooted presence in Sindh through community, village, and local support organizations has enabled the identification of vulnerable households and ensured equitable resource distribution through engagement of local community members. The transformative impact on women's lives – from improved nutrition to greater economic empowerment – has been rewarding.

By scaling up this programme and similar initiatives that prioritise women's empowerment and food security, the Sindh government can make significant strides toward building a more prosperous and equitable future for all its citizens. Extending this programme across Sindh and potentially other regions of Pakistan will enable policymakers to address several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This holistic approach will not only improve the livelihoods of millions of rural households but also contribute to the overall development of the country.

*The writer is a gender expert and development professional. She can be reached at: sanakhazada4@gmail.com
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1273997-gardens-of-cohesion?s=081>*

Exquisite handicraft on display at Sartyoon Sang Crafts Exhibition

Connecting realities, building perspectives



Visitors look at the craftwork displayed at the exhibition. — Fahim Siddiqi / White Star

Shazia Hasan

KARACHI: The 16th edition of the four-day Sartyoon Sang Crafts Exhibition at the Ocean Mall gives visitors the chance to look and admire exquisite handicrafts of Sindh.

Held annually, the exhibition promotes rural crafts of mostly women artisans.

There were ralli, ajrak, embroidered chadors and shirts with mirror work, Sindhi caps and purses, along with so many decoration pieces, handwoven baskets, framed crafts, and other works.

Some of the artisans directly involved in producing the crafts were also present at the stalls, taking pride in their hard work as customers appreciated and bought the items.

Speaking to Dawn, Shahida Baloch from Sukkur, said that even though she is now an SRSO employee, she was an artisan initially and that there is nothing at the SRSO stall which she cannot make herself. "I didn't learn the handicrafts from any school or institute. My mother's and grandmother's lap was my first learning institute," she said.

Artisans deal directly with customers to get an idea of the market

"When SRSO came to our village, they also visited my home and saw the handicrafts I was producing. They gave me some orders. After that they took me on as a trainee," she said, while informing that she has also been to India in 2009 under a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) association for home-based workers called Sabah Pakistan.

“I visited Ahmedabad in India for one month, where there is a similar organisation called Self-Employed Women’s Association or SEWA. Besides learning stitching and more crafts there, we also attended sessions on community management, running of small businesses, etc,” she said.

Fahmida Jatoi of Agha Ali Jatoi village in District Khairpur said that she also learned Sindhi embroidery from her family. “Our crafts are handed down to us through generations,” she said. “I learned from my mother and older sisters. Earlier, we used to do embroidery on shirts only. Then SRSO trained us in other handicrafts, too.

Now we produce keychains, jewellery, bags, buttons, etc. I’m now an entrepreneur. My company is called Aghaz Handicraft Centre. Some of the items on sale here are from my company,” she said proudly.

SRSO’s Assistant Manager, Craft Enterprise Development, Mirza Sulaiman Baig, told Dawn that many women in Sindh’s rural areas have skill but no resources. “The artisans working with us represent around 15 districts of Sindh, including Thatta, Kashmore, Badin, Umerkot, Mirpukhas, Khairpur, Sukkur, Larkana, Qambar Shahdadkot, Jacobabad, Ghotki, Hala, Matiari, etc.

Each product mentions which district it belongs to. We help them polish their crafts while also teaching them to produce items according to the demands of the urbanised markets,” he said.



We also display their handicrafts at this exhibition. As it is, due to the industrial revolution, our handmade products have taken a hit. We want to create space for them in the market again,” he said.

He also said that the artisans have already been paid for their labour by SRSO, which is up to 40 per cent of the cost of an item. The amount is more than what is paid to the labour in the market normally. Some 10 to 15 per cent of the profit from the sales also goes to them.

“We bring several of the artisans here to the exhibition so they can deal directly with customers to also get an idea of their demands, specifications, needs, quality, etc. After gathering feedback from them they return home with a better idea of the market,” he said.

STITCHING HOPE: SINDH'S ARTISAN PROGRAM UPLIFTS RURAL WOMEN THROUGH HANDICRAFTS



Visitors take interest in handmade textile products depicting Sindh culture at the 16th Sartyoon Sang Crafts Exhibition, organized by the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) in Karachi, Pakistan, on January 10, 2025. (Photo Courtesy: SRSO)

BY NAIMAT KHAN

The Sindh Rural Support Organization has trained over 6,000 women in some of the poorest areas in Pakistan's south

Woman artisans in Sindh say the organization has not just brought them financial stability, but dignity and hope as well

"KARACHI: Dressed in a vibrant pink embroidered dress with traditional patterns depicting the Sindh culture, Ponam Shaam Lal proudly displays her handcrafted cushions to visitors at an upscale mall in Karachi. Had it not been for Sindh's rural artisan programs, Lal, in her late 30s, would have been bereft of skill, and the means to earn her bread and butter.

