



WOMEN'S DRR & GREEN SKILLS TRAINING BY HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF PAKISTAN

Although women make up a little over 50% of the population in Pakistan, they are almost always overlooked whenever any development activities are undertaken. There are many reasons for this oversight:

- Traditionally women are kept aloof and not accessible easily even to outsider women.
- Men occupy most decision-making positions.
- Women are not considered worthy of attention, as they may not provide the expected results.
- Women themselves are not aware of their rights or of their own potential.
- Most teams that work on development issues are composed of men who often forget the importance of the role of women in development.

When the project was undertaken, although the community centres were to be built for the youth, both men and women, there seemed no particular allocation for bringing women into the loop.

Considering the societal constraints it is clear that unless special programs are conducted, it will not be possible for women in conservative societies to participate in activities.

On the other hand, in the work that has been so far conducted by Heritage Foundation of Pakistan (HF), especially in marginalized sections, we know that women can play a dynamic role in adopting the messages that could be beneficial to the society at large.

However, because of the prevalent constraints it is essential that special programs be conducted targeting women particularly. In most of the programs that are conducted by HF, women are seen as the agents of change and thus obtain rich dividends.

Since there was no special allocation for women in the program, HF decided to carry out the training of local women through its own resources, as we felt it was critical to reach out to them. It was extremely important also for the success of the program as envisaged by UNDP which was to empower the youth and change their mindset.

With this aim a team was mobilized by HF that consisted of its woman social mobilizer Ms. Sumatra Batool, who had achieved exemplary results in reaching out to Sindh's rural women and a star village master trainer Ms. Champa, had excelled as a Barefoot Village Entrepreneur (BVEs). Both being women needed to travel with their chaperones – Ms. Sumaira with her brother and Ms. Champa with her husband Kanji, also an HF BVE.

The introduction to the HF's women's team had been made in the training program that was conducted for D.I. Khan youth at HF's Base Camp in Hazara. When designing the training program,



since all the youth were men, it was felt important to introduce women trainers to them. For this purpose, Ms. Sumaira and Ar. Azeemah had been invited to provide training as helpers to master trainers Mr. Saad Khan and Mr. Naheem Shah.

The stories of successes of HF's Sindh BVEs were shared by them with the youth during training sessions that highly motivated them. The success of Champa and Kanji in promoting the construction of HF's Rural Designer Chulah Kitchens, as related by Sumaira and Azeemah, were eye openers for the Musa Zai youth. Suddenly there was so much enthusiasm among the trainees to learn the technique of chulah building, that although not originally part of the training, a special session was held so that the DI Khan trainees could learn how to make the chulahs themselves. The introduction to HF's young professionals also showed the trainees how women could travel from outside their homes and were able to hold their own. They became quite fond of the two trainers, calling them 'baji' as a mark of respect.

This icebreaker strategy was important so that when HF's women's team would arrive in Garha



Shaikh they should receive the welcome they deserve. And, it has to be said, that the reception of our women's team and the warmth that they received, was quite remarkable!

Knowing the fierce protective nature of the menfolk in the area, where their women were not allowed to venture outside the village perimeter walls or allowed to meet outsiders, HF Project Manager Naheem Shah had also laid the ground well. He had informed the elders that the team was invited as special guests of M'am (CEO, HF) and as such it was important that they were accorded full respect. Also, he told them that they are daughters and sisters of those living in remote areas and the team's members have left their home to undertake a long and arduous journey in order to provide advice to improve the lives of the local womenfolk.

The community of Garha Shaikh has been extremely hospitable to HF personnel and artisans teams and all of them have developed a mutual rapport, which is remarkable - all taking care of each other.

The Yousuf Zai trainees also played their part in reporting complimentary sentiments for HF members who had been very warm towards them during the training sessions at the Base Camp. Thus, a mutual feeling of respect and companionship had already developed which stood our women trainers in good stead. The trainees had already shared their stories with their women family members. And, it was thus, that they were warmly welcomed into their homes, where we are told hardly any strangers (women) had been allowed to enter.

HF's two women trainers and their chaperones came by train all the way from Lower Sindh to the remote area of DI Khan. Leaving on 5th October it took 24 hours to arrive in DI Khan since the train turned out to be quite slow. For the last part of the journey a car had to be sent to them to the last leg to bring them there. The journey was quite arduous and they promptly fell sick (possibly from exhaustion) as they had never travelled so far - Champa and Kanji had hardly been ever out of Sindh and Sumaira had travelled only recently for the first time to Hazara for the training program.





