

Most Significant Stories of Change



Published by

Rutgers Pakistan

Date of Publication

March 2017

Story Writers

Community Members of Nowshera & Haripur Districts. Names are mentioned with each story

Chief Editor

Dr. Rubina Ali

Co-editors

Akhtar Raza Saleemi

Muhammad Irshad Rana

Review Committee

Sayed Imran Haider

Hafsa Mazhar

Habiba Salman

Kashif Muneer

Designer / Printers

Rizwan Ali / Excel Enterprises

Disclaimer:

Articles/stories attributed to named authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation/editors.

This publication is developed & printed with the financial support of GIZ

Community Dialogue Approach:

Rutgers Pakistan has implemented a series of community dialogues in the Nowshera and Haripur districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa under Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Health Project of GIZ supported by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The overall aim of the intervention was to increase awareness and uptake of reproductive health care in a way that is respectful and sensitive to the traditional local context by initiating a series of facilitated community dialogues. Through this approach, Rutgers directly approached more than 1500 people including Chief Minister of KP, District Nazim, District Health Officer and indirect beneficiaries 300,000 people reached through Green Ribbon Campaign (GRC) and Dekho Bolo Roko (DBR) campaigns during project implementation from July 2016 to January 2017.

The Generation Dialogues otherwise known as the Community Dialogues is a participatory approach aimed at initiating a process of social change in communities with a strong commitment to traditions, belief systems and customary practices. It is built around a facilitated, respect-based dialogue process across sexes and generations. It begins with community consultations open to all interested community members, followed by five weekly Dialogue Sessions, lasting half a day each. In these sessions participants share and discuss different views and perceptions about gender-linked life concepts and roles, about traditions and social norms, and about culturally-sensitive topics such as sexuality and gender relations. Through moderated interactive exercises, which proactively bring in and build on elements of local culture, the participants come to appreciate that openness and acceptance of others' views are the basis for mutual understanding across ages and sexes.

Dialogue participants work together - within, and then across, their sex- and generation-specific groups - to identify traditional values that both generations hold dear and want to maintain, as well as practices with harmful effects which they agree should be modified or abandoned altogether. Over the course of the Dialogue process participants develop strategies to deal with perceived problems and jointly present these at so-called public meetings in order to involve more and more members of the community in this process of change.

The Project has captured a series of Most Significant Change Stories to document and publicize the real-life impact of the intervention.

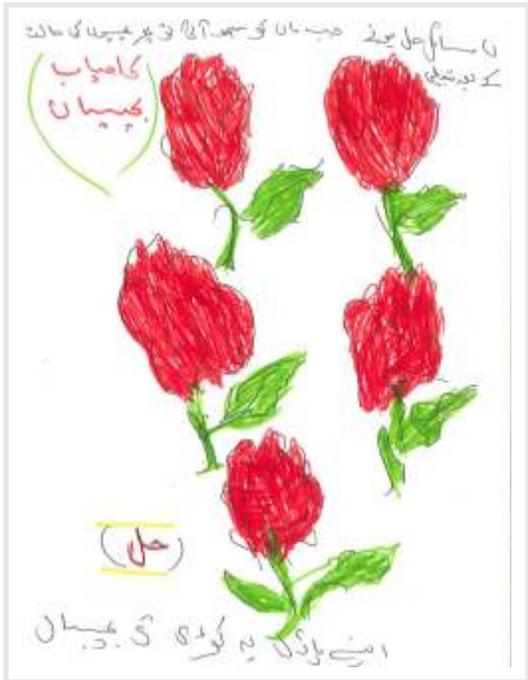
The Change Agents

Kinza Bibi, 18 years:
Village Jatti Pind

We were living a dull and boring life, as our society does not give us (the women) the status, which we actually deserve. Whenever I thought about it, I felt frustrated and angry. We were not allowed to go to school or take part in any other social activity. I have seen many of my female relatives die during childbirth as men considered it against their honor to take their wives to hospital for childbirth. However, our lives changed forever when workers from a social welfare organization called Rutgers came to our area. They talked to our menfolk and made them understand that women are also equal human beings and have an equal right to a good quality life. In the beginning, people did not pay much attention to what they were saying, but they kept on meeting and talking to people, trying to convince them.

I see a lot of improvement in our village now. Many people are willing to send their daughters to school. I feel so happy when I see young girls, carrying their bags to schools. There were some girls, who had passed matriculation, but were not allowed by their fathers and brothers to continue their

education. Now, their families have allowed them to take admissions in college and continue their education. Some of the girls have even been allowed to take up jobs. Gohar Khanum and Samina Bibi persuaded many women to go to healthcare facilities at the time of delivery. Anila Bibi helped many women in getting the hospital cards. She connected those, who were not able to get the cards, to doctor Aamir for regular check ups. I am



sure this has helped in saving many lives.

All of us know that our Holy Prophet (PBUH) said that a son is like a gift and a daughter like a blessing from Allah, but unfortunately, before the start of this project in our area,

many of the people favored their sons only. However, as a result of the project interventions, now the people are more sensitized and are giving equal rights to their daughter as well.

Since, my childhood, I have always dreamt of becoming a doctor, but I had little hope of realizing this dream. Now my hope has been rekindled, as my parents have started supporting me as the result of the efforts of the team here. I am happy that my dream is now going to turn into a reality.

This Can be your Story as well

**Muhammad Adil,
25 years, Haripur**

Though it is a story of my home, but you can find numerous such stories scattered all around us.

