

Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs: Capacity Building of Paralegals

STORIES FROM RURAL PAKISTAN



April 2017

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Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs:
Capacity Building of Paralegals

STORIES FROM RURAL PAKISTAN

April 2017

OUR SOCIAL MOBILISATION OUTREACH*

397,076

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Women COs: 191,170

6,745,144

ORGANISED HOUSEHOLDS

6,936,905

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION MEMBERS

Women CO Members: 3,510,270

125

DISTRICTS + FATA/FRS WITH RSP PRESENCE

3,870

RURAL UNION COUNCILS WITH RSP PRESENCE

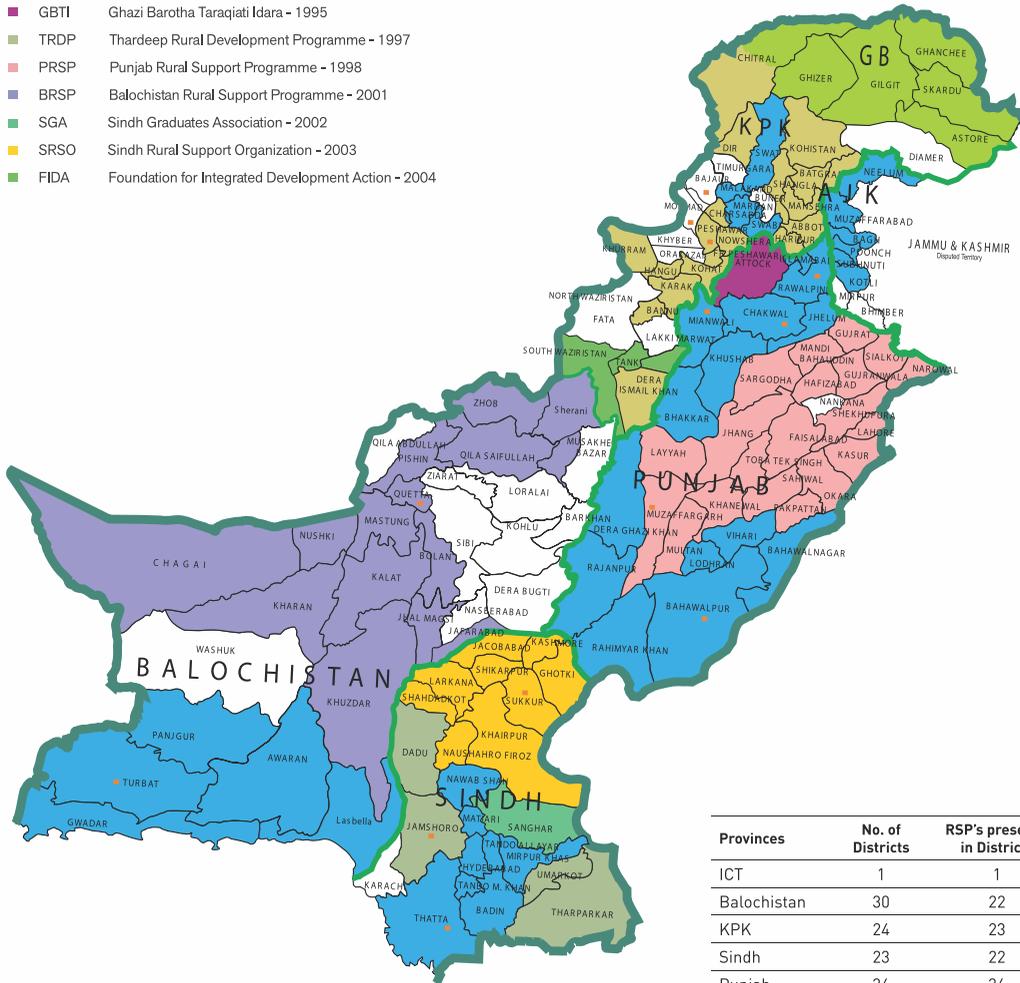
1,334

LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS (347 WOMEN ONLY LSOs)

