



**Poverty Graduation  
Programmes: SRSP  
creating pathways out  
of poverty to sustainable  
livelihoods**

**Evidence from the Field**

**January | 2020**

## Rural Support Programmes - A brand known well in Pakistan

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Rural Support Programmes have become a well-known and reputed brand in Pakistan. A brand associated with a) *Bringing people into an organized fold at three levels-often called as community based or peoples' institutions and b) Poverty reduction through offering need based packages as per local needs, context, culture and capacities.* The very first Rural Support Programme- Aga Khan Rural Support Programme was established in 1981. Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan (currently Chairman Rural Support Programmes Network) was its first General Manager. Being a pioneer in participatory development approaches and programmes especially in Pakistan and South Asia, Mr. Khan had a firm belief that poor people have an innate potential to come out of poverty if provided with technical and financial support. Inspired by teachings of Dr. Akhtar Hammed Khan, Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan promoted and supported developing broad based men and women community-based institutions often called as people's institution at local level essentially including poor and vulnerable with an aim to address their needs for improving their lives, condition and situation. These principles with passage of time have become core values and beliefs of Rural Support Programmes followed proactively by all RSPs.

The philosophy, values, beliefs and approaches to deliver programme through local communities have always given an edge to RSPs in terms of scale, coverage, and impact in rural areas. Therefore, RSPs are always at the forefront spearheading delivery of quality services in normal or emergency situations<sup>1</sup>. Rural Support Programmes within four decades of its establishment have taken its roots in communities across all Pakistan. It is worth-mentioning that RSPs (presently 10 in nos.) as of today have been replicated in all five provinces of Pakistan and have organized nearly 8.1 million members into 473,000 men and women community-based institutions. Nearly half of these members are from lowest bands of poverty as RSPs firmly believe in their inherent potential to come out of poverty.

As mentioned, inclusion of poor in an organized fold in respective areas is a unique feature of RSPs as no other organization or public institution, explicitly, work with them for reducing their poverty. This encouragement has urged poor to proactively participate in programmes and projects undertaken by RSPs across Pakistan and their participation, more than often, has led to their graduation from lower poverty band/category to a better/higher poverty band/category, which is duly substantiated by interesting facts and figures. Narrowing down spatial scope of this paper, results of the thematic evaluations of the following programmes/projects are presented and discussed in detail;

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1. For details on RSPs/SRSPs' achievements, please visit [www.rspn.org](http://www.rspn.org) & [www.srsp.org.pk](http://www.srsp.org.pk). Visit publications segment for more details.

1. Programme for Economic Advancement and Community Empowerment (PEACE) supported by European Union (EU) & implemented by SRSP.
2. Women Economic Empowerment and Market Development (WEEMD) supported by DfAT-Australia and implemented by SRSP and
3. Benazir Income Support Programme supported & Implemented by Gov. of Pakistan.

These evaluations were conducted by SRSP's Monitoring & Evaluation Team at Head Office supported by relevant professionals<sup>2</sup> at field level. The results presented reflect graduation of poor from lower to a better/higher poverty band/category through their participation in above mentioned 3 programmes/projects.

## The Three Evaluations

As mentioned above, this paper is based on key findings of following three evaluations briefly discussed below;

### i. Women Economic Empowerment under EU-PEACE Programme

EU-Programme for Economic Advancement and Community Empowerment (EU-PEACE) was implemented by SRSP in 7 districts of Malakand Division during 2012-18. An internal evaluation of the programme was conducted in 2017 by Head Office Monitoring & Evaluation Team. The

evaluation used a stratified random sampling technique and selected 344 out of 1,718 women beneficiaries of entrepreneurship development programme, which was one of the major components of EU-PEACE programme. Other components included social mobilization, Establishing micro hydro projects, Developing infrastructure and value chain development.

### ii. Women Economic Empowerment & Market Development (WEEMD) under DfAT-Australia

WEEMD was implemented in 22 Union councils and 72 villages of 3 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) i.e. Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda from period 2010-19. This evaluation covered nearly 10,941 CIF beneficiaries mainly benefited through Community Investment Fund activity. Like EU-PEACE, this programme had also focused on social mobilization, entrepreneurship & value chain development, small scale infrastructure and market linkages. Data of these beneficiaries was collected at onset of programme (2011). At the end of the programme, data of all these beneficiaries was again collected in 2018/19.