Lal's creations were among the 5,800 handicrafts showcased at a four-day exhibition launched by the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), a not-for-profit organization, in Karachi's Ocean Mall on Tuesday.

The event, a collaboration with the Sindh government, featured 3,545 rural woman artisans displaying products ranging from traditional shawls to embroidered accessories.

The SRSO has trained thousands of rural women in different trades from some of the most under-developed regions of Sindh such as Jacobabad, Kandhkot-Kashmore, Shikarpur, Ghotki, Qambar-Shahdadkot and Badin districts in the last 16 years.

Lal, who rarely ventured beyond her remote village near Rohri up until a few years ago, is one of those thousands of artisans at the Karachi event, which aims to help these women sell to high-end customers in Pakistan's urban cities.

“Before, we never went out; we didn't know the outside world. Only my husband would earn. We would sit idle, wondering how to make ends meet or pay for our children's education,” Lal told Arab News, as she showed her handicrafts to a customer.

“We were poor, but when we started doing this work, took on orders, and worked hard, our circumstances improved.”

Lal says the crochet and embroidery work she learned due to the SRSO's training program has helped her send her children to school, and life is “finally stable.”

Shahida Baloch, an artisan and trainer from Sindh's Sukkur city, learned embroidery from her mother and grandmother, but she had little formal education or access to markets where she could sell her products.

“I am a rural woman from the village,” Baloch, a mother of seven, told Arab News.

“We learned embroidery and sewing at home from our grandmothers, without attending any institute or training center.”

But things changed for Baloch, when the SRSO reached her village almost a decade ago. She says the organization provided her recognition for her embroidery and sewing skills by showcasing her work at exhibitions across the country.

As one of the few trainers at the SRSO, Baloch now guides woman artists on how to transform traditional craft into marketable products. “I trained women to make cushions, bags, and pouches from the same art. We also worked on color combinations, blending traditional Sindhi colors — blue, yellow, red, green, all natural colors — with modern preferences. This way, the color became more appealing to urban customers,” she said.

“Similarly, we taught them to create buttons as a supplementary product. For instance, if no one buys large, embroidered fabrics worth fifty thousand or a hundred thousand rupees, they might buy a few buttons to embellish their shirts.”

SRSO CEO Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro said the organization has trained over 6,000 women in Sindh's poorest areas through 316 Business Development Groups.

“Our aim is to connect these women with high-end markets and ensure better incomes,” he said.

Sindh government spokesperson Sadia Javed said the SRSO, part of a larger poverty-reduction initiative, provides loans and support to woman artisans, and with a 98 percent repayment rate, it has proven highly effective.

“Earlier, this program was limited to a few districts,” Javed said. “Now, it has expanded to urban slums in Karachi and Sukkur.”

For women like Lal and Baloch, the SRSO has brought more than financial stability.

It has brought them dignity and hope. “I am extremely grateful to Allah for making the SRSO the means through which I was empowered,” said Baloch, who could not study beyond the fifth grade, but has managed to send two of her daughters to university.

“Today, I am successful, and so are my children.”

Link:

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2585939/pakistan>

How an India-inspired model empowering Sindh women socially and economically



How an India-inspired model empowering Sindh women socially and economically

The three-tiered social mobilisation approach is inspired by a successful model implemented in India's Andhra Pradesh | Courtesy: Azeem Windows

The three-tiered social mobilisation approach is inspired by a successful model implemented in India's Andhra Pradesh

Yousuf Katpar

December 28, 2024

Published in The News

Nine years ago, Aami's world turned upside down. Her husband Sheru, the man she once trusted with her life, attacked her with an axe, leaving her with 32 stitches and confined to a wheelchair. He landed himself behind bars for his crime, while Aami was left to pick up the pieces — not just for herself, but also for their six children, including five daughters.

"I am the sole breadwinner. My three daughters and I work together. We manage to earn Rs1,500 some days, while on others it goes up to Rs2,000 or Rs2,500," she shares. Aami's two other daughters and son go to school.

Aami can neither stand nor walk and for the last nine years, she has been confined to a wheelchair, she said with a heavy voice.

"My husband had a mental health issue. He hit me with an axe on the right side of my shoulder. I can return to a normal life with surgery to insert a rod, but that requires money," she said describing her situation, further sharing that she can barely make ends meet to support her family.