*DATA AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 2016

The Outreach of the Rural Support Programmes Across Pakistan

- AKRSP Aga Khan Rural Support Programme - 1982
- SRSP Sarhad Rural Support Programme - 1989
- NRSP National Rural Support Programme - 1992
- IRM Institute of Rural Management - 1993
- GBTI Ghazi Barotha Taraqati Idara - 1995
- TRDP Thardeep Rural Development Programme - 1997
- PRSP Punjab Rural Support Programme - 1998
- BRSP Balochistan Rural Support Programme - 2001
- SGA Sindh Graduates Association - 2002
- SRSO Sindh Rural Support Organization - 2003
- FIDA Foundation for Integrated Development Action - 2004



Provinces	No. of Districts	RSP's presence in Districts
ICT	1	1
Balochistan	30	22
KPK	24	23
Sindh	23	22
Punjab	36	36
AJK	10	10
GB	7	6
FATA/FRs	13	5
Total	144	125

RSPs are present in 125 districts including 5 FATA/FR Agencies.



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Preface

The Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) extends its deepest appreciation to all those who provided the opportunity to document these success stories. We acknowledge with much appreciation the crucial role of the staff of 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs: Capacity Building of Paralegals' project to identify these stories from the field. It is through their hard work and dedication that the intervention of the project is visible on the ground and recorded in this document.

We also extend our gratitude to the higher management and focal persons of National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) for their support to the Head Paralegals, Community Based Paralegals, District Programme Officer, and Field Unit in charge. We would specially like to thank the members and leaders of the community institutions: the Community Organisations (COs), Village Organisations (VOs), Local Support Organisations (LSOs), for their valuable time to participate in interviews. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Muhammad Faseeh Jameel and Mr. Muhammad Saqlain (Capacity Building Officer) for their continuous support and guidance to the Community Based Paralegals and community members.

Lastly, we are grateful to Open Society Foundations (OSF) for their continued financial and technical support in the implementation of this project.

Sadaf Dar

Programme Officer Gender and Development,
Rural Support Programmes Network,
Islamabad, Pakistan.

About RSPN

The Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) is the largest development network of Pakistan, with an outreach to over 43 million rural people.. It consists of 11 member Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) that espouse a common approach to Community-Driven Development (CCD): social mobilisation. RSPN is the strategic platform for the RSPs with expertise in policy advocacy, grant management, networking, monitoring and evaluation, gender mainstreaming, knowledge management, communication, renewable energy and social sector (health, education, and sanitation) programming and implementation. The RSPN and the RSPs have adopted a three-tiered approach to social mobilisation. At the first tier, rural households living in a close proximity are organised into Community Organisations (COs) at the neighbourhood level, which amount to 397,076 with a membership of 6,936,905 members, covering a population of 43.2 million. At the second tier, the COs are federated at the village level into Village Organisations (VOs), while the third tier involves federation of VOs into Local Support Organisations (LSOs) at the the Union Council (UC) level. There are currently 1,128 LSOs across Pakistan, and in several areas these organised communities have started to federate even further into LSO Networks at the district level. As of September 2016, RSPs have a presence in 3,870 UCs in 125 districts and five regions of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

About Open Society Foundations (OSF)

The Open Society Foundations works to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people. The organisation seeks to strengthen the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and a diversity of opinions; democratically elected governments; and a civil society that helps keep government power in check. OSF helps to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. They implement initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. OSF builds alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption, and freedom of information. Working in every part of the world, the OSF places a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities.

