

# Vocational training and sustainable livelihoods for women in Pakistan

**KEYWORDS:** participatory model; women's empowerment; vocational training

*BHP Billiton, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Child Development Organization and the Women Skills Development Organization have facilitated a process for promoting women's empowerment through income generation and socio-economic development in southern Pakistan since 2001; the partnership work has benefited the wider community.*

## Key partners

- BHP Billiton
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- Child Development Organization (CDO)
- Women Skills Development Organization (WSDO)

## Background

Income-earning opportunities are few and far between for the poor of Dadu district in southern Pakistan. Agriculture is the main source of income, but unreliable rainfall, particularly during the drought of the past years, and an inadequate irrigation system mean that most people are unable to survive on agriculture alone. Most families have come to rely on men migrating for seasonal labour work in towns nearby or cities further afield.

Women often seek additional income through selling handicrafts or rope made from local materials, but lack proper linkages to market these products. The severe economic pressures on families are a major constraint to improving their health and sending their children to school.

Through its community development programme, BHP Billiton has worked closely with its partners and local communities in contributing to sustainable development in the district of Dadu. The programme aims to empower local people through social mobilization and institution building. It provides access to the basic facilities of life, and targets specific problems in the four areas of health, education, livelihood support and provision of basic infrastructure.

## The 'Sartiyoon Silai Karhai Markaz' Vocational Training Centre and the Sustainable Livelihoods for the Women of Johi Project

In 2000, BHP Billiton established a relationship with a small local NGO, the Child Development Organization (CDO), as an implementing partner for its projects in the Dadu district. In 2001, the partnership set up the

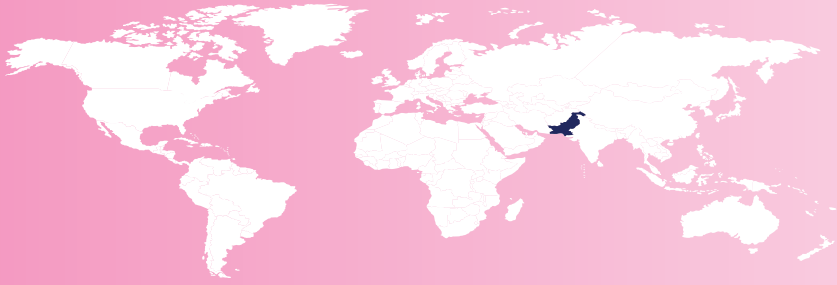
'Sartiyoon Silai Karhai Markaz' Vocational Training Centre in the town of Johi, to encourage women to learn such skills as embroidery, sewing and tailoring for income generation.

A participatory review of the vocational training centre in 2003 identified that some of the women attending the courses had the potential to take their income-generating activities to a higher level, given the appropriate training and support. To broaden partnership participation in the initiative and increase international stakeholder engagement in the area, BHP Billiton signed a partnership agreement with the Canadian international Development Agency's (CIDA) Program for the Advancement of Gender Equity. In 2004, the partners initiated the Sustainable Livelihoods for the Women of Johi Project. The objectives of the project are to:

- enable women to earn an independent income;
- improve the standard of living for women's families;
- improve the status of women within their households and the wider society; and
- enhance the economic and social well-being of the community.

*The Sustainable Livelihoods for the Women of Johi Project has brought opportunities for greatly improved standards of living, and economic and social well-being of the community.*





**THEME:** Community development

**PARTNERS:** GOV • NGO

**LEVEL:** local/provincial

**LOCATION:** Southern Asia

## Progress and lessons learned

Women have expanded their income-generating activities at the vocational training centre. So far, around 270 women have attended the centre to upgrade their sewing and tailoring skills, enabling them to make clothes either for their families' use or for sale.

The progress and impact of the centre mobilized a group of women in Dadu who wanted to take up the struggle to change the quality of women's lives. They formed the Women Skills Development Organization (WSDO), an independent NGO with an all-women governing body, which took responsibility for management and policy making. In the process, a fresh and wholly independent, community-owned identity for the 'Sustainable Livelihoods' project was created.

Through the 'Sustainable Livelihoods' project, women running businesses, or interested in starting businesses, can receive business training, apply for micro-credit and link up with handicraft exhibitions to sell their products. So far, 200 women have received training through the project, with 30 selected to receive intensive enterprise development support as part of an ongoing pilot project. Groups of women, families and individual women have set up small-scale enterprises after the training. For instance, a number of women have opened shops selling clothes and cosmetics in their villages.

Challenges have been thrown up by the partnership projects, but equally strong learnings shared. It is clear that to attain maximum value from development work, the corporate sector and civil society need to work hand in hand. Working together has been the most significant challenge for all four partners.

In terms of lessons learned, from the outset partners need to:

- understand each other's values, objectives, strengths and weaknesses, so that they can build on success and, despite their diversity, work towards a common purpose;
- maintain constant dialogue, not just with each other but with key stakeholders—specifically local communities, government agencies and other development organizations; and
- fully comprehend their immediate roles and responsibilities in creating a conducive working

environment for the achievement of sustainable community development.

The role of NGOs is integral in participatory community development, as they can act as a mediator between the local community and the corporate sector.

Finally, a key lesson for BHP Billiton is that it cannot fulfil all the expectations and requirements of the local communities where it operates. Therefore, it is important to work closely with donor organizations in assisting them to play their part in development of the area.

## Conclusions

The livelihood projects resulting from the BHP Billiton, CDO, CIDA and WSDO partnerships have improved access to livelihood opportunities for local households, and to income-generating activities for women in particular.

Given the prevailing cultural norms that limit women's role to the domestic sphere, it was a significant challenge to encourage women to expand their earning capacities by attending the training programmes on offer, and even more of a challenge to create an all-women NGO. That both initiatives have succeeded without creating social conflict is extremely encouraging and has promising implications for the future. Awareness of women's rights and capabilities is increasing among the local communities as they experience the projects' positive effects.

For BHP Billiton, the partnership work has helped establish the tenets for a stronger local economy, resulting in a better educated, better equipped workforce.



*So far, the Training Centre at Johi has provided training to 270 women in the development of a variety of skills including sewing and handicrafts. The Sustainable Livelihoods project has provided business-related training and support to 200 women, already leading to the establishment of 20 small-scale enterprises.*