### iii. BISP Beneficiaries (Non Members)

This evaluation focused Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) beneficiaries in three central districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa i.e. Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda. A total of 111 BISP Beneficiaries (essentially non-members of SRSP CBOs) were selected through

## The Poverty Score Card (PSC)

PSC is concise, quick, cost effective and simple tool/method to help determine poverty status of households. It was designed by Mark Schreiner (a senior scholar at Washington University Missouri USA) alongwith useful inputs by Mr. Tahir Waqar, PM M & E, NRSP to assess poverty likelihood of an individual household. It comprised 10 simple and easy questions which were assigned weight-age and households' poverty likelihood was assessed by calculating weight-age of the answers. The score card was modified & refined by the World Bank incorporating Pakistan's contextual issues highlighted during initial PSC exercises conducted in field areas. Different versions of PSC are being used by RSPs, Micro-finance institutions and BISP for identification of beneficiaries. The PSC provides the scores on a scale from 0-100 for respondent households where "0" signifying poorest and "100" the richest. It provides poverty score of a household at a specific point in time. By conducting PSC again, one can find the change in score (improved or otherwise) determining HH economic status due to delivery of programme packages by respective RSPs/other organizations. It is a useful tool to measure a household's movement from lower (poor) economic status to higher economic status (non-poor).

2. The paper is written by Atif Zeeshan Rauf, PM, M & E, SRSP with valuable contribution from Fahad Gillani, Aftab Shakir, Naheed Akhtar, Waiq Khan, field teams of DfAT WEEMD, EU PEACE, and Zahid Khan. Special thanks to Fazal Ali Saadi for reviewing the paper and providing valuable inputs to improve it.

random sampling. In general, BISP has been supporting these individuals for almost 8-9 years from 2010-19.

In all three evaluations mentioned above, tools for assessment included topical questionnaires, personal interviews, meetings with beneficiaries, personal observations and pre/post intervention PSC assessment.

## Poverty Graduation- Evidence from the field

Based on results of three evaluations, the following Table-01 reflects women/men's graduation from lower poverty to higher poverty scores (on Poverty Score Card as elaborated in figure here) based on their participation in respective programmes. It is worth mentioning that scoring high on poverty score card increases the likelihood for an individual to be non poor. An exciting fact, as can be seen in table above, is graduation of beneficiaries from lower to higher poverty bands. The pre and post intervention results or "before and after" distribution of poverty scores highlights

fairly a positive picture of EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD programmes in graduating beneficiaries from lower to higher poverty score band. The poverty figures at onset of these two programmes showed that a large percentage of households (90% in case of EU PEACE and 100% in case of DfAT WEEMD) were clustered tightly in first three lowest categories i.e. 0-11 (destitute), 12-18 (ultra-poor), and 19-23 (poor). Post intervention exercise conducted at the end of respective programmes showed significantly positive results. EU PEACE facilitated graduation of at least 40% poor to non-poor (24 & above) category while DfAT-WEEMD facilitated 45% poor to non-poor category according to the PSC score bands. The PSC band wise disaggregated data revealed that a significant number of households (85% and 50%) moving out of the lowest PSC categories 0-11 to higher PSC categories in case of EU-PEACE and DfAT WEEMD respectively. So those who are generally perceived to be economically unproductive and a burden on economy, if supported through appropriate and need based interventions,

**Table-01-Poverty Scores before and after interventions of respective programmes/projects**

Poverty Bands	EU-PEACE		WEEMD		BISP	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
	2013	2017	2011	2018	2010	2019
Destitute (0-11)	75 (22%)	11 (02%)	4,738 (43%)	2,394 (22%)		09 (8%)
Ultra-poor (12-18)	122 (35%)	78 (23%)	3,242 (30%)	1,620 (15%)	111	32 (29%)
Poor (19-23)	111 (33%)	85 (25%)	2,961 (27%)	2,017 (18%)		36 (32%)
Non-poor (24 & above)	36 (10%)	170 (50%)	00 (00%)	4,910 (45%)	0	34 (31%)
	344	344	10,941	10,941	111	111



may well prove to be useful in contributing to their family incomes:

- i) In case of EU-PEACE, women beneficiaries recorded 109% increase in income i.e. from PKR. 6,831 to 14,323 per month per beneficiary on an average.
- ii) In case of DfAT-WEEMD, women participating specifically in value chains recorded 133% increase in income i.e. avg. PKR. 17,245 to 40,207 per month per beneficiary and same women participating in value chain activities and availing repeated CIF loans recorded an increase of 172%, which is quite astonishing and clearly pointing to effectiveness of grant money- Community Investment Funds- continuously available at local level (preferably through village organizations/banks).
- iii) In case of BISP, an average increase of PKR. 1,879 per month per beneficiary was recorded i.e. from PKR 13,267 to 15,146 or on average 14% increase in their incomes per beneficiary per month.

## Drivers of graduation

### i) Social Mobilization as Linchpin

In case of EU-PEACE and DfAT WEEMD, almost 100% of the households have been organized in areas selected under respective programmes. These areas saw an exhaustive effort to form community-based institutions at three levels. Realistically, physical and monetary investment in same geographical locations through integration of interventions led by social mobilization has led to creating an impact. Bringing these households into an organized folds coupled with reasonable time period of interaction has created opportunities for programme team to unleash potential of these women to be economically active and productive. Progressive rather than conventional dialogues on aspects related to education, entrepreneurship, financial management, value chain development, productive assets, investment, literacy and numeracy or linkages through social mobilization teams and enterprise/value chain development officers coupled with willingness and zeal of individual members have all contributed to changing fortunes

## The Package and Approach

In case of EU-PEACE and DfAT WEEMD following approach was adopted;

- careful identification through community-based institutions;
- detail mapping exercises & gaps analysis through specialized teams;
- need based support inclusive of tool kits plus skills development & exposure visits to create linkages in case of EU-PEACE while CIF, toolkits, skills development, coaching and market linkages in case of DFAT-WEEMD.

of these women. The sub-optimal results in case of BISP may be attributed to relatively low or no focus on mobilizing communities. BISP has not focused on bringing their beneficiaries in organized folds at all. Very recently BISP has started organizing communities called as BISP Beneficiaries Community Organizations (BBCOs) and these are thematic COs limiting their scope to BISP related issues only.

### ii) Targeting Women

In case of EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD, women beneficiaries, as mentioned in preceding sections, recorded 40% and 45% graduation to non-poor (24 & above) categories respectively, which is why one can say boldly and confidently that targeting women (specifically in age bracket of 25-50<sup>3</sup>) is one of the key drivers of graduation. This is consistent with evidence from other parts of the world that women are more bankable as they tend to invest wisely in children education and accumulating household durable goods unlike men inclined towards temptation goods (e.g. cigarette, cinema, city tour etc). Women beneficiaries in case of mentioned programme, as expected, were found to take wise decisions at household level to invest in below mentioned four areas/aspects, which had positive bearing on their economic wellbeing;

- i) Encouraging their children to avail education, which is indeed a long-term investment with high returns;
- ii) Accumulating household level

durable goods<sup>4</sup> to improve their living conditions;

- iii) Investment in productive assets, which included livestock (goat, sheep or cow) and engine driven vehicles (mostly motor bikes).
- iv) Improving/developing infrastructure (adding rooms) which specifically in terms of PSC has positive bearing on occupancy ratio.

With meagre investments provided through EU-PEACE or DfAT-WEEMD, incomes of women have increased resulting in their graduation from lower to higher poverty score bands/categories. These women are exercising a firm control on income they earn from small scale enterprises or value chains. Looking at the responsible nature, one may be more inclined to invest in women in future.

In case of BISP, though 31% women were able to graduate to non-poor categories but it was mainly due to unconditional cash transfer & support received in terms of education support commonly known as Waseela-e-Taleem support. An important aspect to discuss here is that amongst non-poor BISP beneficiaries, at least 35% were on border line (within score range of 24-27) and one shock could see them falling back in to poverty. The increase in income through BISP's unconditional and conditional support, as their expenditure pattern reflect, has improved consumption of BISP beneficiaries as 83% of amount is utilized in fulfilling food, clothing, health care and educational needs while

3. RSPs CBOs are not age bound but figures suggest that women who have graduated to higher poverty scores/bands were between 25-50 years of age, which may encourage inclusion (of this age bracket) in respective CBOs.

