



BREAKING THE BARRIERS...



A 29-year old single woman living miles away from home, leading an immunization team comprising of 40 men in a large district of Balochistan – Mahgul Noor is the perfect embodiment of women’s empowerment in Pakistan.

“Nothing is impossible if you have the right motivation for your cause,” claimed Mahgul, “and what stronger motivation can there be than saving a child’s life!”

Mahgul belongs to District Kalat of Balochistan. An area marred by security issues, restrictions in movement for women and limited educational opportunities. Despite such restrictive factors, she has completed her Bachelor’s degree in education from Kalat and Master’s degree in International Relations as a private candidate. “My mother is my strength and she has always encouraged us to prosper in life, never be scared and push ourselves to be the best, especially after my father’s death four years ago. Even though she wanted me to become a teacher, she knew I wanted more from life, so she never stopped me in joining this field. She was always scared, especially when I started living away from my

family in Lasbela which is against the conventional societal norms, but she continued to support me,” she added.

Mahgul started her career in the humanitarian sector in 2011 and worked in the sectors of maternal and newborn health, poverty alleviation, immunization, and women empowerment. She was always questioned about her choice of working as a field monitor rather than an administrator or finance person at the backend. But Mahgul claims, “Yes, I had to travel a lot in difficult areas like Washuk and Chaghi for many days at a stretch but there is something irresistible about saving lives and having a positive impact in the lives of others. Once I went to visit a local tribe and when we called all women with children to attend our session on vaccinations, a woman sitting inside a gloomy old room just stared at me with a steely gaze. I went up to her and asked if she has any children and her bereft expression is etched in my memory forever! She told me that she gave birth to three babies and all of them died of tetanus.” Mahgul shuddered at the painful memory of her encounter.

“I told her about the TT vaccination for pregnant females and that it would save the lives of her future children. Her expression changed and her eyes had a spark of disbelief but hope as well. She started crying and thanked me for this information that could change her life. That is the expression I want to remember forever! Because that is what motivates me to step out of the comfort of my home and work for my community every single day, regardless of the difficulties that I have to face.”



Mahgul is not just any female breaking barriers in a male dominated society. She is also hailed by her seniors and juniors alike for her determination and courage, her meticulous planning, her leadership qualities, and her urge to achieve the impossible. Mahgul recalled that, “the Measles SIA is my biggest achievement as the District Health Coordinator for the Expanded Programme for Immunization in Lasbela. On the last day I could not contain my excitement and I just kept saying - I did it! I did it! - I could not believe it. Lasbela is a huge district compared to others as there are 30 union councils facilitated by big teams. I was responsible for their trainings, preparations, microplanning, campaign sessions and evaluation and it was not easy, but our district coverage was 98% during the measles campaign.”

“If a child dies because of not getting a vaccine – it is our fault! I believe that no child should be left behind. So, I encourage my team to record any refusal cases and follow-up until they are included in our immunization services,” she added.

This unstoppable determination and motivational leadership has made Mahgul not just an impeccable District Health Coordinator of Lasbela, Balochistan, but also a Vaccine Hero for the country and an inspiration for others.