

Stories from Province Sindh, Pakistan

S.No.	Main Character	Story Title	Theme(s)
1	Hakimzadi, Ghotki	Ambassador of Change	Shelter, Women Empowerment
2	Sabhaagee, Sanghar	Standing Strong against all Odds	GBV and Harassment Child Protection
3	Sahjan Bai, Ghotki	Sobbing, Surviving and Sustaining	Education/Learning Losses Inter-faith Harmony Protection
4	Chhutaan, Dadu.	A Journey from Humiliation to Hope	Women with disabilities Social protection
5	Zubeda, Sukkur	Enlarging the Choices with Equity and Justice	Livelihood and resilience

Ambassador of Change

“Life was full of emotional challenges, financial crisis and social distress, when, alone, I had to raise my 13 children (7 daughters and six sons and look after my paralyzed husband),” said 47-year-old, Hakim Zadi Siyal from remote village Chak Siyal, Ghotki district. Her shaking hands and trembling feet were in absolute contrast with her firm determination and strong confidence in making society a better place for everyone around her.

Regarding the floods, she said, **“There were torrential rains in July 2022 but major damage to our homes and belongings was done due to diversion of water to our homes from land of other influential which demolished many houses including mine. We lost all our belongings and livestock died due to collapse of our roof.”** Among other challenges during the flood, like food, medicine and shelter, the lack of privacy for personal hygiene was most crucial. It was addressed through community’s collective efforts by putting temporary toilet using the bamboo and Ralli to create a cover.

Hakimzadi realizes that social taboos like early marriage, attitude towards girls’ education and family planning are the main reasons for her socio-economic miseries. The natural disasters further aggregate these miseries. Hakimzadi and her son work as agriculture labourers to feed a large size family. It goes without saying that most of the time what she earns doesn’t even bring adequate food and sometimes days pass without eating anything.



About her work she said, “I have facilitated hundreds of women and girls to get their CNICs, which is prerequisite in numerous situations including access relief and rehabilitation services in disaster management.”

Hakimzadi, Village Chak Siyal, Ghotki

She said, **“In addition to community, the Village Development Organization responded to our call and mobilized funds for rebuilding our house Having house in my own entitlement gives me a sense of protection, social security and I feel more empowered and enjoy pride of being in my house.”**

Many women like Hakimzadi feel socio-economically deprived due to such natural disaster. Therefore, provision of houses will not only reduce the economic burden from their shoulders, but it will also lead to social empowerment. It is worth highlighting that Hakimzadi serves the community, especially during the disaster, despite living in a socially conservative and challenging environment is worth huge appreciation. During flood 2022, she participated in relief activities and highlighted women’s issues at various forums. She demanded from the government that it should provide support to women to rebuild their houses and give entitlements to women in addition to improving access of women to health, education, and maternal health services for pregnant women.



Standing Strong against All the Odds

“Generally, the word Sabhaagee means a fortunate, but my life story is in absolute contrast of this meaning. At an early age I lost my father and later married to an idle, abusive and drug addicted person,” said a middle-aged Sabhaagee, a lady health worker and a mother of two (a son and a daughter) from Depar Colony, U.C 1, Sanghar district. One could clearly see the marks of sorrows on her pale face and weak body that she endured from recent incident of her mother’s death and abduction of her 14 years beloved daughter, Parveen. During flood 2022 Sabhaagee had to leave from her house which was irreparably damaged and move to a rented premises where she faced further challenges and misfortune.

In the midst of the flood 2022 when Sabhaagee’s mother passed away and the neighboring family pretended to assist during her mother’s burial process and other rituals. It was revealed that, actually it was part of their plan to take away her 14-year-old daughter Parveen for a forced marriage. The neighbors manipulated, drugged, exploited, and abducted her.



Screamingly Sabhaagee said, “I have knocked every door, from police to politicians, from notables to courts; even sold my valuables to meet expenses to pursue this case. When my relatives and colleagues joined me to build pressure through media, I was told that my daughter wishfully got married to the person, double her age. How come a 14-year-old girl can get married, which is unlawful. I pledged to authorities to help me in bringing back my beloved innocent daughter.

Sabhaagee, Village Depar Colony, Sanghar

Parveen was at the tender age of 14, studying in grade VI, and lacked maturity to understand the world. Just five days after Sabhaagee’s mother’s death, on a dark cold evening of January 2023, the neighbors took Parveen with them for just a get together and promised her mother to bring the child back safely, but unfortunately it has been six months she has not met her daughter.