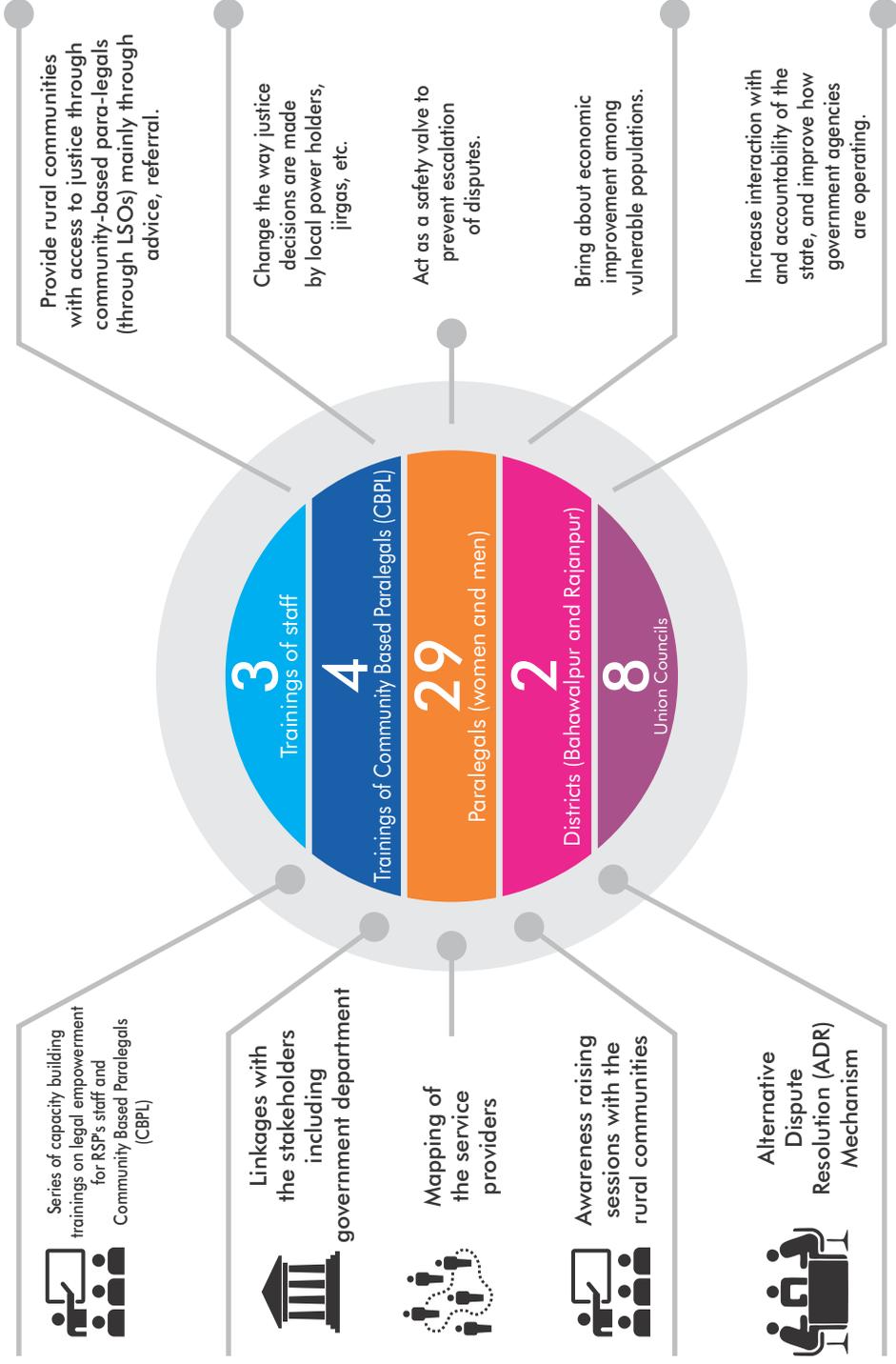
About the Project

The Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and Open Society Foundations (OSF) collaborated to launch a project, 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs: Capacity Building of Paralegals' for the period of one year. This is a pilot project that is implemented in eight UCs of two districts, Bahawalpur and Rajanpur, through National Rural Support Programmes (NRSP). The project aims at building capacity of the staff of RSPs and community members including women and men to work as paralegals in rural communities.

RSPs adopted a model of integrating legal services into its broader work with communities. The model RSPs have developed combines community-based volunteer paralegals, already embedded in and committed to help their communities, backstopped and supported by Social Organizer, and a lawyer. Together the teams help resolve women and men's problems through legal and procedural information, referral, assistance, mediation, negotiation and in rare cases litigation.

The project has three components, all focusing on building a nationwide network of basic legal services and positioning the RSPN as a central player in such a network. In the first component, it describes key steps to build the capacity of RSPs' staff and communities on legal empowerment as paralegals with technical support from OSF. RSPN in the second component will support training for a cadre of lead trainers to be employed across the country in a number of programmes. The third component comprises research on cost benefit analysis of the basic legal services provided by the community based paralegals. The broader objective of the project is to facilitate rural women and men in addressing legal issues through community paralegals.

Programme Intervention Outline



About the Success Stories

These success stories provides a glimpse into the lives of some of the rural communities especially women and girls and other vulnerable groups that were positively affected by “Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs and capacity building of paralegals”. For this is something that cannot be gauged through statistical reports and evaluations. Project benefits converged around two key types; in terms of benefits for the individual community member, and secondly in terms of improvement at community level. Subsequently, following success stories have been divided into these two broad categories. In addition to this, success stories were taken from the intervened districts of Punjab which include Bhawalpur and Rajanpur.



