



Stitching-up Poverty in Pakistan

From 2015 to 2018, Y Care International and Community World Service Asia worked in partnership to improve financial resilience and promote gender equity of disadvantaged young women in Umerkot, Pakistan. The project addressed extreme poverty, food insecurity and gender inequality faced by young women, their households and communities, and contributed to young women having safer, happier lives, with reduced poverty.

YMCA

The results

The Context:

Rural poverty in Pakistan and especially in Sindh province is a big challenge. Umerkot is one of the most remote, rural and under-developed districts with the second highest poverty rates. About 83% of the population is rural and 70% are Hindus and Christians, who are highly neglected and lack access to basic services.

The majority of the population are subsistence farmers and do not have any reliable alternative livelihoods. Due to poor crop yields and climate insecurity these farmers are indebted to the feudal lords for survival. Gender inequality is pronounced for women due to the traditionally patriarchal culture and lack of access to education.

The Project:

The project combined interventions to promote economic empowerment of women with gender equality in 22 villages in Umerkot. These interventions included: training 722 women artisans in business skills and traditional embroidery; training of community gender activists and Household Action Groups for gender sensitisation; the establishment of Community Steering Committees; and facilitating linkages to retailers, buyers and designers through locally trained Sales and Marketing Agents.

Women's economic empowerment:

The embroidery skills that women enhanced through trainings turned a traditional activity into an important income generating activity. The quality of production improved and in two years' time these women artisans recorded an overall income of PKR 8.9 million (USD 79,000) . By circulating in the market, this amount is also strengthening the local economy of these poor rural communities.

By the end of project, 94% of households lived above the poverty line (\$2 a day) compared to only 3% before the project.

To sustain the impact of this work, a social enterprise called Taanka was established in the final year of the project that continues to connect women artisans with urban buyers and designers with the help of locally trained Sales and Marketing Agents.

Gender Transformation:

The project reduced women's vulnerability to economic shocks and stresses and social risks that include gender inequality, discrimination and power at the intra-household level. Key results include:

- ▼ Decision-making: Now 72% women influence or take household decisions compared to only 8% before the project. These women used to work in cotton fields and their wages were paid to a male member of their families. They not only receive income in their own hands but also decide how to spend it.
- ▼ Women as role models: Community members reported that for the first time, women of Umerkot are serving as role models for younger girls and their parents.
- ▼ Girls' Education: The project found a strong correlation between women's increased income and girls' education. 340 children (66% girls) were enrolled in schools during the life of the project. All girl children of Gender Activists were enrolled in schools.
- ▼ Early Marriage: 49 underage marriages in the 22 villages were delayed.
- ▼ Violence against women and girls: Domestic violence decreased in 57 households, meaning less male household members act violent towards women and less are addicted to drugs or alcohol.
- ▼ A District Gender Forum was established in Umerkot to advocate for gender mainstreaming in district plans and tackle gender related issues. This Forum consists of Gender Activists, Steering Committees and local authorities.

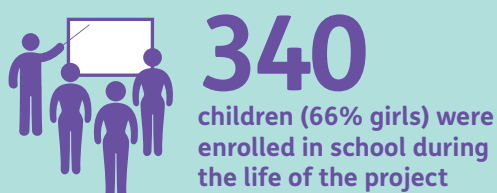
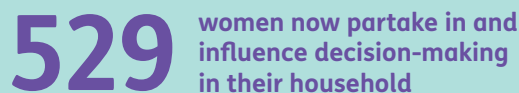
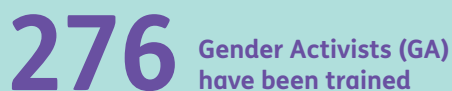
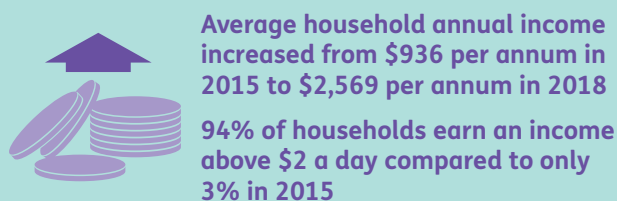
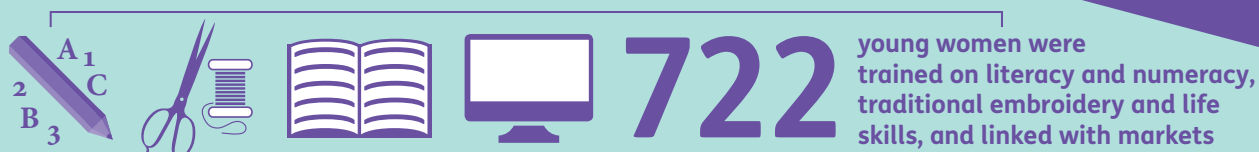
Social Cohesion:

The project strengthened social cohesion between Muslim and Hindu communities as well as among their castes through joint meetings, trainings and other social mobilisation activities with a high degree of conflict sensitivity. In spite of religious and ethnic differences, women from different castes participated in the embroidery centre, supported each other, and promoted tolerance.

An ongoing conflict between two rival ethnic groups in Rana Jageer was brought to conclusion with the help of the Steering Committee established by this project.

What changed?

Our project in numbers



What next?

Gender inequality and access to market remains a big challenge for rural women in Umerkot. We will continue to invest in women's economic empowerment by investing in market relevant skills, connecting them to the market and challenging the harmful gender norms and behaviours in the society.

For the sustainability of income of these women, we will focus on developing a business plan for the social enterprise, Taanka. This social enterprise will help women artisans to sustain and grow their connections in the urban markets.

We will aim to select women Sales and Marketing Agents who have better communication and negotiation skills to access urban markets and speak the same language as the urban buyers.

We understand that women and girls' literacy, health, mobility and access to basic services are directly related to their economic wellbeing. We will continue to monitor progress in these areas by using Outcome Harvesting as a monitoring tool.

We will continue to work with the District Gender Forum in Umerkot and scale up to provincial level. This will help us advocate for gender mainstreaming in government policies and plans and tackle the most pressing issues related to all kinds of violence against women and girls.

We understand the complexity of the environment we worked in and a potential negative interaction between the programme, the context and the power holders (e.g. the feudal lords). To counter this we will establish a conflict-sensitive monitoring and evaluation system.

Stories of change

“ The biggest moment in my life so far is walking on the ramp with models who were wearing my embroidery work. ”

Priya, 27, Ahori Farm

“ Increase in my income from embroidery work has positive impacts on our household. It reduced the burden on male members. This has helped me strengthen my self-belief and confidence that I can also contribute in household expenditure. I have complete freedom on how to use the income I earn. ”

Meera, 25, Rana Jageer

“ My husband is not a drug addict anymore. He doesn't fight with me now. I am very happy about these changes. ”

Roma, 24, Talo Malo

“ This embroidery work is my passion and I enjoy doing it while listening to music. I also like to master in sewing and stitching so I could start making Lehengas, (Pakistani wedding dress). My Baba says that I am more than a son and have supported him and the family in difficult times. I want all the girls in my village to engage in income generating activities and support their families. ”

Sangeeta, 17, Gambe Jo Daro

“ Gender sensitisation training made the real difference in terms of developing positive attitudes amongst male community members towards women. This is evident as today I am here along with my wife, she is an artisan. ”

Roshan, 28, Surto Oad

Project dashboard: Improving financial resilience and promoting gender equity of disadvantaged young women in Umerkot in Pakistan

Goal

Reduced poverty for vulnerable households in Sindh Province, Pakistan.

Implementing partners:

Community World Service Asia

Funders:

UK Aid
Swedish Postcode Foundation

Duration:

April 2015 to March 2018

Cost:



810,514 GBP



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Final Evaluation Report:
www.ycareinternational.org/publications-listing/

Podcast Series "Stitching-up Poverty":
www.ycareinternational.org/publications-listing/



Y Care International creates opportunities for vulnerable young people across the globe to change their lives for the better. Inspired by and faithful to our Christian values, we work with people of all faiths and none to build a more just world, free from poverty.