In the middle of the dark night, Sabhaagee went to the police station to lodge the complaint, but the perpetrators used their money and power to influence the police in their favor.

She felt sad seeing Parveen’s classmates recently appearing in their annual exams while Parveen was not there to take her exams.

It is not only the food relief that people require in such times of crises, but they are also vulnerable to social evils which must be avoided by applying stringent safety measures. She said, **“During displacement people become vulnerable to threats and harassment. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to raise awareness about safety and security, and create secure environment for everyone, especially for girls and women.”** For addressing such need, Oxfam with its local partners established safe spaces, where safe and healthy environment of learning and sharing was provided to flood affected displaced women and girls. Orientation sessions on protection and safeguarding, available legal and institutional frameworks and linkages with support mechanisms supported them to cope with the losses and emotional trauma.

Sabhaagee, with deep grief, urges the Government for help in bringing her daughter back. She suggests that in future, if any such disaster happens, Government must ensure the safety of girls and women by organizing gender segregated relief camps with basic facilities and in case of combined camps there must be stringent safety measures to make girls and women safe and secure.

"Sobbing, Surviving and Sustaining"

"I never thought there would be a trade-off between bread and books. But the hardships of the flood compelled us to choose either education or food," shared Sahjan Bai, a Hindu elderly woman, mother of 10, inhabitant of village Tooh Maar, district Ghotki. Sahjan's husband is a laborer but due to disruption caused by flood 2022 he occasionally finds any work to contribute to household's meager income. One of her sons, who used to study in grade VIII, but poverty, hardships and flood traumatized him and caused mental instability. Like millions of families, Sahjan could not protect herself from the disastrous effects of the 2022 flood. Her livestock (two goats and one cow, a worth of PKR 200,000) died during the flood. Her house was washed away, leaving her family nowhere to stay but at the roadside for two months. Besides the monetary loss, the lack of security was an additional social loss. The absence of washroom in relief camp area was making it difficult for women and girls to address their personal hygiene needs and they would wait for night to use darkness as cover for addressing their hygiene needs. They had to use rags for menstrual hygiene. Furthermore, the tormenting flood caused drastic learning losses to Sahjan's children due to school damage.



Upon sharing her painful experience of living on the roadside, she said, "I couldn't sleep a single night due to deep feeling of insecurity as I was accompanying adolescent daughters and people's harassing sights was not sparing the flood victims". Remembering her hardest day she burst into tears, saying, "I lost 400 KG wheat just with the wall collapse during the flood. During the days in a relief camp, one day, I just had flour to make four chapatis to distribute among my ten children. "

Realizing the challenges, she faced due to illiteracy, Sahjan is determined to ensure that her daughter and two sons continue their education in a local primary school. She believes that by enabling her children to gain education and vocational skills, she will prepare them, especially girls, to face socio-economic challenges caused by natural disasters. However, the exacerbating inflation affected her ability to provide school supplies, like books, stationery, and uniform, for her children.

After surviving on the roadside and waiting for Government's help, communities themselves dewatered village and moved back to broken houses and started rebuilding the demolished house with the help of communities and local NGOs. She acknowledges the community's support in those challenging times but due to inflation Sahjan could not finish all the reconstruction work; her bathroom is still unfinished.

Being concerned about education, particularly girl's education, she pledged Government to resume education activities at earliest to limit children's learning losses. She also suggested that Government must prioritize girls' education and women's safety and security in camps to avoid harassment incidents. She emphasized government to allocate regular stipend for girls to continue education, widows and deserving women-headed households, to meet their basic needs and help them in building their houses, washrooms and save livestock which is a main source of livelihood for women.



A journey from Humiliation to Hope

“I never imagined that in my old age I shall have to perform nursing of an adult but dependent daughter. My 35 years old daughter, Majeedan is a woman with intellectual disabilities and is completely dependent on me,” said Chhutan, a 65-year-old widow, resident of village Khair Muhammad of Union Council Kamal Khan, district Dadu. Her daughter’s lifelong disease has been so heavy on her, especially since Chhutan’s husband departed for final abode.”

