

Ted London
Lisa Jones Christensen

case 3-202-248
February 3, 2023

From Pilot to Platform in Rural Pakistan: A Uniquely-Owned Company Scales to Change Lives

“By 2025, more than half of the world’s population will have joined the consuming classes, driving annual consumption in emerging markets to \$30 trillion. RB is playing an important role in introducing these new consumers to the economy through the development of innovative products for consumers at the bottom of the pyramid, who represent some of the most discerning customers in the world...”¹
—Reckitt Benckiser CEO Rakesh Kapoor

Fahad Ashraf, the chief executive of Reckitt Benckiser (Reckitt)ⁱ Pakistan, and Ayesha Janjua, head of marketing at English Biscuit Manufacturer (EBM) in Pakistan, poured themselves fresh cups of tea as they waited for the boardroom to empty. A board of directors meeting for Saaf Sehatmand Services (SSS) in Karachi, Pakistan, had just ended. Ashraf and Janjua wanted to stay behind to discuss next steps. While both were pleased with the meeting’s progress, several strategic questions remained. If not addressed in a timely and effective manner, these issues could stall SSS’s innovative approach to helping local women sell branded health, hygiene, and safe food products in rural Pakistan.

Saaf Sehatmand Services (where “Saaf” meant clean and “Sehatmand” meant healthy) was a for-profit business co-owned by six different parties: Reckitt, EBM, three other companies, and the largest not-for-profit rural outreach network in Pakistan. Ashraf, the earliest and strongest proponent of SSS, was board chairman and Janjua served as pro-bono CEO. Other board members were senior leaders from business and non-profit communities. They had come together in 2019 with the goal of creating a basket of goods that low-income entrepreneurial women could sell in rural communities. By doing so the women could earn a living while also achieving health improvements in their communities. If successful, this new joint platform

ⁱ Reckitt Benckiser was formed by the merger of Reckitt & Colman and Benckiser in 1999. After the merger, the firm was simply known as RB, until the firm rebranded to Reckitt in 2021. This document refers to the company as “Reckitt” to reflect current firm branding, although it was known as RB during in-country data collection in 2019.

Published by WDI Publishing, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

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