They say that all their fatigue was soon forgotten due to the warmth with which they were received.

It seemed that the women were a little diffident in the beginning, not knowing how to interact with strangers. But the fame of HF's BVE who had managed to earn over Rs. 200,000 (\$2,000) within a year by teaching how to build Karavan Pakoswiss Chulah, had already spread. Local women were in awe of her when she showed them her silver jewellery that she had made due to her earnings (Rs. 200 or \$2 / chulah). Soon, it seems that with Sumaira's skills they all began to interact well.

It is horrifying to say the least, that even though our women had come from the depth of Sindh, where they are familiar with poor living conditions, they were appalled at the state of living in village Garha Shaikh. Without drinking water, children were sick, women in a poor condition,

the place was slothful and there seemed no concept of hygiene. The dirty water they are forced to drink, even that in short supply, had rendered them unable to keep any order for themselves or their surroundings. Since there was no concept of cleanliness or hygiene, Sumaira conducted handwashing exercises for women and children and also taught them how to make cheap reetha (soapnut) soap.

As is the case in all HF trainings, Sumaira introduced to them to the need to overcome poverty and become strong to withstand disasters. The concept of rights of children to education and for women to take care of themselves and their families to become healthy was introduced. Along with telling them how to deal with adversity, various green skills were also introduced. The most popular elements were the reetha soap, platform making and solar water treatment, and chulah making.

Although there were only 45 women on the first day, by the fourth day there were 60 participants, demonstrating the confidence that local women developed on HF team.

It is also a sign of confidence that the community arranged two feasts (dawat) for the visiting team. Considering the poverty levels in the area, this gesture speaks volumes for the hospitable and generous nature of the community.

It must be understood that it was very difficult to take photographs since initially the men and even women did not want any pictures to be taken.

Gradually as the team was able to gain confidence of the women and men, they were able to

take photographs of the training activities. They always had to make sure that women's faces were always protected.

Garha Shaikh

The focus of training was the village of Garha Shaikh. As this is where the work of building community centre had been taken up first and there had been much interaction between HF personnel and the local community.

Garha Shaikh suffers from many drawbacks – here the poverty levels are high, lack of clean water has left women and children weak with high level of disease and ill health. Lack of school and health facility has rendered the community even more vulnerable than ever before. Literacy levels among women are abysmal and





none of them is able to even sign her name. The floods had swept away most of the houses and those that have been built require retrofitting in case of future flooding.

Open defecation is common and leaves women in a wholly undignified state even though generally as a nation we all profess to be mindful of pardah and chardewari for our womenfolk.

Women appear to have no interaction with the outside world. They are not allowed to move out of the village and are expected to keep a purdah even from outsider women.

On the last day when the team was to leave, it seemed as if their best friends were leaving. There were tears in the eyes of the women who hoped that the team would visit them again in the near future.

DAY 1 OF TRAINING

Among the first activities were the introduction by the team of the famous Karavan Pakoswiss chulah, as it appeared to be the most sought after activity. Approximately 45 local women congregated on the first day.

They appeared to be scared and seemed to live in a state of fear. The team reassured them that there was no need for fear as they have come a long way only to familiarize them with HF program and activities that would be beneficial for them, where women are taught how to fend for themselves.

The briefing was carried out by Sumaira who first conducted the comprehensive training for disaster preparedness and DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) issues, as well as the importance of

green skills. This she did with the help of a large number of panaflex posters and predictably, the training for the chulah was best received. Most women expressed their desire to learn about the chulah. They asked to be taught how to make the chulah so that they could make them in their houses.

There was also discussion about the issues and problems confronted by local women and the burdens they have to carry. Not surprisingly the biggest issue highlighted was absence of clean water as they were forced to drink dirty, contaminated rain water that is collected in open ponds and is the cause of many diseases.

DAY 2 OF TRAINING

Having dispelled the initial fear, on the second day there were 56 women who participated. They all took part in constructing a chulah, the demonstration of which was given by Champa, who is a skilled chulah maker. The training was provided for the following:

- a. How to carry out the layout
- b. Excavating the soil
- c. Placing plain lime concrete
- d. Dry slaking lime arrangement and its mixing with mud.
- e. Making the platform in lime stabilized mud and how lime provides water resistance.
- f. Making the double stove above the platform and the mud chimney for discharge of smoke that occurs when the fire is lit.
- g. Making a storage wall with mud brick with niches for storing utensils.