My mother wanted to marry my brother to a girl who was studying in class 9th and was hardly 15 years old. I told my parents that the girl was too young and her education was also incomplete, therefore, it would be better if we do engagement & wait until she was at least 19 or 20. My parents did not agree with me. They argued that one should marry as young as possible, so that children become young even before one gets old and can support him. I argued that early marriages cause several problems. How can a girl, who is not old

enough or mature enough to take care of herself, be expected to look after a family? Many matrimonial issues also come to fore. Girls usually fall ill and suffer from frustration and depression, which causes many psychological issues. The greatest issue in such marriages is that girl, who is herself a child, is expected to give birth and raise children. Not being mentally mature, she is unable to take care of her children properly. I gave examples of many such early age marriages from our own families and our area. At least 25% of such marriages had ended in divorces. The other 75% were not happy or successful either.

After listening to all my arguments, my mother told me that they understood these issues much better than me as they were my elders and had seen the ups and downs of life. After being disappointed from there, I decided to talk to my brother. In the beginning, I was a little hesitant, fearing that he might also have the same opinion as our parents. When I talked to him, I was surprised to know that even though he agreed with me, yet he considered it a sin to disobey the parents. He said to me, "You are quite right but what can I do? Though, I realize these things also, if I refuse to marry, not only the parents, but Allah will also be not happy with me. Instead of trying to convince me, try to convince mother, as I would do whatever she asks me to do." I tried to talk to my father, but he also gave me the same reply, "Talk to

your mother. We shall do whatever she says."

I decided to talk to my mother again. While talking to her, I intentionally talked about the daughter of Ahmed Shah (Pseudo name), who had been married at a very young age and had died during her first delivery. My mother was shocked to hear this. She agreed to change her decision.

Now she was worried that what would she tell to parents of the girl, as they had been insisting for the marriage for the last one-year. I advised her to tell them that we would agree to the marriage only when the girl had passed F.A. When my mother told this to the parents of the girl, they did not agree in the beginning, but since they did not want to lose such a good match for their daughter, they reluctantly agreed.

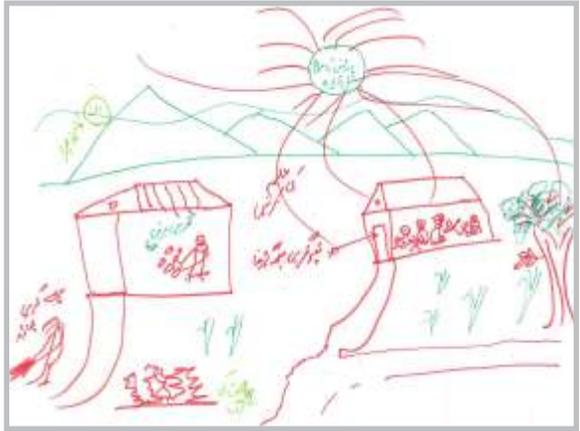
The engagement of my brother took place a couple of months ago. I hope that both the boy and the girl will be mature when they will be married after three years.

I just want to mention one thing in the end. I had developed this understanding and the courage to talk to my parents, after attending the sessions, which had been organized by the support of Rutgers.

A Dream Come True

Raja Amir Shahzad,
38 years (Haripur)

Since the time, I became mature enough to think independently, I have seen many things happening around me, which I strongly dislike. I used to think deeply about these social norms, but did not have the



courage to challenge them.

One day, while I was sitting at my shop and thinking about these norms, Munawar sahib came there. After the exchange of pleasantries, he said, "Raja Sahib, I have realized you also want to do some thing for the welfare and betterment of the society." I felt as if he had read my mind. I said, "I actually do want that, but don't have the courage to take practical steps." He said, "Courage comes from finding a proper platform. Such a platform enables you to raise your voice more effectively." I asked if such kind of platform available in our city? He was one such platform and he

wanted to me to join to that.

After some days, I received his message and invitation to participate in a very important meeting. When I reached there, I saw a lot of people gathered there, along with Munawar sahib. It was meeting arranged by an organization working for the rights of women particularly the right to education. When I listened to the discussion there, I felt as if that was coming from the core of my heart. After the meeting, on my way back home, I felt as if a new passion had awakened in my heart. I decided to start this work from my home.

I have four daughters. These four daughters had been born in the hope of a son. My wife was still insisting to try one more time for a son. Though I did not agree to her, but somewhere, hidden deep in my sub-consciousness, I also had the desire of a son. On my way back home that day, I decided that not only will I try to convince my wife but will also bring up my daughters like sons. I decided to give them the attention and love, which is reserved only for sons in our society. I talked to my wife as soon I reached home. It took me a couple of hours to convince her. On that day, our life turned altogether. Now I want to provide everything to my daughters it's my dream, which is provided only to sons in our society.

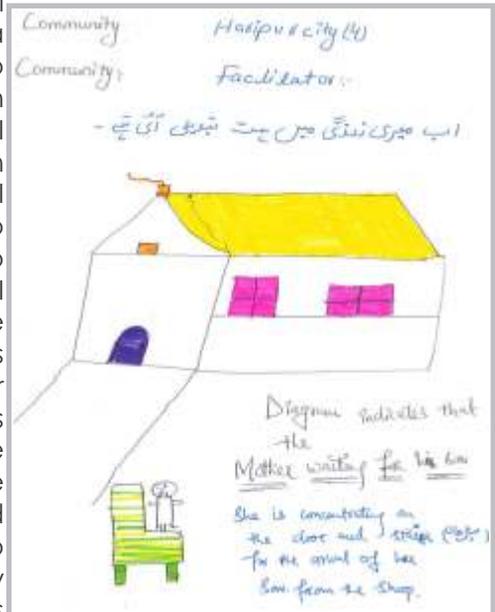
Now three of my daughters are going to school. The fourth one is still too young to go to school. We

have decided that our youngest daughter will not only get modern education but will also become a hafiz-e-quran. We have already started teaching her Qurani Qaida. One day, shall we shall be the proud parents of a hafiz-e-quran.

Generation Gap

Zenaib Akhtar,
25 years (Haripur)

Now days, there is a lot of talk of generation gap. People seem to be living under one roof are actually far removed from each other. Till recently, even my home was not much different.



