

Summary of BALID Informal Literacy Discussion No. 9

Empowering non-literate rural women in Pakistan

Led by Moqees Baiz

July 23rd 2013 at Feed the Minds, Vauxhall

Moqees Baiz is the Executive Director and founder of National Rural Development Programme which is a partner of Feed the Minds. In 1992 NRDP was started in a small village room in the Narawal district. In 2013 it became a national programme. NRDP is currently working in seven districts, two in Punjab and five in Sindh Province.

NRDP aims to alleviate poverty, discrimination and injustice. Literacy is one area of work, women's empowerment with an emphasis on the situation of widows is another.

Moqees showed a video illustrating NRDP's work on issues around gender equality, education, neo natal and maternal health care (which is supported by Feed the Minds), civic education, voter identification and micro credit.

Seventy per cent of the population live in rural areas where there are high levels of poverty and gender inequality and in some parts of rural Pakistan girls' education is very limited. NRDP considers that education is one of the first steps to development. There is a need for women to become involved in economic empowerment and decision making. More than 80 percent of women have experienced physical abuse. NRDP's aim is to make women independent in society by developing programmes for enterprise development, and by giving small loans and optimising investment.

Moqees reminded us of the natural disasters Pakistan has recently suffered – the earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 and the devastating monsoon floods in 2010 and 2011.

Women's human rights are violated in many ways - bridal exchange, honour and dowry abuse and killings, harassment and sexual violence, rights related to divorce, inherited property, and financial constraints. Women are not aware of their legal rights.

Moqees described some of NRDP's work to alleviate these conditions and empower women. He described how he coordinated and negotiated with families who disapproved of a marriage.

The NRDP tree of empowerment includes:

1. Economic development
2. Health/ sanitation
3. Protection and awareness of women's rights
4. Promoting women's participation.

NRDP is now moving to promoting literacy through health education and developing literacy skills on health. Rural literacy is around 49% but women's literacy is only around 35%. The health centre and literacy classes are basic tools for developing a positive situation for women. Research is now required to identify the needs of the literacy and community health educators and the community midwives' needs. The languages are Sindhi and Baluchi, but the literacy and training materials are usually in "easy" Urdu.

In response to a question, Moqees stated that men are very much involved. There are programmes and booklets for men on their responsibilities for the health of their wives and children for example accompanying their wives and children for vaccinations or hospitalisation. The aim is to sensitise men to become change makers.

345 local associations have been developed and there are now 9000 change makers. There is a '5 star' approach to developing a committee i.e. a committee should comprise people from all points of a star in the community. In practice this means ensuring members are drawn from different religions, with different ages, speaking different languages, with different educational levels and abilities, practicing different trades, with different levels of income and living in different parts of the community. Twenty five people is the minimum and there is no maximum. Each committee has three books to assist the work 1) Survey of the community, 2) Minutes and meetings, 3) Initiatives and projects. Though NRDP will assist with projects, write letters and provide support, the initiatives come from the communities.

Funding for these programmes has been from UNDP, the UN office in Pakistan and INSAF as well as a variety of smaller trust funds and location donations.