Mukhtar Bibi's story

Breaking the cycle: free from the tradition of child marriage

Mukhtar Bibi, a 30 year old woman, was born and raised in Union Council Tatar Wala, District Rajanpur of southern Punjab. She has four daughters and her husband works as a barber to make ends meet. The tradition of child marriage has been prevalent in their family for as long as she can remember. She explained the custom by stating *“I got married when I was 15 years old. My mother was married when she was 13 years old. Before I met Ruqqaiya Bibi (the village para-legal) and started visiting the LSO, I did not even know that child marriage was illegal. I did not know the health risks it involves for both girls and boys. It was normal for us and our way of life.”*

Two years ago her husband and other family members suggested that Mukhtar Bibi's daughter be married at the age of fifteen. She knew in that moment that she had to do something. She decided to stand up against the tradition of child marriage and break the vicious cycle.

With tears in her eyes she narrated *“My daughter was studying in 7th grade and her father suggested that we stop her education and get her married. I told him I would not allow her to go through the same thing I did as a young girl, who was married off. She must study and make a better future for herself.”*

Ruqqaiya Bibi, the President of LSO Dua, Tatar Wala and a community paralegal assisted Mukhtar Bibi in ensuring that her daughter can continue her

education and is not married at such a young age. Upon enquiring how she managed to make Mukhtar Bibi's husband change his mind, Ruqqaiya Bibi stated, *"I arranged a meeting with him. Initially he wasn't listening to me and communicated to me that it was his daughter and he had a right to make decisions regarding her life. I informed him that there is a law against child marriage that forbids him to arrange a marriage for his daughter before she is 18 years of age. I told him that if this marriage ceremony takes place, I will call the police on the number '15'(police) and they will arrest the Maulvi and anyone else involved in the child marriage. Hearing this he backed off and started asking me questions about the law. I spent a lot of time explaining the law against child marriage to him and helped him understand that it is important to educate our daughters. They can change the future of our society."*

Today Mukhtar Bibi's daughter is studying in 9th grade and wants to go to college after she finishes school. She is in no rush to get married and says it is education that will ensure a bright future for herself and her family.

Mukhtar Bibi is proud to be the first woman in her family who stood up against an age old tradition and is a staunch pillar of support for her daughter and promises to support her future education.

"I am glad that I became a CO member and met Ruqqaiya Baji at the LSO office. Her advice helped me make a decision that will give my daughter a bright future, free from the clutches of oppression and male dominance."



Shahida Bibi's story

Confronting Domestic Violence

Shahida Bibi, aged 30, lives with her husband and three children in Tehsil Jampur, Union Council Tatar Wala, District Rajanpur. She is a house wife and her husband is a farmer. She narrated her story by stating *“My husband used to beat me up over petty issues since the day we got married. I kept enduring it thinking it is my duty as a wife to be patient and understanding as he is the breadwinner for our family.”*

Ruqqaiya Bibi, President LSO Dua, Union Council Tatar Wala and a community paralegal added:

“Once he hit her over something as petty as giving him breakfast five minutes late. That is when she came to the LSO for advice. I knew I had to help her otherwise her cycle of abuse would continue forever. I filled a case intake form for her and took a copy of her NIC (national identity card), as is our practice for all cases. I then decided I would arrange a meeting with her husband.”

Community Paralegal Ruqqaiya Bibi met with Shahida Bibi's husband and explained the law against Domestic Violence in Pakistan to him.

“I emphasized on “THE PUNJAB PROTECTION OF WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE ACT 2016” in order to convince him that there is a law especially applicable in Punjab that forbids him from committing domestic violence”, Ruqqaiya exclaimed. “I think I was able to convince him because he came back

to see me two days later and assured me that he would never hit his wife again, now that he was aware of the law”, she gleefully added.

Shahida Bibi's husband never raised his hand on her after his meeting with Paralegal Ruqqaiya Bibi.

“My life has changed and I know where to go for help if he ever raises his hand again on me. I now know there is a law protecting me against such violence and I feel protected”, said Shahida Bibi, with a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye.

This story is a testimony to the work the community paralegals are doing for women, by giving them the gift of knowledge and awareness and the ability to stand up for their rights.