My grandmother, who is in her seventies, is facing extreme loneliness. She is suffering with depression due to loneliness. I always wondered about the

reasons behind that loneliness. After some time, I realized that she was herself responsible for her condition. My grandmother always wanted sons. My grandmother always make a lot of hue & cry at the birth of girl in my uncle or my father's home, she would make a lot of hue and cry. My mother once told me that my grandmother wept for hours when I was born. After me, two more daughters were born. My grandmother made the life of my mother a living hell. My mother wept and prayed to God for a son, when she was pregnant for the fourth time. When yet another daughter was born, my mother went into depression. Because of her depression, she was not able to take proper care of her fourth daughter. The baby died soon afterwards. I started hating my grandmother and stopped seeing her, as I was now old enough to understand what was going on.

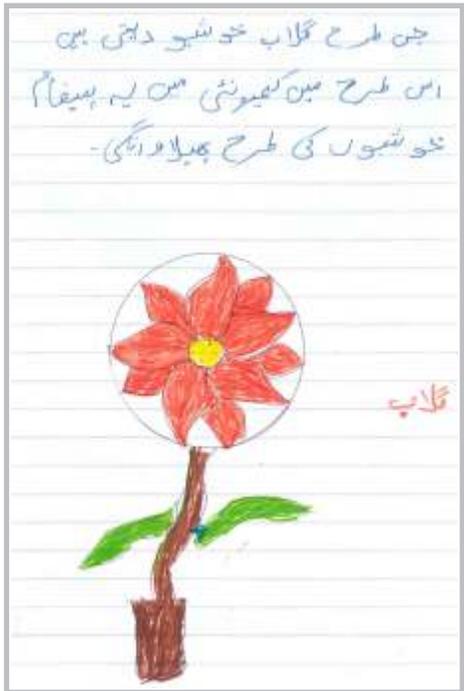
One day, my friend took me to a meeting, where along with other topics, the issue of generation gap was also discussed in detail. The participants discussed why some times young people start hating their elders and how this generation gap could be reduced. I felt as if they were talking about me. I decided there and then I would not hate my grandmother anymore. My thinking changed. Next day, I went to see my grandmother and made it a routine afterwards. Gradually, I started liking and loving my granny. I started to take care of her. I noted

that after some time her attitude also started changing. Now she likes her grand daughters as much as her grand sons. It is true that love conquers all.

The Story of my Life

Ulfat Jalal, 35 years
(Pabbi, district Nowshera)

I belong to a poor family of Pabbi. Along with being very poor, my family is also religious. I got education under very tough circumstances. Most of the family members opposed my education. Getting primary education did not prove very difficult, but it was a



huge struggle afterwards. The high school was in another village. No one in the family wanted me to go

to another village, but I did not lose heart and kept on trying. Ultimately, I managed to convince my family to allow me to go there. when I decided to start my career as a schoolteacher after completing my education whole family got upset . Not only my parents but also those members of the family, who had supported me when I was trying to get admission in high schools, opposed me. Everyone was of the opinion that woman's sphere is limited and they should be confined in four walls of home.

Despite all these hurdles, I did not give up and started teaching in a school.

In the meanwhile, I met Seema Bibi, who is a social worker. She briefed me about Rutgers, interviewed me and I was selected for the project.

There was so much false propaganda against me in the beginning. It was said that I was working for an organization, which was anti state and anti religion. It was said that I was helping in misguiding the people of the area. But nobody can hide the truth for long. I started educating people about the objectives of the project and slowly but surely, women started joining me.

We learnt a lot from the meetings and sessions of the project and started working for the rights of the women. Now the women of our area are more aware. Women,

who used to proclaim that going to doctors for anti natal check up was against Islam, are now themselves going to hospitals for regular check ups. Not only this, they also encourage others to go to hospitals. We are hoping that no woman will die in our area due to complications occurred during pregnancy and delivery.

The Day I Felt Privileged

Sawaira, 15 years
(Nowshera)

I belong to village Tarru Jabba in district Nowshera. I am a student of eighth class. I have two sisters and one brother. My father is a manager in a company. I used to waste all my time after coming



back from school. One day, one of my cousins told me about an NGO working in our area and asked me to go join hands with her to work for raising awareness regarding rights

of women and girls in our area. I was very reluctant and flatly refused to go there, as I was afraid of interaction with strangers.

My cousin did not lose heart and kept on insisting for many days. She requested me to go with her at least once to see for my self. She promised that if I disliked the environment; she would not force me again. At last, I agreed and went with her. I was really impressed by the attitude and behavior of the Rutgers' team. The way they were treating women respectfully was beyond my expectations. For the first time, I had seen that men treated women respectfully & courteously. This positive attitude forced me to know about Rutgers work and engage with them.

I started participating in all the sessions. My own personality bloomed and improved. There I also met Seema baji. She gave me so much love and taught me so much that I had not learnt so much during eight years of my schooling. Seema and her colleagues have inculcated such a great sense of confidence in me that now I can face any situation. She opened new horizons for me and told me that men and women are equal in all respects. We can do every thing a man can do.

I think they have done for us what no government had been able to do.

They made us aware of our own importance. I am thankful to the Rutgers Team for this.

Story of a Samosa Seller

Samreen, 18 years
(Nowshera)

I belong to Tarru Jabba district Nowshera. My father died when I was just two months old. I have two elder sisters. After the death of my father, my mother brought us up by working as a housemaid in the homes of the people. My mother wanted us to get education but because of the resistance and opposition of our uncles, we could not continue our education after primary school.

Pakthoon society is very conservative in nature. It has its own culture and social norms. In the beginning, we were not allowed to go out of our home. But when my mother asked the family members to bear our household expenses if they wanted us to stay inside the home, no one came forward. We started selling samosas. This gave us a meager income to make both ends meet. As we were growing young, the worries of our mother were multiplying.