In Majno Shoro village of Thatta district, she lives in a thatched house — a humble abode she built with the income earned from selling handicrafts.

"I know all handicrafts," Aami told Geo.tv, as she showed embroidered pillow covers and traditional Balochi gaj, a dress-front embroidery.



How an India-inspired model empowering Sindh women socially and economically

Aami was initially given a one-time cash grant of Rs15,000 by the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), a non-profit organisation, for purchasing income-generating assets. She bought fabric and made a suit, which she sold with a profit. Later, she made two more suits and then three more. She also bought a buffalo calf with the income she earned.

Aami then became a member of a Community Organisation (CO) to be eligible for the grant.

SRSO, which helped Aami kick-start her business, is executing the Peoples Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP) through a three-tier social mobilisation approach. Through this programme, the women are first encouraged to form a CO which comprises 15 to 20 households. They hold regular meetings to discuss issues concerning their community and are trained in organising meetings, record-keeping, and savings practices.

Two representatives from each CO then come together to form a Village Organisation (VO) at the village level, comprising all COs. VOs further federate into a Local Support Organisation (LSO) at the union council level having two representatives from each VO.

Shabana Alam, a resident of Achaar Khaskheli village, said that with the formation of these organisations, there has been increasing awareness among women. "They now pay attention to cleanliness, focus on children's education, and overall, they have improved their lifestyle," she shared with Geo.tv.

"My main focus has been on preventing underage marriages. Young girls were being married off and bore children when they didn't have the capacity to do so. Their lives were destroyed before they could even begin," she explained, adding, "I have saved the lives of 20-25 young girls."



Women participate in a VO meeting in Shikarpur. — SRSO/LinkedIn

Zakia Khanum, a resident of Mohammad Saleh village and manager of the LSO named 'Roshni', told Geo.tv they face a multitude of challenges as their land lies close to the coast and the water is saline. "But our women did not lose hope. They showed courage, formed their organisations and have been running them very efficiently."

"When the women started earning a little through small businesses, they began sending their young girls, who earlier worked in the fields, and their children, who were engaged in labour, to school," she says.

Through these organisations, women have been addressing various issues that impact their lives.

"Men also participate in the meetings of LSOs, VOs, and COs," Falaknaz Shoro, an LSO president said. "We convinced both women and men to send their daughters to school because education is just as much a right for girls as it is for boys."

"We also planted trees in our village. These trees protect us from disasters and serve as a place to tether our livestock. Even our meetings take place beneath their shade."

Previously, Shoro explained, women wouldn't go to hospitals for delivery. "Our organisations decided that expecting mothers must visit the hospital every month for a check-up and to get vaccinated. They must deliver at the hospital to minimise risks for both mother and baby."

Through their initiatives at the organisations, the women have also bought a rickshaw to transport girls to school. "We took a loan from SRSO to make this happen. Not only did this provide a livelihood opportunity for the driver, but now the girls reach school and return home on time."

'We work with women'

SRSO CEO Muhammad Dittal Kalhoro explained that on average, there are 3,000 households in a union council. The organisation begins by profiling households through surveys to gather information about the number of houses, population, including men and women, levels of education, and livestock and then uses a poverty scorecard to determine the poverty levels of these households.

"We work with women who are willing to step out of their homes and organise themselves into community institutions," he said.

He added that the organisation has been working with women in Thatta for the past five years. "As they participate in meetings, they always learn something. More than anything else, women are being socially empowered."

These women can now raise their voices for their rights and talk about their daughters' education, said Kalhoro.

The SRSO CEO also highlighted that trust is also building among men when they see women contributing to household income. "When women start earning even a little, they not only take care of the home but also stand beside their husbands, sharing the burden."



Women create clothing and handicrafts in the Thatta district. — SRSO/LinkedIn

"We work with women who are willing to step out of their homes and organise themselves into community institutions," he said.

He added that the organisation has been working with women in Thatta for the past five years. "As they participate in meetings, they always learn something. More than anything else, women are being socially empowered."

These women can now raise their voices for their rights and talk about their daughters' education, said Kalhoro.

The SRSO CEO also highlighted that trust is also building among men when they see women contributing to household income. "When women start earning even a little, they not only take care of the home but also stand beside their husbands, sharing the burden."

He maintained that although the organisation's goal was to alleviate household poverty, its social mobilisation approach is chipping away at deep-seated issues like child marriage and honour killing. Through awareness and education, there has been a gradual change in people's attitude, perhaps not everywhere but in many places, he added.