4. These included electrical appliances e.g. fridge, tv, air conditioners, microwave or geysers, air coolers, cooking range etc.



remainder is utilized on repairs, small enterprises, debt repayment, social functions and transportation.

### iii. The Package & Approach

The package, strikingly similar, offered under EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD was yet another factor for facilitating women to graduate as explained in figure here. In case of DfAT WEEMD, a deliberate effort to identify value chains which had potential of engaging poor women was a daunting task which was managed well by programme team. Adoption of this professional approach led by specialized teams in EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD supported these women, previously ignorant of their potential, to manage their own small-scale local level businesses or develop value chains, which eventually resulted in improving their condition and situation.

### iv. Continuity in Programmes

These evaluations also pointed to a

very interesting aspect of 'reasonable interaction time period'. In these three cases-EU-PEACE, DfAT WEEMD and BISP, 31-45% women graduated to non-poor categories, mainly, due to continuity in programmes. The average time period of interaction in either of these 3 programmes ranged from 6-9 years to nurture beneficiary women to be engaged in identified activities and graduate.

### v. Supportive roles of counter parts

Results from these evaluations suggested an inverse relationship between resistance and encouraging women economic participation or one can say the local level prejudices can be mildly intoxicated through introduction of culturally appropriate and acceptable interventions. Infact results showed that women were encouraged by the male counter parts, brothers, elder sons or any other senior male member to step outside their compounds, allowed undertaking



business transactions, managing their records and exercising control over incomes from established enterprises/ value chains or unconditional cash transfers from BISP. This encouragement invariably resulted in empowerment of these women.

#### **vi. Specialized approach**

Specialized teams with requisite knowledge (enterprise & value chain development) were engaged in facilitating women/men to graduate to better poverty bands/categories. These teams essentially were an integral part of social mobilization teams for providing need based technical support to beneficiaries and maximising impact. In case of EU-PEACE or DfAT WEEMD these specialized teams based on requirements of individual or groups extended requisite resources coupled

with mentoring and coaching. In case of BISP, a generalist approach and standard package of PKR 5,000/beneficiary/quarter have been adopted assuming that this monetary support will support them and prevent them from falling deeper into poverty, which may be true but with same amount augmented with mobilization and mentoring, one can take these women out of poverty.

#### **vii. Market proximity and products**

Market proximity may also be one of key factors for products produced by women entrepreneurs to be consumed locally and at good prices. In case of DfAT-WEEMD, it was relatively easy for women to produce need-based products for consumption of three big markets i.e. Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda (these districts were also programme target districts), which



resulted in an increase in their incomes or graduation to better poverty bands.

A similar trend in increase of women income could be observed in case of EU-PEACE prominent districts e.g. Swat, Malakand and Chitral.

#### **viii. Determining Objective at the onset**

Interestingly in either cases-DfAT WEEMD, EU-PEACE or BISP, women from lowest poverty bands were selected but with variable performances. While BISP beneficiaries struggled to perform well, EU-PEACE/DfAT WEEMD's beneficiaries scores saw positive changes. Challenging accepted wisdom, these women (destitute or chronically poor) took giant leaps to improve their scores reflecting their bankability. This significant progress of poor women in case of beneficiaries under WEEMD or EU-PEACE may well be attributed to setting an objective at the onset of respective intervention. Women thus exactly knew of what is expected of them and they "therefore" had put an extra effort to be successful and improve their scores. In case of BISP, the sole objective was to improve consumption level of BISP beneficiaries, which is why these women were and are comfortably dependent on cash grants thereby augmenting dependency syndrome rather than undertaking any innovative measure aimed at improving their income levels. BISP beneficiary response analysis also showed that 87% women preferred quarterly cash transfers, while only 13% showed an intent to receive lumpsum

amount for possibly initiating any local venture/business.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The paper points to some interesting and intriguing aspects which may lead to challenging ideologies/philosophies, refining policies and rethinking strategies. Based on results of these evaluations, one can clearly see that poverty scores of community members from lowest poverty bands<sup>5</sup> can be improved, if organized and provided requisite technical & financial support through specialized teams (especially in social mobilization & entrepreneurship development). This is evident from the figures relating to EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD with 40-45% members graduating to non-poor categories.