The struggle with extreme poverty and raising an immobile child was already a huge challenge and the rain flood of 2022 exacerbated the situation of Chhutan. Due to disastrous effects of the flood, their family was forced to leave their homes and move to a relief camp in a school. During that time, in the middle of the rains, carrying Majeedan due to her dependency was a cumbersome job. I requested help from my sons and my neighbors, who assisted with huge reluctance. Majeedan was not able to maintain her own cleanliness, which bothered all those who were supposed to help her. They remained homeless and lived under the harsh conditions for three months with lack of access to water, lack of privacy to change Majeedan’s clothes and perform her cleanliness. The discomfort in camp life made Majeedan so uneasy that she started screaming at other children and her mother had to tie her with chains.



Earlier, I was registered under Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and received one instalment of 12,000. Later, my name was removed from the list due to unknown reasons. Upon inquiring from their district offices, instead of finding appropriate information, I faced humiliation. Similarly due to my daughter’s condition, I was registered in Ehsas Program but grassroot facilitation was negligible.

Chhutan, Village Khair Muhammad, Dadu

Upon showing her demolished room due to flood 2022 with her trembling hands, she couldn’t stop her tears and said, **“It feels so difficult not to have shelter and being unable to even change or wash dirty clothes of my adult but mentally challenged and dependent daughter.”** There is no proper room and washroom available in the house. In summer, she and her daughter lived in temporary shelter which couldn’t save them neither from heat nor from wind and rain. According to her experience of safety-net programs, the staff at district level neither have capacity for public dealing nor have compassion to listen complaints and show empathy. That impolite attitude made Chhutan discontinue pursuing her registration with safety-net program.

She suggests, **“The Government establish drop-in centers with provision of proper food, shelter, care and boarding where parents can drop-in their physically or mentally challenged children. On the one hand it will lead to the well-being of such children, on the other hand it will also reduce the burden on poverty-stricken and elderly parents like me who have no family support available. Though its hard decision, if this is in best interest of children, then it is worth it.”**

Enlarging the Choices with Equity and Justice

“I wasn’t allowed to read and write and remained illiterate because people in our communities used to think that if girls got education they would be spoiled and make affairs outside their communities. Such attitudes not only limited my potential of social growth but also halted ways of economic wellbeing,” said Zubeda, a widow and mother of five children, from village & UC Roshan Abad district Sukkur. One of her young sons was diagnosed with cancer recently.

About the losses of flood 2022, Zubeda said, **“It was nothing less than a sheer devastation for me. During flood, every time when my cattle died, it caused me heartache. I lost my 11 hard to raise livestock, some due to collapse of the wall and the others because of hunger, thirst, and viral diseases. The total worth was more than 1.1 million which brought me under a huge debt.”** She sold two buffaloes at a low rate of 17,000 rupees only, whereas their original price was around 200,000. Amidst the natural disaster, people added to their miseries by stealing their remaining things from their broken house and harassing girls and women in the relief camps.

As the majority of these animals were purchased from the investment, she managed through a savings committee of 40 members; the other members are expecting Zubeda to pay her due installments. She said, **“Such distress can’t let me have a peaceful sleep even for a single night. I wish there were any vaccine to protect some of my livestock, so I could have less burden of loan.”**



I never allowed illiteracy to limit my efforts towards economic empowerment nor did I depend on others for support. Instead, I proactively reached to different institution which works for women empowerment and gathered the information to restart economically halt status. Through I do not have education, still I know eligibility criteria and documentation to gain support from these institution for me and my community women who are willing to change their suppressed state.

Zubeda, Village Roshanabad, Sukkur

In addition to the economic burden, the flood also dragged Zubeida into more pressing social responsibilities and domestic burden. Along with settling the debts, she takes care of the entire family, especially her ailing son, her married daughter and grandchildren who were abandoned by Zubeda’s son-in-law due to poverty and his inability to feed them.

Zubeida faced life with dignity and pride. After the death of her husband in 2010, she realized her potential to become a social activist and explored possibilities of growth for herself and other women. She also worked in relief activities and raised her concerns on women’s issues at different platforms.

In the views of Zubeda, the Government should engage local women activists in relief activities to make it more transparent, prioritize the support to widows and other vulnerable women and men by providing the income support grant and awareness raising sessions about women rights and gender-based violence prevention. There should also be livestock support services, like; fodder, water, and veterinary treatment the including vaccination. She also emphasized involvement of women in planning and management phase. According to her, the government must organize fair trade market for livestock selling in rural areas facilitating women to participate and get fair prices.