Kalhoro was of the view that poverty, drug abuse, and financial issues are often at the root of honour-killing cases. "Sometimes, it's as simple as borrowing money from someone, and then false allegations are made to settle scores," he explained. Economic empowerment, he added, can help prevent such incidents.

'True value'

Sarah, the manager of a village organisation named 'Chand', shares that women had long been skilled at stitching and embroidery, but their work was undervalued. "We realised the true worth of our skills after working with SRSO. Now we know that our work can even be sold in international markets."

Sarah explained that they now receive orders worth Rs50,000 to Rs100,000. "We work together in groups to complete these orders, and the payments are transferred to my account. I then distribute the earnings among the women involved," she added.

SRSO now has presence in 15 districts of Sindh, where it has organised around 1.5 million households. This month, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the NGO and the Sindh government to expand the provincial government and European Union-funded PPRP to five more districts — Shaheed Benazirabad, Naushahro Feroz, Hyderabad and two districts of Karachi, Malir and Keamari.



Women are receiving a training in the Thatta district. — SRSO/LinkedIn

'As of June 2024, 79,432 COs, 13,944 VOs and 592 LSOs have been formed, according to data. More than 57,646 households have been given Income Generating Grants (IGG) worth Rs798.66 million, 281,479 households have benefited from the Community Investment Fund (CIF) and 110,888 community members have been trained in technical and vocational training.

Around 958,598 trees have been planted and managed by communities and 18,878 kitchen gardening seeds have been distributed. It has organised 6,005 rural women artisans in 308 business development groups and 12,690 children enrolled in SRSO-managed community schools.

This three-tiered social mobilisation approach of the PPRP is inspired by a successful model implemented in India's Andhra Pradesh. This model underlines a three-tiered social mobilisation approach: community organisations mobilise households and address local issues; village organisations coordinate activities of multiple COs; and local support organisations provide technical assistance, training, and support to COs and VO.

'No poverty reduction'

Renowned economist Dr Kaiser Bengali opines that although the SRSO programme is billed as a poverty reduction initiative, it was a social mobilisation programme in reality. "Data shows that many rural support programmes have been launched at the national level and by the provinces, but they have failed to alleviate poverty," he told Geo.tv.

"They often share stories about giving money to a woman to open a shop and claiming it helped her send her children to school. However, when we traced these stories, we found that most of these shops shut down within three to six months. This indicates there has been no real impact on poverty reduction."

Dr Kaiser, however, acknowledged that these programmes have successfully mobilised women, providing them with opportunities to step out of their homes and engage in discussions with other women, which is their achievement.

Teach how to catch a fish
The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has sometimes faced criticism for relying on a stipend-based model rather than focusing on empowering women with skills to become self-reliant.



Handicrafts made by women are on display in the Thatta district.
— SRSO/LinkedIn

"BISP is called an income support programme and was not launched to alleviate poverty," explained Dr Kaiser.

"When I was heading BISP, I would say it was not a poverty reduction programme. We started with a Rs1,000 stipend, and that amount is not sufficient to alleviate poverty. However, for households with low incomes, it could increase their earnings and improve their purchasing power. When we launched the programme in 2008, we calculated that Rs1,000 could enable a household of six to buy 22 days' worth of flour."



Billions of rupees, the economist said, have been spent on income generation, skill development, and business loan programmes, yet there have been no significant results. Neither have individuals succeeded in establishing sustainable businesses nor have they secured jobs after acquiring skills, he added.

Dr Kaiser said poverty can only be reduced through jobs, which can be created when the economy is growing rapidly, industries are flourishing, and agricultural production is increasing.

Yousuf Katpar is a reporter at The News.
Published December 28, 2024

A Way To Self-Reliance

(Compilation of selected articles, success stories & news reports published in English media 2025)



Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO)



Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) was incorporated on May 29, 2003, as a not-for-profit organization and registered under section 42 of the Companies Act 2017 (Formerly known as Companies Ordinance, 1984). SRSO was established by the Government of Sindh to achieve the goals of poverty reduction through community empowerment, skills enhancement, capacity building, development of community-supported infrastructure, and support for income generation, enterprise development, and micro-credit.

Edited by: Naveed Ishaque Memon

Manager Communications

Reviewed by: Naveed Ishaque Memon

Sr. Manager MER Head Office Sukkur

Compiled & Designed by: Mr. Ali Anwar Azad

Manager-Communication & Documentation-MER Unit

SRSO-Communications-Monitoring, Evaluation & Research (MER) Unit

SRSO Complex Shikarpur Road Sukkur (Sindh), Pakistan

Ph.# 071-56271820 Email:info@srso.org.pk Website: www.srso.org.pk