In the meanwhile, my mother met a woman named Laila, who worked in a non-governmental organization. She praised my mother and told her that she was a brave woman as she was bringing up her daughters well against all the odds. She also told my mother that if she (my mother) wanted her daughters to be successful, she would have to educate and capacitate them with the skills of

living a successful life. She arranged my mother's meeting with Seema. She made my mother realize that girls are no less than boys and can live successful lives like boys, but for that purpose they should be educated. My mother told her that our uncle was against education of girls. Seema told my mother that she was independent and no law could stop her from providing education to her daughters.

Encouraged by this, our mother has once again got us admissions in a school. We are quite successful at school as we are now mature and grown up. We have once again learnt to write: at least enough to write this story.

My mother wants us to grow up to be like Seema and Laila. All three of us have promised our mother that when we grow up, we shall play our role for the betterment of society like Seema and Laila.

Transformation of my Life

Lal Meena, 27 years
(Haripur)

I belong to the village Palis in district Kohistan. Village Palis is a backward area with very low rather negligible literacy rate. My father migrated to village Mankroy in district Haripur even before my birth. I could not enjoy the love of my father for long, as he died when I was only five years of age. My mother is a great woman. She not only brought us up very well but also ensured that her daughters

get proper education. Keeping in view the wishes of my mother, I put my heart and soul to the studies and by the grace of God; I have cleared my MSc now.

Though, I was living a good and comfortable life, yet I have experienced a great change in my life in the last six months. The reason behind this change is an organization, named Rutgers. My friend Sobia (trainer) introduced me to this organization. Once, I had planned to go to a market with Sobia. On the way, she told me that she had to attend a small meeting in a village Jatti Pind before going to the market. She asked me to go along with her. When we reached there, a session was in progress. I also joined other



people there and started listening. The topic of discussion was son preferences. People were discussing as to why daughters are considered inferior to sons. I liked

this topic a lot. On our way back home, I discussed the topic in detail with Sobia.

One day, I was sitting with my sister in law, when I noticed the way she was treating her daughters. She was hiding good part of food and giving her daughters only curry. When the younger daughter asked for mutton, my sister in law lied and said that mutton was finished. When I whispered and asked why she had put away mutton, she told me that it was for her son. I was really surprised to hear all that and recalled the discussion, which I had heard in the session conducted by Rutgers' team. I took the mutton, gave it to my nieces and told my sister in law that we should treat daughters and sons equally and should make no distinction between them.

I went to meet Sobia next day and requested her to take me along whenever she will go for attending the session next time. I participated in meetings regularly afterwards. The participation transformed me altogether. Sometimes, I wonder if I would have changed so much if I had not participated in that meeting by chance.

Down the Memory Lane

**Gulab Sher, 53 years,
Vice Principal, Government
High School Pabbi**

A few days ago, there was a gathering in the house of my friend Malik Arif. I was also invited along with many other people. I had

absolutely no idea what the meeting was about. When I reached there, I came to know that meeting had been organized by an organization called Rutgers. A woman named Seema Babar was leading the proceedings.

Women rights were the central theme of discussions of all the speakers. The speakers emphasized that a society where 50 % of the population was not even allowed to take part in the development process could not progress and prosper. This discussion reminded me of many incidents in my own community. Now that I think about those incidents, I was surprised myself. In our community girls are not even allowed to go out of homes and they were also not allowed to get education and think about jobs.

We are not practicing Islam, but in reality we are far removed from it. Our Holy Prophet called daughters a blessing from Allah, but we consider them to be wrath of Allah. We are living in 21st century but still mourn at the birth of a daughter, totally forgetting the fact that it was a woman had given birth to us. Whatever a son may do outside the home, he is forgiven, but a daughter is killed even if some one puts a false blame on her. I personally know many people, who publically celebrated birth of their sons, but felt embarrassed when daughters were born.

I am thankful to the colleagues from Rutgers that they made us think about these issues. We should support people like them, who are

raising their voice against such harmful social norms. I have decided that in future, whoever takes up these issues, I shall support him.

Chains of Traditions

Al Haj Amjad Ali,
55 years (Pabbi)

I belong to village Pabbi in district Nowshera and I am a general counselor here. I met a lot of people, because of my interest and practical participation in politics. I was brought up in a typical Pakhtoon family steeped in conservative Pakhtoon cultural and social norms. Obviously, my environment also influenced me and I thought on similar lines. I have no hesitation in accepting the fact that I thought and acted like any other conservative Pakhtoon; preferring sons, mourning at the birth of daughters and supporting only sons.

Around six months ago, a social welfare organization organized a workshop in our area. They contacted me as well. To tell you the truth, in the beginning I only joined them to further my political agenda. I did not want any of my political opponents to take advantage and join them first. But later on, I realized that after participating in this training my thinking has been changed. Now when I look back at my past, I feel ashamed at the kind of thoughts I used to harbor.

Now my daughter feels happy when I give her equal importance. I also feel delighted when I enter my home and my daughter runs and give me a hug. I feel grateful to those people who taught me to love my own daughter. I have decided that I shall get my daughter admission in medical college, so that she can become a doctor and treat the women in our area. Women in our area face many health issues. I hope my daughter would do for my community what I was not able to do. For this change, I am thankful to Seema who inspired me to change my thinking and attitude towards gender discrimination.

Caught in the Web of Problems

Nazir Ahmed, 42 years

Until recently I disliked sending girls to school. I thought "What is the point of educating girls, if they are not supposed to get jobs and earn money." We always associate education with getting a job and do not realize that education is necessary to make oneself a better human being and to enable a person to live a better life.