Fayyaz Ahmed's love story

His journey to his bride

Fayyaz Ahmed, a 22-year-old boy, was born and raised in Tehsil Rojhan, Union Council Umar Kot, Rajanpur District. Ten years ago his elder sister got married and his brother in law's sister was promised to him in marriage. Years passed and when it was time for his marriage his brother in law and their family refused to carry out their part of the agreement. Fayyaz and his fiancé were deeply in love and had thought of marrying each other for as long as they could remember.

"They said they would let us get married if I arranged a Prado car and a plot for them. I am a poor man, a kisaan (peasant). I cannot afford a car. Why should I have to give them fancy things in order to marry my fiancé? We are both adults and wanted to get married to each other," Fayyaz explained.

When things started looking hopeless Fayyaz contacted community paralegal Mohammad Ajmal who did everything in his power to help Fayyaz and managed to convince the girl's family.

On enquiring about how he convinced the girl's family Mohammad Ajmal stated *"I arranged several meetings with the girl's family. I explained to them that it is the girl's legal right to marry the person of her choice as she is now 18 years old. I reassured them that she would be very happy and well taken care of by Fayyaz. Eventually they decided to give in because they realized they could not legally force her to marry someone else."*

Fayyaz Ahmad and his bride have now been happily married for 6 months. They are thankful to community paralegal Mohammad Ajmal for his help.

“We feel free now and live a peaceful life full of love and joy”, stated Fayyaz Ahmad, smiling from ear to ear.



Arifa Bibi's story

Claiming her rights as a citizen of Pakistan

Arifa Bibi, aged 33, is a house wife in Jampur Tehsil, Tatar Wala Union Council, Rajanpur District. This story of her courage and persistence involves her fighting for the right of her family to receive income support from the government, a right that many families that fall under the low income bracket are entitled to, but never avail, out of sheer unawareness or due to a lack of initiative and a fear of intimidation by government officials.

Arifa Bibi and her husband were registered under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) but never received the amount they were promised. As years passed they gave up hope.

"We told ourselves this is just one of those things that the government promises on paper but doesn't actually provide. We didn't have it in us to fight. We are poor people, we can't fight the system and go talk to government officials", she explained tearfully.

Ruqqaiya Bibi, President of LSO Dua, Tatar Wala and a community paralegal heard of Arifa Bibi's plight and decided to reach out to her and her family.

"I felt extremely sad to see the kind of poverty they were living in. They had no money to feed their kids and buy them clothes. I thought to myself, this amount from BISP will make a huge difference to their life and it is their legal right. I must help them", explained Ruqqaiya Bibi.

The next day Arifa Bibi returned to the LSO office with her husband and they both presented their NIC's to the community paralegal, Ruqqaiya Bibi, who filled their case intake form and officially registered their case. She then accompanied them to the BISP office and spoke to a government official there regarding their case.

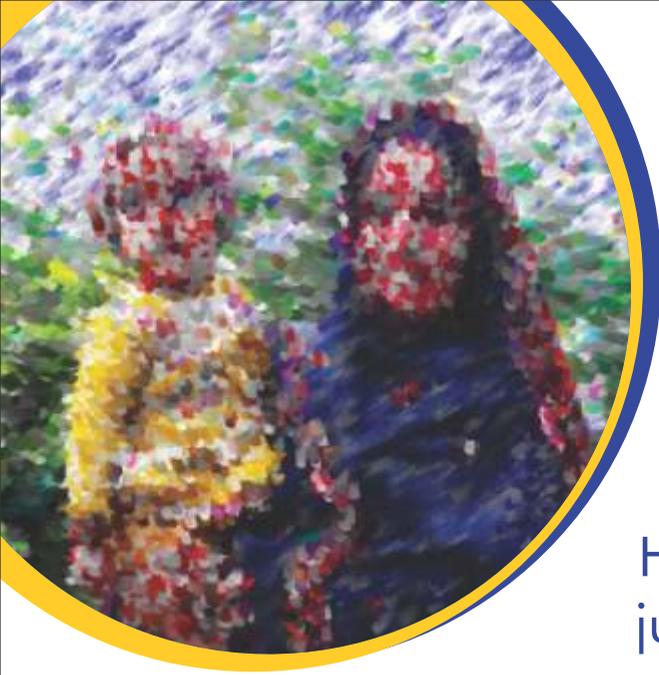
The officials at BISP were acquainted with Ruqqaiya Bibi due to her frequent visits and her position as the community paralegal under the legal empowerment project.