The average increase in income in case of EU-PEACE was observed to be 109%, which in case of DfAT WEEMD was even more encouraging i.e. 133% or 172% for those beneficiaries who had an access to regular financial capital (CIF or repeated CIF loans through community-based institutions). In case of BISP beneficiaries with 14% increase in their incomes, availability of easily available funds i.e. PKR. 20,000/beneficiary/year for almost a decade has seemingly spoiled the nature of communities. Instead of taking measures to be engaged in prospective productive ventures, these comfortably dependent beneficiaries<sup>6</sup> rather look forward to cash injections.

5. Destitute; 0-11 and Ultra Poor; 12-18 on Poverty Score Card

6. Evaluation results also showed that 87% women were happy with the support, while only 13 % showed an intent to be engaged in some sort of economic activities (if BISP support is withdrawn).

7. PKR. 15-20,000/year/beneficiary or PKR.132,000-180,000/beneficiary for a period of 9 years



Comparing specifically EU-PEACE, DfAT-WEEMD and BISP, one can see that in case of the former two, in same time period i.e. 6-9 years of support, a significant number of women beneficiaries with nominal investment of PKR. 15-20,000 were able to improve their poverty scores and improve their living condition and situation. Infact in case of DfAT-WEEMD, those women who have started local level business have been able to create employment for further 3,000 women thus benefiting local level economy. While in case of BISP, 9 years of support<sup>7</sup> could see only 31% beneficiaries' graduation to non-poor categories, of which a significant proportion is still at the border line (i.e. between scores 24-27). Such a huge support with average results should be questioned critically in a poor country like Pakistan.

There is also an agreement with the argument that cash transfers through social safety net programmes are not aimed at poverty reduction but if innovative ventures e.g. EU-PEACE and DfAT WEEMD have been able to demonstrate graduation of poor members and with significantly lower investments, then one can think otherwise. Perhaps government may rethink and reallocate its resources for progressive poverty graduation programmes through

an active involvement and engagement of local communities as mentioned and elaborated in this paper to reduce burden on government exchequer.

Though women in either programmes (DfAT-WEEMD, EU PEACE and BISP) were able to access funds for reasonable time period i.e. 6-9 years, yet setting an objective for women in case of two projects (EU-PEACE and DfAT-WEEMD), seemingly, is a definitive factor for ensuring performance. These women had clarity in mind and they performed what had been expected of them, while BISP, merely aimed at improving consumption, had further contributed in enhancing dependency of nearly 3.93 million women on already crippled system.

The relational aspect is also important to be mentioned here. RSPs keep a close contact with local communities for a reasonable time period during which leadership development, coaching, mentoring and need-based support e.g. market linkages is provided to help these community members realize their objectives. Keeping this close contact with local communities and ensuring their participation in community based organizations has supported hundred and



thousands of community members to improve their condition and situation vis-à-vis graduating to be placed in higher/better poverty bands whereas BISP believes in virtual relationship with its beneficiaries through Bio-Metric Verification System or Debit Cards. This distant relationship has created dependency of beneficiaries on the institution and system rather than being enlightened on productive use of cash transferred to them. Based on these interesting figures and analysis, it

would be wise for the government to start thinking on improvising its social safety nets programmes by adding new elements geared at reducing poverty of marginalized segments of the society. It may also start thinking of developing public private partnerships with credible organizations like RSPs to fund exciting interventions as mentioned in this paper to catalyse process of graduation of poor to non-poor categories and mainstream them rather than developing burden for itself.

# SARHAD RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME

An indigenous organization working in social development and humanitarian aid in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Newly Merged Tribal Districts

## **SRSP HEAD OFFICE**

14, Sector E-8, Phase VII, Hayatabad Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

Facebook: @sarhadruralsupport • Twitter: @SRSP\_official

Email: [srsp@srsp.org.pk](mailto:srsp@srsp.org.pk)

Tel: +92 91 5890717-19, Fax: +92 91 5890716

**[www.srsp.org.pk](http://www.srsp.org.pk)**