

Creating futures in farming for young people and women

Majida Parveen lives with her father, Meharban Ali, in the Muzaffargarh District of the Punjab in Pakistan. Most of the people in her village live on low incomes and have limited access to education.

Her father has worked as a labourer for more than 30 years but, for the past two, has seen regular employment steadily diminish. With the family struggling to make a living, Majida recently decided to leave education, find work as a seamstress, and support her family.

Without education and skills, Majida's prospects for finding work will be difficult. But with the right training, farming can offer her a much brighter future – something that Majida was not aware of until she joined a **CABI-led Skills for Farms project**.

Losing agricultural skills

Agriculture is the mainstay of Pakistan's economy. It engages nearly half of the country's workforce and accounts for over 20% of GDP. Together with agro-based products, agriculture contributes 80% of the country's total export earnings.

But despite the economic importance of agriculture, many young people and women have little access to information that could help them improve their future farming careers and livelihoods. Each year, the number of young people and women choosing to farm for a living is going down. Left unchecked, this reduction in the farming workforce will affect the future of sustainable food production and, ultimately, food security in Pakistan.



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MAJIDA'S STORY

In 2013, CABI launched the Skills for Farms project with financial support from the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF). This project aims to stimulate agricultural markets by training poor, unskilled and vulnerable people. The project focuses on youth and women from four districts of South Punjab: Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Lodhran and Muzaffargarh.

Working directly with local communities, the CABI team has been working to enhance the skills of young people and women in particular, enabling them to get better jobs or generate income through self-employment. Eventually, the trainees will contribute towards food security and the lives of the rural poor by utilizing these skills.

So far, CABI has established a support office and five training centres in villages in the Muzaffargarh District. The team has developed complete training programmes and has conducted regular classes in both kitchen gardening and grain storage. Between September 2013 and March 2014, CABI trained 250 young people in two sessions, each lasting three months.

Also working on the training project is CABI's partner, the University of Arid Agriculture, based in Rawalpindi, Punjab. This university has established a system for certifying agricultural trainees according to their knowledge, skills and training levels. To monitor these and other agreed outputs, PSDF is engaging a third-party firm. At the same time, PSDF's own monitoring team regularly visits the project sites to assess the quality of the training being provided to young farmers.

Changing lives with kitchen garden skills

Majida says employment opportunities were not always forthcoming – sometimes she could find work; sometimes not. Fortunately, Majida's village was one of those to be selected for Skills for Farms kitchen garden training. Majida joined a group, visiting the CABI centre and taking part in the lessons, as well as practical exercises in the training gardens.

After three months, Majida successfully completed her course. Armed with a thorough understanding of the production of various types of vegetables, she decided

to support her family. Her father allowed her to use two acres of his land, where she worked with him in the field, growing a selection of local vegetables. The produce they grow now not only gives them fresh, nutritious food to eat, but also to sell for income.

NAJMA SHAHEEN LIVES IN MOUZA BUDH TEHSIL. SHE RUNS A CANTEEN IN A GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL AND WAS TRAINED IN KITCHEN GARDENING. SHE NOW USES THE INFORMATION SHE GAINED TO GROW VEGETABLES FOR THE GIRLS WHO EAT AT HER CANTEEN, PROVIDING THEM WITH MORE NUTRITIOUS MEALS.

Majida says she is happy. "I am playing my part to make food security in my family and village a reality. I no longer need to work as a seamstress, and am back in education. Thank you CABI for changing my life."

Majida is just one of hundreds of women trained by CABI in kitchen gardening through the Skills for Farms project. Many other women have benefited from the courses and are going on to improve their own lives, as well as the lives of their families and communities, in terms of food security, nutrition and income generation.

QALSOOM BIBI LIVES IN MUHALLAH BAKHAR. HER TRAINING IN GRAIN STORAGE MANAGEMENT HAS NOT ONLY HELPED HER PROTECT HER OWN GRAIN, BUT ALSO EMPOWERED HER WITH THE KNOWLEDGE TO TEACH OTHER WOMEN IN HER VILLAGE TO SAFELY STORE THEIR GRAIN AND THEREBY IMPROVE THEIR OWN FOOD SECURITY.

Donor:

Punjab Skills Development Fund (PDSF)

Partners:

The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA)
University of Arid Agriculture, Rawalpindi

CABI centre:

Pakistan