The problem was a simple one. Arifa Bibi's generated PIN was not working due to a technical failure. The BISP officials double checked their documents and renewed the PIN number.

Today Arifa Bibi and her family receive Rs. 4500 from the Benazir Income Support Programme, every quarter.

"I wish I had become a CO member earlier and come to the LSO with my problem. It was such a simple thing. Ruqqaiya Bibi has taught me that all one needs to do is to take the first step and the problem becomes small on its own. I am so glad I took that first step", Arifa Bibi gleefully informed us.

This case is a perfect example of how the paralegal model is effective in providing community members encouragement and support to take that first step towards justice. It is this kind of problem solving that stems from the heart of the community that is the essence of the Legal Empowerment Project.



Naseem Bibi: A trendsetter

Her struggle to achieve justice for her daughter

For Naseem Bibi, July 8th 2016 was an unfortunate day. It was the day her daughter arrived on her doorstep, sobbing uncontrollably. She informed her parents that her husband had married another woman without her permission and had told her that there was no place for her and their three children in his home anymore.

“We felt like our world had collapsed. What would my daughter do now? She has three children and no means of earning a livelihood for them”, explained a tearful Naseem Bibi.

Naseem Bibi's daughter's husband sent her divorce papers a few days later. He did not provide her the Haq Mahr (dower amount owed to the wife that is stipulated in the nikkah nama-marriage contract) and refused to hand over possession of five acres of land gifted to his wife by her parents on her wedding day. He claimed the land belonged to him now, as compensation for of all the years he provided for their daughter.

“All she had was some land in her name and that too was snatched away by her husband. We gave her money for dowry which he also kept and refused to give her. He literally put her and their children out on the street with no means to survive”, explained Naseem Bibi.

Naseem Bibi and her husband went to the local Jirga/ Sardars to ask for justice for their daughter, but to no avail. Their daughter's influential husband had

connections and claimed that he had done nothing wrong by availing his Islamic right to a second marriage.

“We kept screaming for justice but the Jirga members decided in his favour. His personal equation with the members of the Jirga helped him and we were left feeling hopeless”! Naseem Bibi exclaimed.

“That is when they came to me, hopeless and dejected”, adds Ruqqaiya Bibi, a Community Paralegal in LSO DUA, Tehsil Jampur, Tatar Wala Union Council, District Rajanpur

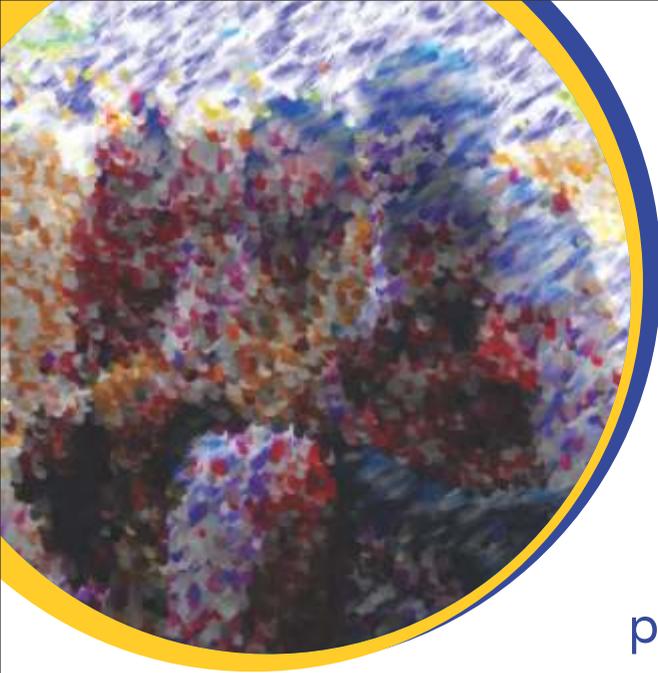
Ruqqaiya Bibi explained the law on second marriage to Naseem Bibi and encouraged them to take the case to a lawyer. She informed them that their daughter's ex-husband owed a legal obligation to their daughter to ask for her permission before his second marriage. Furthermore, even if the divorce is final, he must give her the Haq Mahr. (Dower amount owed to the wife that is stipulated in the nikkah nama).