In our Pakhtoon society usually pregnant women are not allowed to go to hospitals. We feel that it is against our honor, as the women would be exposed, despite the fact that the health care provider taking care of the women are also women. Many women die during

childbirth due to such practices and many households have been destroyed. I never questioned these norms and always felt that these social norms established by our forefathers were beneficial for us. I thought that if we stopped following them, our whole social fabric would be destroyed.

Sometime ago Ms Seema Babar visited our area along with some her colleagues and diverted our attention to these harmful social norms. In the beginning, I did not really like and understand what they were saying. But they managed to convince me after a few meetings and I also became a part of their team. The greatest benefit of this project was that before trying to change others, I had to change myself. I developed a totally different way of looking at the things.

Now I think like Seema Babar and her colleagues. I also dream that one day our society will be able to get rid of the traditional and conservative way of think and should tread the path of development. I am committed that even if these people finish their work and go away, I shall keep on promoting and supporting this cause in my area.

Transformation of an Arrogant Father

Arif Khan, (Pabbi)

Just a few months ago, I was totally different person. I was an arrogant father, intoxicated by his power

and authority. I considered it against my dignity to sit and eat with my children or to listen to them. I always thought that in order to maintain a hold on children and keep them in awe, one should keep them at an arm's distance.

My thinking about daughters was even worse. I always considered them temporary residents in my household as they were supposed to married and sent away sooner or later. I thought that a daughters are not important, as she has to be married away and will be there to provide me any support when I grow old. That is why I was very sad when my daughter was born. Even my wife had mourned at her birth. Actually, in Pakhtoon society, not just men but also women prefer sons.

Few weeks back, staff members of a social welfare organization came to our area. Whenever, we hear about social welfare organization, strange notions come to our minds. We suspect some hidden agenda. When they told us that they wanted to talk about issues and rights of women, I felt alarmed. I assumed that they wanted to misguide and mislead our womenfolk and use them against us. I went to meet them with all these apprehensions in my mind, but when I met them, I found them to be totally different. Discussion with these people changed my way of thinking within a few days.

They told us that women also have equal rights as men. When a male got sick, we immediately take him

to a hospital, but if a female is even dying due to complications during childbirth, we try to treat her through traditional outdated methods. We send our boys to study in English medium schools but do not even allow our girls to go a madrassah. Their dialogues have changed the mind set of the 80% people of our community.

Now, whenever I go home, I call my son and daughter, hug them and talk to them. Both my children love this change in my attitude.

Self Confidence

Wania Aiman,
19 years (Nowshera)

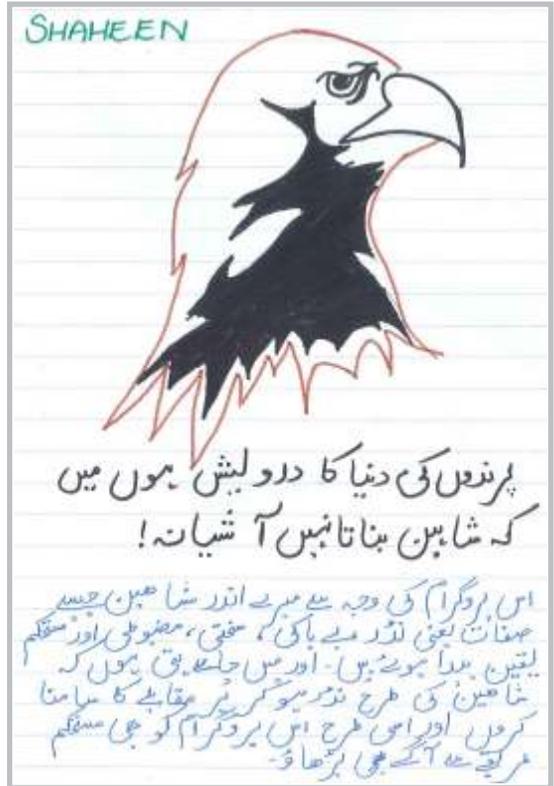
I belong to an ordinary family. My father is unemployed and my mother is a schoolteacher. Since my mother is herself educated, she paid special attention to my education. Because of her special attention, I am now a medical student, studying in Khyber Medical College.

There was nothing extra ordinary in my routine life. I had very limited interaction with people. After university hours, I stayed home most of the time. Despite being a medical student, I lacked confidence to talk and communicate with people.

Few weeks back, I was studying my study room when the door bell rang. When I opened the door, I

found a friend, who was once my class fellow in school. While we were sitting and talking, she told me that a social welfare organization had started its work in our area. She suggested that we should go to attend the meeting, which was taking place the next day. I readily agreed to it.

The next day when I reached the designated place along with my friend, I saw a lot of people gathered there. I felt confused and hesitant. I started feeling a little bit relaxed when I met Seema, who



was coordinating the meeting. She greeted me warmly and welcomed me. Her frankness and

warmth helped me feel at ease. I learnt a lot during the session. I decided to attend more sessions. After attending a couple of sessions, I started to feel a positive change in my personality. I was becoming more confident. Being a dialogue champion, I also got the opportunity of speaking in some gatherings, where prominent social and political personalities of the area were present there. I felt really good talking to them. Discussions with these prominent people helped me grow in confidence and this changed my personality altogether.

I think that if I had not met these people, I might still have become a doctor, but I would certainly not be able to serve the people of my community, as a doctor should. If a person lacks self-confidence, he or she cannot do any thing properly.

Five Days that Changed my Life

Ghazala,
35 years (Tarru Jabba
District Nowshera)

I belong to middle class family of Tarru Jabba. Being the youngest among all the siblings, I was the most pampered child in the house.

My mother died when I was very young. This was an unbearable loss for us. All of us were studying when my mother died. Since I was the youngest daughter, I felt her

absence the most. This tragedy turned me into a very serious person.

