

Pakistan:

Initiative of One, Relief for All – Women’s Leadership in the Banda Golra Water Supply Scheme

Challenges

Banda Golra is a small village in Pakistan with about 120 households. Most men work as day labourers, while women have traditional roles in the household and take little part in decision making. Most of the families are large, as women are usually not allowed to use family planning methods. The majority of women are illiterate, while most men have primary education. Women work at home, manage livestock and do other household work. Access to water in this area has been a problem for decades. The village’s only water sources were two natural springs, which are used by the people as well as by village livestock and wild animals. Collecting drinking water is the women’s responsibility and they spend three to four hours daily just completing that task. Obtaining water for livestock and other household purposes traditionally required another full day every week. In the only communal government pipeline to this village, water only runs twice a week and is not sufficient to meet local water demands. Diarrhoea is a major health concern among the children. Given these circumstances, the need for improved access to water and sanitation was urgent.

Programme/Projects

In Banda Golra, the village women, through the leadership of Nasim Bibi, a poor woman with no land to cultivate and whose husband works in construction, motivated other villagers to organize their own water supply scheme. Nasim Bibi had formed a community-based women’s organization (CBO) in 2002 in order to be eligible for credit from the Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP), a regional NGO which could lend money to community-based groups.

CBO members started a saving scheme and, over a two-year period, 21 women received loans from SRSP, all of whom have successfully repaid the loans. During their monthly CBO meetings the women identified increased access to water as a priority for action and decided to develop a village water supply scheme. The project involved installing seven new hand pumps in different locations in the village. The community had to contribute 20 per cent of the costs and SRSP 80 per cent. This case study documents how the group succeeded in bringing water to their village, the individual leadership of Nasim Bibi, and the strategies women used to gain acceptance for the water scheme. Nasim Bibi’s role helped other women become involved as community leaders. She herself served as the water scheme project manager and three committees were formed to manage the project. Every participating household had to take turns providing food and accommodation for the labourers engaged in hand pump drilling. Village women also helped soften the ground for drilling and with construction of the hand pump platforms.

Outcomes

Sanitation and health:

- There is now increased frequency in bathing for families, particularly women and girls, and increased frequency of clothes washing from a weekly to an almost daily basis.
- The time needed for collecting water has greatly decreased, resulting in a large increase in time available for other activities.

- The sense of security regarding the cleanliness of their new water sources has significantly increased.
- The contamination of the new water sources due to animal waste has decreased.

Women's empowerment and recognition of women in leadership roles:

- An open discussion of health issues related to frequent pregnancies is now possible in this community. Many women up to 35 years report that they are now able to decide to keep their families smaller.
- The decision-making power at the household level has increased for the majority of women involved in the water and credit schemes, and the value of participation in public activities is increasingly recognized.
- There is a growing understanding of how these activities can benefit the women's families through gaining access to new services and an increased acceptance by men that women can be effective community leaders.
- Women's social relations outside their homes and sense of independence due to greater social mobility are significantly increased.

Education:

- Girls' access to education has improved. A non-formal school has now been established in the village that offers both primary and secondary classes, mainly to girls.

Community involvement and higher rate of participation:

- The number of new CBO members has significantly increased, with support from male family members. Villagers who did not participate in the scheme now perceive it as something that is being done on behalf of the entire community.

Key Factors for Success

- The women's CBO was able to gain men's support for the water scheme because it started with a base of people who trusted each other due to their familial relationships and the proven success of the credit scheme. The support of the husband of Nasim Bibi of his wife's leadership helped her considerably in the organization of both the credit and water schemes.
- Because the women were able to provide additional financial support for their families through the SRSP micro-credit scheme, women received increased respect from male family members as well as increased decision-making power at the household and community levels.
- CBO Members' male relatives realized that the women's participation was benefiting the entire family. This helped the women gain male support for the water supply scheme, as did the fact that the women consciously involved the village men in a shared management model.

Main Obstacles

The men own and control most of the village resources, including houses and land. According to the state and Islamic law women can inherit property, but in most cases they do not receive their inherited property or are pressured to waive their inheritance rights in favour of their male relatives. The men in the village exercise greater decision-making power than women, although the majority of women involved in the water and credit schemes have found that members of the community are starting to listen to their views. More women are now receiving support for the CBO activity from male family members, rather than resistance.

Looking Ahead – Sustainability and Transferability

After the successful completion of the credit and water supply schemes, the community members now see Nasim Bibi as an informal leader and a person with strong linkages with NGOs, and often come to her for help seeking jobs and credit. Increased understanding of the importance of sanitation in the village is a long term result of this project. Women interviewed indicated that they plan to propose a resolution to organize a village sanitation scheme at their next CBO meeting.

Further Information

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<http://www.rspn.org>

Source

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, *Gender, water and sanitation; case studies on best practices*. New York, United Nations (in press).