“They had exhausted all other options and after conducting several meetings with Naseem's daughter's ex-husband I knew that going to court for her legal right to Haq Mahr was the only option. The girl didn't want to live with him after everything he had done anyway. Furthermore she needed the land back in order to cultivate as a means of livelihood for herself and her children. The land is in her name so there was no reason for her husband to take possession of it”, explained Ruqqaiya Bibi.

The case of Naseem Bibi's daughter was the first case from the UC Tatar Wala to ever go to court. It set a precedent and the community realized that they too could knock on the door of our justice system and fight for their rights.

“Ruqqaiya Bibi gave us the strength to not give up and keep fighting. She introduced us to a lawyer who is fighting our case for free. We have had a few hearings in court and are hopeful that we will get justice soon. We feel empowered because we were the first to surpass the Jirga system and go to court. Today people look up to us for having the strength to do that. We could never have done it had we not come to the LSO and been guided by Ruqqaiya Bibi in the right direction”, a visibly confident Naseem Bibi stated.

Many other community households facing similar legal issues have followed suit and gone to court as a result of Naseem Bibi's family's inspirational story of struggle and resilience.



Abid Hussain's story

Team work by the community paralegals of LSO DUA

Abid Hussain is 35 years old and lives in Tehsil Jampur, Union Council Tatar Wala, Rajanpur District with his wife and five children. Abid Hussain used to be a successful tailor in his village before he was paralyzed one fine day. He could never walk again.

"I don't know what disease I have. Some doctors say I have Polio. Others say I had a stroke resulting in paralysis. All I know is that I could never walk again after that unfortunate day. Because I am paralyzed from the waist below I cannot use the sewing machine anymore and my work as a tailor has ended", he tearfully explained.

Abid Hussain contacted Amir Baksh, a community paralegal in LSO Dua and explained his situation to him. Amir Baksh promised to help him.

"He came to me on 12th December; 2016. I took him to meet the Sardar of our area who is also a Member of the Provincial Assembly. He set up a tea stall for Abid Hussain and gave him Rs. 15,000 as well. Now he earns his livelihood from this tea stall", stated community paralegal Amir Baksh.

"I am thankful for the tea stall but I am not making enough money to support my family. Many competing tea vendors have set up stalls in the same area and my earnings have significantly gone down. I don't know what to do", a dejected Abid Hussain explained.

Ruqqaiya Bibi, President of LSO Dua and a community paralegal listened to Abid Hussain narrate his story, piped in and exclaimed *“I can speak to the milkmen of the area and set up a deal between them and Abid Hussain. They can give him milk to sell on his tea stall. He can also make yogurt and sell that too. That should increase his earnings. What do you think Amir Baksh?”* What about you Abid”?

“That is a great idea”, exclaimed community paralegal Amir Bakh.

Abid Hussain, who was listening to paralegals Amir Baksh and Ruqqaiya Bibi trying to come up with a solution to help him, looked at them with hope, admiration, and gratitude in his eyes.

“Yes that would be great Ruqqaiya Baji”, he happily replied.

Community Paralegals Ruqqaiya Bibi and Amir Baksh worked together to ensure that Abid Hussain is provided milk to sell at his stall. His earnings significantly increased as a result of this deal with the milkmen of the area.

This case is a testimony to the way community paralegals in Rajanpur work together as a team in order to bring a positive change in the community.

Abid Hussain could not fight his paralysis but he is a winner today because he did not let circumstances prevent him from moving forward in life. He continues to visit the LSO regularly to express his gratitude for Ruqqaiya Bibi and Amir Baksh who continue to be strong pillars of encouragement and support for him.



Saeeda Bibi's granddaughter's story

The power of women joining hands to save an innocent life

Saeeda Bibi, aged 50, was born and raised in Tehsil Rojhan, Union Council Umar Kot, Rajanpur District. A year ago she was in the happiest phase of her life. Saeeda Bibi's granddaughter had recently been engaged to a well-settled man, and she was busy preparing for their beloved grand daughter's wedding. She knew her granddaughter was very happy with the union and would have a happy married life.

One unfortunate evening changed all of the above. A young man forcibly entered Saeeda Bibi's house one night. He saw their granddaughter sleeping and before he could do anything, Saeeda Bibi and her daughter yelled for help and everyone from the Mohalla gathered around their house. The young man got startled and ran out of the main door. The community members saw him leave the house and that is when the rumours began.