After the death of our mother, my elder sister took the responsibility of taking care of the household. She tried her best that her siblings do not feel absence of their mother. It was due to her efforts and dedication that we were able to continue our education. When I did not get any suitable job after doing my Masters in Urdu Literature and completing necessary training, I decided to try luck in NGO sector. Thus I have been



associated with different NGOs for the last eight years.

When I joined Rutgers a few months back, I thought it would be same

kind of work, which I had been doing in other NGOs. I was in for a surprise. Just a five days training taught me so much, which I had not been able to learn in eight years. The colleagues of Rutgers revolutionized my views about life. I learnt that a job is not just for earning money, it can be a passion to serve. Honestly, I worked with many NGOs earlier, but my objective was to earn money. but now I am passionate to serve my community. This passion to serve is priceless and invaluable for me.

Unconquerable Will

Seema Babar,
41 years (Nowshera)

I was brought up in a farmer's family in district Sargodha. Females of our family observe strict pardah (veil).

the first girl of my village to continue her education after primary. I was married after graduation. After my marriage, I shifted to Peshawar. Despite being an educated person my husband did not allow me to continue my education and do MSc. I did not lose heart. I spent ten years in winning the hearts of my husband and in laws.

In 2008, I requested my husband that I wanted to live in the village. The reason was strange. My father had inculcated in me the passion of serving humanity. I knew that only a village could provide suitable and conducive environment to pursue my passion. When I returned to my village, I started studying the Holy Quran along with translation. Later on I started teaching Holy Quran to young girls of my village. At the same time I requested my father to



Going out of the homes was considered a taboo. However, my father was a different type of man. He brought me up like a son. I was

come back to our native village in Nowshera. In his home, I opened the first sewing center for young girls. Until now, I have trained ten

classes. In 2016, I came to know that training was being organized in PC hotel Peshawar. Some one asked me for my CV, so that it could be shared with the organizers of the training. I did not show any interest. My friend insisted and said that it would help in improving the quality of my social work. Reluctantly I agreed to it. Within the five days of the training my whole life was transformed. I joined the Rutgers and started working in my own area.

After joining this organization, I also realized that our social services should not be limited to our family and relatives only. We should serve also other community. I went out of my village and started training other people. In the beginning I faced many problems, but I had complete faith in Allah. Then a time came when I became the first woman to organize a joint public gathering of men and women for the first time in Nowshera district. This public gathering provided a platform and opportunity to men and women to talk to each other on equal basis. Earlier, the males of our area considered it below their honor and dignity to talk to females and females were afraid of talking to men. Through dialogue sessions, I brought both, men and women, together, which yielded positive results.

Association with Rutgers has not just changed me, but has led to sensitization of whole area about important issues. I am glad that Allah almighty brought this change through me. Now many people

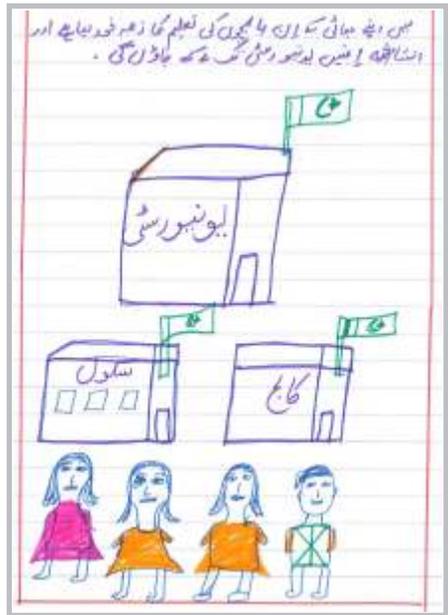
want to join me. I am sure this message will reach to every household of my district very soon.

The Lonely Elders

Sobia Bibi,

27 years (Haripur)

I am Sobia and I belong to Haripur. My father died a long time ago. I have three elder sisters, who are all married. Now there are only two people in our home: my mother and me. For some time, I worked



with an NGO called Sungi Foundation. Around six months ago, an ex colleague called and informed me that an international organization was about to start a project in Haripur. She asked if I wanted her to recommend my name. When I asked about the nature of the work, she informed

me that it was related to mother and child health. She told me that in the beginning, I would be given training and then I will train other people similarly. I agreed and after some days, I was called to Peshawar for training.

The five days training in Peshawar was different kind of experience for me. It focused on the topics like mother and child health, son preferences and generation gap between the old and the young. We were also trained on social mobilization and sensitization.

All these issues seemed very trivial and ordinary to me as I had never faced these issues in my life and had not come across such situations. But while discussing generation gap, it was discussed that distances between the young and the old are increasing, as the young people are most of the time busy on their mobiles phones and on social media totally neglecting the old people around them who crave for their attention, I thought of my mother. I realized that I was also behaving in the similar way. I had very little interaction and communication with my mother, even though we were living in the same house. I was spending most of my time on face book and twitter. I realized that distance between me and my mother was increasing. I made a resolution to myself that I would overcome this shortcoming in my personality. I have started giving more time to my family. My mother is now very happy with me and prays for me.

The Change in my Thinking

Sultan Zari, 55 years (Pabbi)

I have six daughters and three sons. We keep livestock for our living. I don't go out of my home very often, as our family does not appreciate women going outside the home. It is assumed that this practice leads to many issues, which ultimately cause disturbance in the family life.

However, my thoughts have been transformed since I have been chosen as a dialogue champion by an NGO, which recently started working in our area. Now I feel that if a woman has strong character and high morals no body can dare to think or say any wrong thing about her. This organization taught me to love my daughters and awakened the emotions of love for my daughters, which I never realized that I possessed.

Previously, all my attention was reserved for my sons, though I have six daughters as well. Now, I treat all my children equally, rather I pay more attention to my daughters as I feel that they need it more. They have to become mothers when they grow up, and a mother can her only raise her children properly if she is herself sensible and mature.

