



Shaikh Keerio is a remote village located at the extreme south of Sindh province in Pakistan in the coastal belt of the Arabian Sea, 40 km from Badin city. Nearly 300 people belonging to about fifty households live here. Before the cyclone struck in 1999 this was a prosperous and self-sufficient village. The cyclone left a trail of misery destroying land, homes, property, cattle, fishing boats and infrastructure. Today Shaikh Keerio has no basic amenities, no school, no dispensary, no road, no electricity, not even drinking water. All that people have

## PROFILE

# Bhagi: Leading by example

**Bhagi, head of the Shaikh Keerio unit of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), played a key role in the long march for the restoration of the Indus River and Indus Delta**

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is the extremely muddy, stagnant and poisonous water that collects in nearby ponds or in the Mirwah canal.

Bhagi, 45, lives in Shaikh Keerio with her husband Sajan Shaikh. They have a 25-year old daughter who was married for five years and has two children. Bhagi and Sajan joined the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) in 1998, the year the organization came into existence. Initially uncomfortable with speaking in public, both have, over the years, become active members of the governing body of the PFF.

With units in the coastal areas of Karachi, Thatta, Badin and Gawadar Balouchistan, the PFF is the only network of fishing communities that is recognized at the national

level in Pakistan. It works towards bringing about a change in the attitudes and policies of the government with respect to fishing communities and envisages the introduction of a sustainable fisheries policy. It believes that fishing communities who historically derived their livelihoods from the resources of the coasts and inland waters should have ownership rights over those waters.

As part of the PFF, Bhagi and Sajan have been playing a vital role in mobilizing and sensitizing their communities on issues impacting deeply on the lives of fishing communities, including climate change, sea water intrusion and drinking water shortage. They were in the forefront of PFF's campaign against the occupation of fresh water bodies—the source of the livelihood of the local fishers—by Pakistan's paramilitary forces. During the struggle, when male protestors were arrested or driven underground, Bhagi played a central role in uniting women's voices against police violence, torture and repression.

Bhagi currently heads the Shaikh Keerio unit of the PFF. She played a key role in the Long March initiated by the PFF for the restoration of the Indus River and Indus Delta. Marching from 2 to 14 March 2010, PFF activists covered a distance of 350 km from Kharo Chhan (where the Indus River meets the sea) to Almanzar Jamshoro. All through the march, Bhagi continuously cheered and encouraged other marchers and was a symbol of dedication, commitment and struggle. Truly, the PFF and the villagers of Shaikh Keerio are proud of her. ❏