Leading by learning
Rukkaya Hashmi, MPA Balochistan Assembly and a seasoned politician found it hard to engage with the media, until she learned how to manage it

“I wanted to excel for myself and my community,” says MPA Rukkaya Hashmi of PML-Q. “It was because of my struggle and hard work that I became Member of Balochistan Provincial Assembly.” She recalls her own inner conviction that she could lead her people as she had all the necessary capabilities for it. She participated in different meetings and yet was never really heard or seriously noticed by her party's leadership. “It was during this time that I started to question my own capabilities,” remembers Rukkaya: “The problem surfaced in political meetings and also in my efforts to reach the media.”

Rukkaya was then invited by SFCG to participate in a training of Effective Media Messaging, held as part of its “Strengthening Women Parliamentarians of Pakistan for Effective Government” project. She found the training on media messaging fruitful and continued with the sessions. She tried to test the lessons on a few media persons but the response was even more discouraging. “I was convinced that it was never going to happen, and I almost gave up but one message of the training was to carry on and be persistent in my messaging,” she recalls.

Sharing an example as to how the training changed her life and career, Rukkaya recalls: “After the massacre in Hazara Town of Quetta, where hundreds of people were martyred in bomb blasts, I was shaken. I desperately wanted to speak up for my people and present solutions to both media and my party leadership. After the massacre, President Asif Ali Zardari visited Quetta and I managed to assemble a delegation of likeminded political leaders to meet with the president on his visit. We were surrounded by the media. They were continuously questioning. The person heading the delegation tried to answer. However, the media did not seem to be satisfied with those answers. In that moment, all the techniques I had learnt in Effective Media Messaging Training Workshop came into my mind. My courage emerged, and I started talking. Suddenly I was getting heard. I was the most prominent person in the crowd. That was shocking even for me but then I handled the whole situation very technically, applying all the tactics I was taught that could bridge the gap between media and a politician. The next thing I knew, I was leading my delegation and discussing the whole situation with the President of Pakistan!”

Rukkaya is currently a member Provincial Assembly of Balochistan and a prominent leading politician in Balochistan, her efforts and services are now always given coverage by the media. “In fact, now I feel more comfortable to communicate with the media and they feel the same,” she says.