I have decided that, I shall educate my daughters like my sons. I wish that when my daughters grow up and get married, they should be ready to take up that responsibility and have the ability to stand on their

own. I want them to aware of the ups and downs of life just like men. They should be able to support their husbands in the same manner as I am supporting my husband today.

I don't what kind of life my daughters would have lived, if this organization had not started working in our area. I hope that now my daughters would be able live a good life and would not have to face problems, which I had to face in the past.

Our Common Dreams

Aneeta Bibi,
20 years (Jatti Pind)

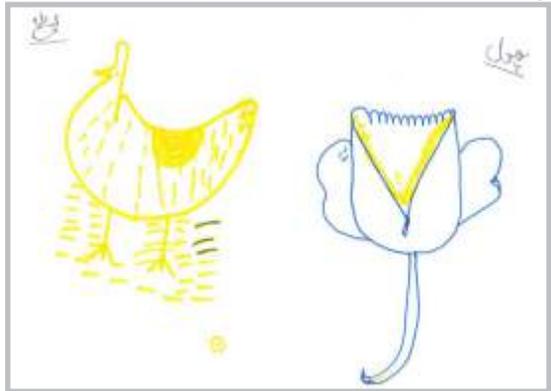
Since my childhood, I had dream of getting education and doing something big. That is why I passed all exams till matriculation with high grades. I want to become a teacher and help the people of my area to get education.

Along with harboring these dreams, I was also a bit apprehensive that my parents would not allow me to continue my education after matriculation, as there was no college in our village. The college was in the city and our family did not like girls leaving the village and living in the cities for the sake of education. Our elders though that girls would go astray if they went to cities and lived there. Many girls of my family had passed matriculation examination but had

not been allowed by their parents to get admissions in the colleges in the nearby city.

Last year, when I passed matriculation, I was also not allowed to continue my education and was asked to stay at home. Since, it was my dream to get higher education, this affected me psychologically. I became irritable and frustrated. I used to stay in my room all day long and did not talk much.

Few months back, I came to know that an NGO had started working in our community. Since I had already lost interest in every thing, it did not pay any attention at all. After a month, my father came to me said to me that I could continue my education. I was surprised upon this sudden change and was quite happy. Later on I came to know that my father had been attending



the sessions organized by that organization and discussions there had changed his entire thinking. I also attended some of the meetings later on. This provided me an opportunity to bond with my parents again. I would not have

got the opportunity of realizing my dreams, if Rutgers had not started working in our area.

The Curse of Child Marriages

Sajida Hasrat Khan,
44 years (Haripur)

Early marriages of young girls are a norm and tradition of our area. As soon as a girl enters her teens, her parents start worrying about her marriage. If she is not engaged or married by the time she is eighteen, she is considered unlucky.

I have an acquaintance, which belongs to such a family. She has three daughters, the eldest being only sixteen years of age. She is always thinking about their marriage. Her husband is a driver and the family is hardly able to make both ends meet. Despite the fact that I am against the early marriages, but I never challenged her thinking, because this is their family tradition. I know that such marriages result in many types of psychological and social issues. The main problem is that the girl is not mature enough to handle family life and would not be able to raise children properly.

Few months back, I heard about an organization working in our area and raising awareness about the harmful effects of early and child marriages. Since I already used to think about these issues, it captured my interest. I asked my

friend, who had told me about this to take me along in the meetings. She readily agreed to take me along. After some days, when I went there and listened to the discussions, I felt that I also thought in the same way. Participation in



these meetings gave me the courage to take up the issue with my acquaintance. I decided to talk to her and convince her. After the effort of few days, both the husband and wife agreed to me and promised me that they would not marry their daughters before 18 years of age.

I am pleased that I saved three girls from the menace of child marriages and this was made possible due to the efforts of Rutgers.

The Story of a Poet

Mian Majid Zeb,
32 years (Nowshera)

I belong to the district Nowshera. I am highly educated and have done Masters in Mass Communication and in Pashto Literature. Because of my masters in Pashto literature, I take special interest in Pashto poetry. I am myself a poet and have read all prominent Pashto poets and am able to quote them on appropriate occasions. That is why I enjoy a prominent position among my friends.

Whatever I am today, is because of my elder brother. He took care of me after the death of our father and supported me in getting higher education. He also arranged my marriage. I was living a good and peaceful life. However, there was just one bone of contention between my wife and me. My wife is also educated and wishes that we should at least have dinner together. While I, despite being educated, disliked having meals together, as it was against our social and cultural norms.

Once, my friend, who was also class fellow, took me to a gathering. When I reached there, I saw that many prominent personalities of or areas were also there. The topic was women rights. Speakers were asking as to why women are considered second-class citizens and why they are scolded and teased over small

issues. They argued that marriage is a contract between two persons then why one party is considered superior and other is considered inferior.

I felt as if they are talking about my matrimonial life. I bowed my head in shame. While sitting there, I promised myself that I would change my attitude immediately. When I reached home, my wife was in kitchen. Instead of going to my room, I went into the kitchen and told her that we would have dinner together. My wife, who was not expecting such a pleasant change in my attitude, was pleasantly surprised. Since that day, they have been no quarrels in my household and we are living a peaceful life.

Change is Inevitable

Zakia, 20 years
(Tarru Jabba, Nowshera)

I belong to a family where there is no history or tradition of educating girls. The rationale was that girls become too strong headed and independent after getting education and therefore can not go along well with their in laws after marriage. However, I consider myself lucky as I was able to study till college and passed F.A because of the support of my mother. I desired to get a job as well, but when I talked to my brother, he rebuked me and said that his sense of honor did not allow him to give permission to do so. I talked to my father, he was kind

waiting for me. When I reached, I found him there. He told me that training was taking place in Nowshera and he wanted me to take part in it. He said that it would not just benefit me, but the whole area. I didn't want to anything else apart from teaching, but when he insisted, I half-heartedly agreed to go there.

