

OSDI Food Security Program: Sowing the seeds of happiness in Rehmat Bibis life

July is a busy time in the village of Mari Muhammad Khan located in Matiari district, with lush green fields enveloping the horizon making for a breathtaking spectacle. Despite the abundance surrounding the village, its inhabitants sadly have little prosperity to stake claim to. It can be attributed mainly to the land holding structure common to many other villages in Pakistan, where farmers have little or no ownership of farming land.

The Rehmat Bibi household is one such family that has been teetering on the edge of abject poverty due to such inequitable distribution of resources. Rehmat Bibi's husband Memon Buksh, is involved in cattle rearing financed by village lenders under the *aadhi system*, in which he's paid a paltry Rs 4,000 stipend for tending to the cattle and a 25% profit after selling off the cattle. The soaring food prices had made even three square meals a day a luxury for the family. Vegetables were a staple in the diet of the household. With monthly expenses of Rs 1,500-2000, vegetables amounted to half of Rehmat Bibi's income leaving precious little for anything else. A small fluctuation in vegetable prices had often led the family on the brink of starvation. Memon Buksh claimed the family often had to eat paste (*chatni*) made from onions borrowed from a relative.



Since February 2011 Rehmat Bibi's household comprising of her husband, three sons and three daughters have been the beneficiaries of OSDI's food security program. Vegetable seeds provided to the household under this program have come to fruition in a brief span of three months, providing sustenance to the family of eight. Training in better crop cultivation techniques and seeds provided under the food security program has also immensely benefited the family in harvesting chilies, cluster beans and okras rich in essential proteins, vitamins and calories for their daily consumption. Memon Buksh proudly claims that they have been self sufficient in their food consumption for the last six months with another two months remaining for their seeds to end.

Savings made in excess of Rs 2000 monthly from the program are being used to repay previous outstanding debt to the local shop keeper. Much to Rehmat Bibi's delight, she can now entertain guests at her house again after a very long time, serving them food made from the ready supply of fresh vegetables from her backyard orchard.