A special briefing was given by Sumaira on slaking of lime and its importance in building. They had only known of lime for whitewash and they were most interested in learning about how to slake lime and its uses in order to provide protection to their structures. The Chulah kitchen was ready by the end of the day and they all were very pleased with the results, promising to make their own chulahs as well.



DAY 3 TRAINING

The third day was dedicated to making inexpensive reetha soap made out of soap nut. This is one of the green skills that are imparted during trainings designed particularly for women.

56 women attended this session and informed that they did not use soap, as it is far too expensive. Also, due to shortage of water there was no custom of washing hands. Most hands were grubby and many children appeared to be sick.

The demonstration of hand washing was given by Sumaira and she briefed them about advantages of hand washing. She emphasized regarding the dangers of unhygienic practices as a cause of prevalent sickness. The women were also briefed about the importance of physical cleanliness as well as keeping the surroundings as clean and tidy as possible.

All the women watched with great interest the procedure for making reetha soap and found that it was easy enough to make and was also cheap. They were pleased that they will not need to purchase soap from the market which is very expensive as they will be able to make the cheap reetha soap themselves. Since HF had already begun the process of installing a handpump and the entire





goods was emphasized along with the use of lime as the material that provides protection from rain and flood. The women were encouraged to make as many platforms as possible, in order that their valuables and food items are not washed away during the next flood. All the women followed the briefings carefully and expressed their gratefulness at the training sessions that HF had arranged.

KOT SHAHNAWAZ

This village is comparatively well off. There is no dirt of water and the village seemed prosperous since they even have refrigerators in their houses. 56 women participated in the day's event. The one-day training included general preparation for DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) through panaflex posters and images. They were briefed regarding the use of lime and construction of Karavan Pakoswiss Chulahs.

POTENTIAL

Due to the visit of the HF Team local women found an opportunity to share their concerns and issues and were encouraged to discuss their problems. The poverty levels are high and the community feels unable to rise above adversity because of isolation and also lack of knowledge regarding how they can improve their lives. The training program opened a window of opportunity and they were able to judge as to their own potential.

In addition to the need for clean water, they were also vocal in their desire for a school, as the school building had been washed away during the 2010 flood. Since then the teacher is unable to conduct classes, moving from one house to another. Therefore a school building is essential to be built in the village, especially for girls.

The women were all keen to start income generating activities. The HF Team found very attractive jewellery made from beads and some other crafts as well. Many artisans from Sindh have placed orders for bead necklaces to take home when they return.

Champa's husband Kanji also bought many for

community was aware that they will soon get clean water, they promised that once they have access to clean water they will keep themselves, their families and their surroundings clean.

DAY 4 TRAINING

60 women participated on the fourth day, as the training gathered momentum as well as the team had attained confidence of the community.

The day was dedicated to building platforms with lime stabilized mud in order that all the valuables, food and water could be stored on platforms and thus be protected from flood waters. The building of platforms has been drawn from the ancient Bronze-age city Moenjodaro, where the entire settlement was built upon raised platforms and thus kept it largely safe from flood. The platforms have been popularized in the areas where HF has been active. These are decorated beautifully by women themselves as they store their valuable items on top of the platforms.

In addition to its use in chulah kitchens, another innovation is the solar water platforms, which are built with a sloping top. When the women were informed that by placing water in clear mineral water bottles in the sun on the incline surface of the platform, the water becomes potable, they were very surprised. This no cost methodology has been developed by SODIS, a Swiss company, and has been greatly popularized in many developing countries.

The importance of platforms for the safety of their

samples as he intends to market the bead jewellery by taking orders. They think there would be potential of sale of bead jewellery as it is not available in Sindh.

All in all the training was a great success. It is something that should be repeated in order to provide hope to those women who are cloistered behind high boundary walls and have no inkling of what their own potential could be.

It is important to take up these challenges in order that women's crafts are promoted in different parts of Pakistan at the level of village communities. There is a great potential to keep women's crafts alive by ensuring their marketing from one area of Pakistan to another, where the craft products can be sold due to their rarity.

