



# CASE STUDY : INTEGRATING WOMEN INTO MARKET SYSTEMS

## PAKISTAN HOME-BASED WORKERS

### BACKGROUND

The socio-cultural context of Pakistan is rooted in a strong patriarchal system in which the honor of the family rests heavily on the virtue of women. Decision making is traditionally the purview of the male head of family with limited participation by women. Traditionally, strict limits are set on the freedom of women to move beyond the home unaccompanied by a male relative. As a result, women, particularly those living in rural or peri-urban communities, face significant barriers to accessing basic education and health care, and in participating in economic activity beyond the home. For many Pakistani women, options are severely limited. As a girl she may be required to end her education early because she is needed in the home or the limited family resources are committed to the education of her brothers. As a young woman she moves within the protective circle of her family as a suitable marriage is arranged. She moves from the household of her father to that of her in-laws where she is frequently assigned the most burdensome chores. Her hope for power rests with her son. If he proves successful, she may be rewarded in her old age, served by an attentive daughter-in-law and surrounded by grandchildren.

### RESEARCH

Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) has been working in Pakistan since 2004. The organization's programming began with research into how women are involved in the economy. The research found that women's participation in Pakistan's work force is very limited. The 2011 Labor Force Survey reported a 15.6 percent participation rate for women. Seventy-nine percent of women who are working are in the informal sector. This underutilization of half its population limits Pakistan's progress toward sustained economic growth.

Since 2006, the World Economic Forum has been tracking global progress on closing the gap between men and women on key areas of economic opportunity, education, health, and political empowerment. In 2012, Pakistan ranked 134 of 135 participating countries. Pakistan's ranking has steadily dropped since 2006 when it was ranked 112. It is now in the last position for the Asia and Pacific region, well below India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

While the majority of Pakistan's women are not engaged in the workforce, this low participation rate does not fully reflect the work that women are doing. They work long hours and are vital contributors to the economic survival of their households. In addition to the work of family and household care, many women are doing some activity, such as embellishment of fabric, raising animals, growing fruits or vegetables, within the confines of their homes through which they seek to earn income.



MEDA's research goal was to identify ways women could earn more for their work through better links to markets. In the course of investigation, the project team identified a rare model: a mobile woman representing her neighbors in the market place and securing better return for their labor.

## **QUESTIONS**

How could MEDA structure a project to improve the integration of Pakistani women into market systems? Identify three steps the organization could follow to ensure sound, market-based project design and implementation.