

LSO Initiatives: Awaz Local Support Organisation

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In village Mud Khoso, union council Mungrani, two Baloch tribes of Khoso and Shar were living together in peace and harmony for centuries. In the year 2000, a conflict arose between the two tribes over the ownership rights of a 120 acre piece of land. This led to armed clashes which took the lives of 36 people on both sides. In addition to this, it has seriously deteriorated the socio-economic conditions of the entire village over the last 10 years.

Despite their internal feuds, COs were formed in both tribes. However, at the time of the LSO's formation, the COs of Shar tribe abstained from joining it because practically it was impossible for them to sit with people from Khoso. When Ms. Nasim of the Khoso tribe was elected as the LSO president, she led a delegation of women from her tribe to the rival Shar tribe without regard of their personal safety and invited their women to join the LSO. The women of Shar tribe said that the people of the Khoso tribe would kill them if they go to their area. But Nasim and the other women members of the delegation took the responsibility of their security. When the women of Shar tribe visited Nasim's village, they were received with full respect and due cultural honour. Therefore, they decided to join the LSO. Then the women of both tribes jointly appealed to their men to settle the never-ending dispute. As a result of this courageous initiative, the elders of the rival tribes sat together and settled the dispute. The piece of land which was the bone of contention between them was eventually distributed among the families of those who had been killed in the conflict.



Ms Nasim, LSO President Sharing her Experiences with Community Leaders in a Workshop

HEALTH, HYGIENE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

During a planning meeting, the General Body members of the LSO realised that health and hygiene conditions play a critical role in the general wellbeing of people hygiene. They therefore decided to form an 11 member *Sehat Safai* or health and hygiene Committee to systematically address the issue. The Committee formed sub-committees in each VO and made them responsible for cleaning their villages on a regular basis. The village cleaning campaign is held on a monthly basis. The Committee members regularly visit villages in turn to ensure that they are cleaning up their villages properly. The General Body of the LSO monitors the performance of the Committee on a regular basis. As a result of that, the settlement areas of the entire union council have become clean and healthy.

The Committee coordinated with the Government's Forest Department and planted 3,000 forest trees in 30 villages of their union council by the community members. They have decided to continue tree plantation in the future to make their union council more green and environmentally-friendly.

The Committee also extends full cooperation to the District Administration in polio campaigns. They supervise the campaign and report to the District Administration regarding uncovered areas and families. There are no-go areas in District Shikarpur, where government officials cannot administer polio vaccines. Therefore the Government recruited eight women from the LSO, trained them and sent them in these difficult areas for administering polio drops.



Mr. Nazar Memon, Member BoD SRSO Addressing an Experience Sharing Workshop in Shikarpur

Date of Formation:
23 July 2011

District
Shikarpur

Union Council
Mungrani

Total Households
in Union Council
2,890

Organised
Households
2,023

Coverage
70%

No of Community
Organisations (COs)
122
all women's

No of Village
Organisations (VOs)
31
all women's

No of General
Body Members
42
all women

No of Executive
Committee
Members
13
all women

What are LSOs?

LSOs or Local Support Organisations are central to the 'Social Mobilisation' approach of the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs). In a bid to reduce poverty and empower marginalised people (especially women), the RSPs mobilise rural communities into a three-tiered structure, which consists of Community Organisations (COs) - neighbourhood level community groups, Village Organisations (VOs) - village level federations of COs, and LSOs - union council level federations of VOs. LSOs are able to carry out community-led development at a much greater level due to the advantage they gain from numbers. As the tertiary tier, LSOs are also uniquely able to develop linkages with government and non-government organisations, donors agencies and the private sector.

Education

Education is the basic right of every child. In union council Mungrani, there were three non-functional government primary schools. One school building was occupied by a landlord who had converted it into a grain store. In the other two schools, the teachers were not coming regularly to teach their students. Therefore, the parents were not sending their children to these schools. The LSO resolved to recover the school building from the landlord and regularise the other two dysfunctional schools in its meeting. The members of the Executive Committee first met with the landlord and asked him to hand over the school building to the Government's Education department. But he arrogantly ignored their humble demand. Therefore, the LSO women went to the school, vacated it by force, cleaned the school themselves and locked it with their own lock and key. The landlord had never expected such a bold action from the women, so he simply remained stunned. Later on they handed over the school to the Education Department.

They visited the other two schools and warned the teachers to attend the school regularly and on time. They then met with the District Education department official and asked him to ensure that the teachers of these schools were regular in their duties and offered their full support to making the schools fully functional. On the other hand, they also motivated parents to send their children to the schools. There are now 800 students (545 boys and 315 girls) enrolled in these schools.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) have become important documents. Besides providing people with an identity as a bona fide citizen of Pakistan, it is an instrumental document for accessing a number of services and facilities from government, donor and even private sector agencies. It is a prerequisite for marriage licenses, voter registration and other types of legal and contractual matters. A large number of women of the union council had never made their CNIC, thus they were practically deprived of their basic rights. The LSO therefore decided to make CNIC for all eligible persons; especially women. On one side they motivated women to prepare their CNIC and on the other side they contacted NADRA officials and arranged for their mobile teams. Thus in a short period of time, they were able to prepare 650 new CNICs; mostly of women.



Dr. Shireen Mustafa, Project Director UCBPRP, Government of Sindh taking Interest in the Products of Trained Women by LSOs



A Young Woman doing Embroidery Work

EMPLOYMENT GENERATION FOR YOUTH

Due to lack of economic opportunities locally, a large number of young people are unemployed in the union council. The root cause of the deadly tribal conflict over a small piece of land was unemployment. The Army is a large employment agency for young boys. But due to their fear, parents were not ready to send their boys in the Army. The women leaders of the LSO, therefore, convened VO level meetings where they explained to the parents of young boys about the benefits of employment with the armed forces and made them realise that their fear was amplified. They also guided the parents and youngsters about the recruitment criteria and procedures for enrolling in the armed forces. As a result of these efforts people started sending their youngsters in the armed forces. During the last one year, 52 young men have been recruited in the armed forces from the union council. This is a commendable initiative as it will eventually help in taking the families of the employed people out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

CONSTRUCTION OF LSO OFFICE BUILDING

The Executive Committee of the LSO meets on a monthly basis. In addition to this, they had to come together time and again for receiving visitors from the Government of Sindh, the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), other LSOs and donor agencies. Due to lack of a proper office space, they had to arrange these meetings at either a house of a member, and if the weather conditions allowed, then in an open space. Therefore, they felt the need of establishing a proper office for the LSO. In the General Body meeting held on 17th July 2011, they decided to construct the LSO office on a self-help basis. They initially levied a donation of Rs. 5,000 from each one of their 31 VOs. The father of Ms. Nasim also donated a piece of land for the LSO office building.

The LSO collected Rs. 150,000 in a week's time and started the construction work with this fund. In the meantime, Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman SRSO visited the LSO and in the appreciation of their efforts to settle the tribal dispute awarded Rs. 100,000 to them, which they decided to invest into the LSO office building. With these funds, they were able to complete the walls up to roof level. Then Ms. Naheed Shah, a SRSO BoD member visited the LSO and donated Rs. 100,000 for the roof of the building from her personal sources. The construction work was supervised by the women leaders of the LSO and the project was completed in a short span of six months. The office building has a 30*20 foot hall, a 14*13 foot room and two bathrooms. This step has further strengthened the capacity of the LSO to work together for poverty reduction and women's empowerment. Moreover, the project will prove a milestone in the sustainability of the LSO in the long run.



The LSO President Briefing the Trainees in the LSO's Newly Constructed Office