As expected, I was quite nervous when the training started, but when I saw that all the participants were female and there was no male, I felt a bit relaxed. When our trainer told us that we would have to talk to men during the campaign, I once again felt anxious and panicky and decided that I would not continue. But I was left with no other option when even my parents started insisting that I should continue this work.

When we went into the community after the completion of the training, I was quite uneasy for the first few days. However, gradually I started to grow in confidence to face and talk to men. My self-confidence also improved during my discussions with men. My parents, who were worried because of my passive and submissive nature, felt very happy to see this change.

The greatest benefit of working here is that I have developed confidence and courage to face the problems and issues of life. Now I am so self-assured that I am writing this story in Peshawar and I came all alone to Peshawar in a bus. I was the only female traveling in that bus and did not feel any fear or

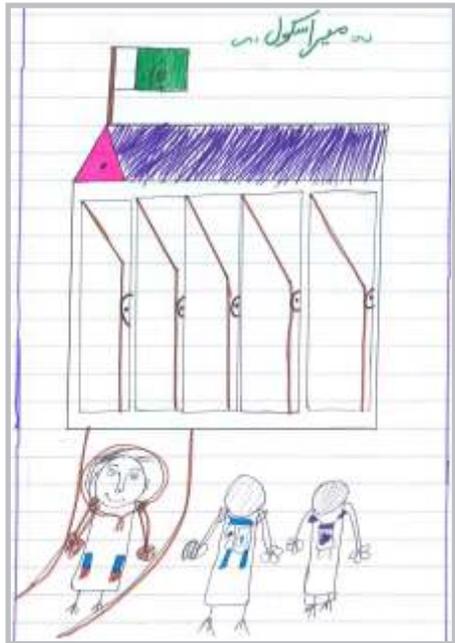
pressure.

As Shall you Sow, So Shall you Reap

Alishba, 15 years

(Tarru Jabba, Nowshera)

I belong to a poor but educated family. I am fortunate that both my father and mother are educated. However, there was one flaw in my personality. I had no respect for elders. My parents were really worried because of my behavior. They did not want to be strict with



me as they loved me a lot and they also knew that if they treated me sternly, I might also rebel against their authority, which they could not afford.

Few weeks ago, I heard that a training workshop was taking place in our area and my mom has

also been selected for it. I was curious to know that what kind of workshop my mom was attending at this age. One day she also took me with her. It was large gathering and there were many people. A female was talking to them about generation gap and the relationship between young and the old. Later on I came to know that she was Seema Babar. During her discussion she said that those who do not respect their elders will have to face the consequences one day and their young ones will also not respect them. She said that this was the law of nature, "As you sow, so shall you reap". I was really distraught to hear this. I reflected that my children would also be treating me in the same way as I treat my parents. This thought was quite distressing. I promised myself that from now onwards, I should never be disrespectful to my elders. Since that day, I have always respected my elders and loved the children. My parents are pleased to see this change and pray for Seema Babar and Rutgers. Since the last few days I have observed my sibling who were always quarreling with me are now being very respectful.

Rising Awareness Amongst Women

Noreen Bibi,
32 years (Nowshera)

I belong to a middle class educated family of district Nowshera. I am married and thankful to Allah that my husband is educated, mature and understanding. I am also educated but I was not putting my education to any use. I was just cooking and looking after my children. I wanted to get benefit from my education to use and serve the society, but I did not have any platform for that.

One day my neighbor told me that some people have come to our community and may be they want to open an office. They were looking for educated people especially women. When my husband came back to home in the evening, I talked to him and asked for permission to meet those people. He willingly gave me permission. Next day, I went to meet those people and shared with them my passion for public service. They referred me to Seema Babar, who interviewed and selected me. I received five days training in the beginning. The training taught what I had learnt even during my school and college days. I realized that despite being educated we were ignorant. Despite being educated, I considered myself inferior to men and avoided going to hospital

even when I was sick.

First of all, I reformed myself and freed myself from those ignorant thoughts. Then, I took the campaign forward. I feel honored that because of this campaign, the women of our area are being sensitized and educated. I am sure that very soon these backward thoughts would be wiped out from our society.

Traditions Defeated

Arif Khan,
49 years, Nowshera

I belonged to a Pakhtoon family, which is bounded in chains of outdated social and cultural norms. Girls are considered inferior to boys and their birth is mourned instead of being celebrated. Not to talk of education, stepping outside the home is considered a crime. Boys are considered as heirs and girls are looked down upon and considered a burden. That is why most of the families get rid of girls by marrying them off at the age of twelve or thirteen.

I am an educated person and a social worker but I was still a prisoner of these conservative notions and ideas. I disliked going against our social norms. Perhaps even education had not been able to transform the conformist within me. Then it so happened that I was selected to work for Rutgers as I fulfilled all the requirements. I had worked in many similar organizations but this was a unique experience for me. I have never

seen the kind of work, which is being done at Rutgers.

I have already confessed that even my education had not been able to change the traditional Pathan within me, but a training workshop of just five days totally transformed me. Perhaps I am the first Pathan of my area who publically celebrated the birth of my daughter. I have already decided that I shall ensure that my daughter gets education. I shall not marry her of my own accord; rather I shall respect her opinion and choice. This change has occurred just because of the interaction with colleagues from Rutgers. I am thankful to them for this. They will leave when their project is complete, but this is my commitment that I shall continue this work forever.

Aware Community for Healthy Generation through Community Dialogues Approach



www.rutgers.pk



[/RutgersPakistan](https://www.facebook.com/RutgersPakistan)



[@RutgersPak](https://twitter.com/RutgersPak)



[/RutgersPakistan](https://www.youtube.com/RutgersPakistan)