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Proactive Enough to Transform Outlooks

“I am a common man and work for common people. And three main issues have dominated my life: education, avoiding floods and improving our agriculture. I had no distant vision of future, but when I started work for the wellbeing of my village I got a goal in my life. I’ve chosen this path which is not easy and I faced much opposition but now people regard and respect me. Having been elected into the local government in 2015 I can put to use all I have learned over the years in health, agriculture, livestock extension and disaster preparedness.”

Jan Muhammad, an activist from village Garaazak, chodwan valley, district DI Khan

You saw how difficult it is to reach my village? Even a villager from another dwelling might not be able to tell you the exact route to this place due to its remoteness. And what is the one thing a harsh climate needs desperately? Water! And that is the exact blessing which is very scarce. This area is rain-fed so you can understand that the hardest time is when there is no rain. On the other hand, during the monsoon season

the seasonal streams burst out and assume the form of flood. The flood water in one way is a blessing from Allah as we try to store it for agriculture purposes but on the other hand it makes us suffer when the flood water is too much and it gets diverted to our dwellings, submerging everything on its way causing heavy damages to the houses, roads and standing crops. There are three main issues that have motivated me throughout my life: education, avoiding floods and improving our agriculture.

There was no school in our village so I never attended any. Today I think that this was the biggest deprivation. When the first NGO came in our village back in 2002 with the objective to open a school for the children, I was the first one to welcome them. At that time, people had a negative perception about NGOs and were not willing to work with them. I saw it as an opportunity to get our kids educated, say what one might but had a hard time convincing people in the beginning. I allotted a small piece of land for the school. The small building comprising one room and a veranda were constructed by the organization. I also provided



residence to the female teacher that was hired by the organization for the school. They gave books to the children and paid the teacher's salary. 140 children were enrolled in that school. This NGO was only a project and after its completion they handed over the school to the government and it became a semi-government school. The salary they were offering was PKR 6,000 for which no teacher was ready to join as there is no educated woman in the village and the ones who are to come from other cities cannot sustain on such a minor salary. Hence the school was closed. I have recently been elected in the local elections of 2015 so I am going to highlight the issue further and look for some viable solution.

In 2010 the village experienced massive flooding and at that time the LPH project helped people a lot, to come out of the appalling mental and physical damages. It helped us restore our agricultural land that had washed away with the gushing waters and provided us with wheat seed to grow again. The seed was of good quality and we had a good crop that season. But for me the important thing was that the LPH looked beyond our immediate needs, helped us recognize the root cause and mitigate future disasters of similar nature. So it not only trained us on community based disaster risk management covering the aspects of disaster preparedness, first aid search & rescue and provided the kits to the disaster management committee but also helped build a protection wall around the village (locally called a Shehr Panah⁵) to protect it from the devastations of future flooding. For me this adds up to my comfort that our children and our families are safe from the destruction of the potential floods. Prior to this, we had to stay back and try to save whatever we could from our village despite the fact that this water is also very precious to our survival and we had to look for ways to store it for agriculture and even consumption in drought season. But then, we had to focus our energy on devising strategies to protect village rather than water storage. But since the Shehr Panah is constructed, it has made our life easy and has saved our village many times. Last year the flow of water was high but it served true to its name, a sanctuary and did not let water enter the village. Learning from the model I took the initiative and built a similar protection around the village graveyard.

I am also a member of disaster management committee and took part in the trainings. There is no hospital nearby and one has to travel all the way to Chodwan to get treated. It was therefore imperative that we got trained in first aid. Thanks to this training, I managed to save the lives of two men by providing them with first aid who were bitten by snakes and also saved seven goats who dropped in the well while drinking water. We were able to save those goats with the rope we were provided in a kit. As people know that I got trained in first aid, so many dwellers come or call me to provide first aid service which I do free of cost. I dress up their

wounds and it gives me satisfaction when someone gets relief from pain. I also facilitate the patient to go to hospital, if the situation is critical and the patient needs evacuation. Our community based organization also collects a monthly saving. We use that for charity purposes helping the poor meet expenses of treatment in the hospital.

The project also trained us in livestock management. When an animal contracted a disease, the only option we had was to slaughter it. But for the very first time, the LPH managed to bring in a livestock doctor. Since then we seek his advice about the livestock and also participate in the promotion of vaccination campaigns for animals. LPH also provided us with two water pumps. Although water is available in the deep bore for tube well but only when there is electricity which is rare especially in summers.

I am responsible for my family subsistence. I have around 22 family members that are dependent on me.

My family helps me in farming: cultivating vegetables, chickpea and wheat. Earlier I used to cultivate only wheat, chickpea and pumpkin. After the training with the LPH I decided to bring innovation to my farming life and started cultivating peas, green chili, and tomato on quarter of an acre of land as a test run. My family



helped me to prepare the land, weeding and watering the plants. I was encouraged with the yield and I sold the vegetables in Chodwan market and also in the village. Last season I cultivated green chili and marrows, which were a great success: after deducting the expenses I managed to make a profit of PKR 100'000/-. I send my vegetables for sale in Daraban and Chodwan market mostly and all is sold readily. We have also started growing flowers like rose and jasmine and realized that there is a great demand for them. I have planted lemon and orange trees but unfortunately this year was not good in terms of rain and the underground water level was



down. On top of that, the electricity issue never helped to pump enough water as the area under cultivation was bigger. Grapes were very successful. The vegetables need excessive water and the water scarcity this season did not reveal good results, so the plants dried out, so I could grow only pumpkin and onion. Still I got 60 bags of onion. I have specified 7.5 acres of my cultivable land to grow vegetables. The LPH gave us the sense to distinguish between poor and good quality seed. We used to cultivate the seeds irrespective of the quality and sometimes it was a mix of seeds which affected the yield of the crop.

I also have a grocery store where all useful items ranging from match boxes to clothes are stocked. I get a good amount of income from this shop as well. I can also dabble with electrical equipment and install electrical items for people who ask for it. Besides, I carry out the business of honey, the nomads collect the honey from the wild bees, and I buy it from them and then resell. I also have nine goats and two cows, am also a polio worker and voluntarily assist the teams during the polio campaign. Many seek my mediation in conflicts. I am also a member of AAWAZ¹ committee which works on advocacy. Reconciliation is never easy and it involves lots of risks. Now that I have been elected as a local leader, I consider it my prime duty to think of the people first. After so many years, I can say that this village is no longer the same as it was at the time of my mother.

¹ AAWAZ is a DFID financed initiative "Voice and Accountability" with several partner organizations who organize village based AAWAZ committees of communities to promote empowerment of marginalized people including women.

Now there is water nearby and at least when the pumps function properly, women do not have to carry water on their heads. We use animal carts for fetching large quantity of water if needed. The wooden pillars made of tree trunks are replaced with iron guarders, latrines are constructed in the houses and separate bathing place is arranged. You see boundary walls around the houses, the mud is gradually being replaced with bricks in house construction. The future will be even brighter. And my children will take my legacy of social work. With all these years of work and interaction with NGOs, the perception of people has changed. They applaud the development work and give me due regard for taking the right stance at that time.