"That boy is the son of a family that we have had a feud with. He did this to defame us and our honour and take revenge from our family. He knew my granddaughter was about to get married and wanted to bestow dishonour upon us by entering her room late at night and implying that something took place", Saeeda Bibi explained.

Soon after, the young man demanded that her granddaughter be married to him instead. He went to the local Sardar and claimed that the girl belonged to him now.

“We went to the local Sardars and pleaded our case. We tried to explain that my granddaughter is engaged to another man and her heart lies there. How can we just marry her off to this man who had conspired to achieve just that? This was all a plot. But they did not listen. They informed us that the age old tradition demands that the girl be married to him since he was a 'Na Mehram' and had entered her room late night. If we don't do this they would follow the tradition of Karo Kari and my granddaughter would lose her life. There was no other alternative given to us by the local Sardars”, she tearfully explained.

The tradition of Karo Kari (honor killing) is related to the concept of “honour”. It is an act of murder, usually performed by relatives or family members of a woman/man's actions are perceived or in fact are “immoral” and “dishonourable “. Literally, Karo means black man, and Kari means black woman; the term means they have blackened themselves by committing this sin, dishonouring the family.

A dejected Saeeda Bibi then knocked on the LSO's door for help. **Jameela Bibi, President of LSO Umar Kot and a community paralegal** decided that she would help Saeeda Bibi save her granddaughter's life.

“I went to the local Sardar and met him every single day for ten days. I would also go to every single jirga sitting and voice my opinion for everyone to hear. I informed the local Sardar that there is a law against honour killing and forced marriages and that I would help Saeeda take this matter to court”, exclaimed Jameela Bibi.

Jameela Bibi also consulted a lawyer in this matter and took his opinion. Saeeda Bibi and Jameela Bibi had decided that they would fight till the end. They would take the matter to court with the help of their lawyer, if need be.

“We were preparing to take the matter to court but then I had an idea. I went and met the local Sardar who is also member of the Punjab Provincial Assembly. I informed him that Shahbaz Sharif (Chief Minister Punjab) had started a new programme that specifically aimed at eradicating the age old evils of Honour Killing and Forced Marriages. I informed him that I was associated with this programme and I would file an FIR (First Information Report – to the police) in the local police station as a result of this new law. Elections were close by and I noticed a change in his attitude. He suddenly started listening to me and started inviting me for meetings to reach an amicable solution between both parties”, explained a gleeful Jameela Bibi.

Eventually the case was resolved. Saeeda Bibi had to pay a sum of money in exchange for her granddaughter's freedom, as decided by the local Sardar. However she was free to marry the man of her choice. Today she is married to the young man she was initially engaged to and is happy that the nightmare is over.

"Jameela Bibi showed immense courage and took on the local Sardari system for us. We would never have been able to do it without her. We owe our granddaughter's life to her. Today she is happily married and it heartens me to see her happy and flourishing. Jameela Bibi's persistence and hard work paid off and she was our pillar of strength during this entire ordeal", explained a smiling Saeeda Bibi as she held Jameela Bibi's hand in gratitude.

This story bears testimony to the significant impact the 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment' project has had in empowering women and freeing them from the shackles of age old cruel and oppressive traditions.



Parveen Bibi's Story

A wife's right to maintenance

Parveen Bibi is 32 years old and lives with her two children (two and five years old) and husband in Tehsil Jampur, Union Council Tatar Wala, District Rajanpur. Her husband is a milkman. He used to provide for the household needs for the first six years of the marriage and there were no problems in Parveen's married life. One fine day her husband declared that he didn't have any money to give her to manage household expenses.

"For about five months I managed to buy food for everyone and buy the children milk and clothes from my savings. I had saved this money from the cash my parents gave me the day I got married. I am an illiterate woman and have no means to earn a livelihood. My husband doesn't let me go out to work in the fields and was not providing for us either. I was stuck and was worried that my children would starve to death", she tearfully narrated.

Parveen Bibi tried to convince her husband several times regarding how he needed to provide for the children.

"I begged and pleaded with him but he just stopped giving me any money. I know he was still making money as a milkman because he was selling milk every day. He started buying cigarettes and perfume and other things from his earnings. Things he never bought before. Those things are not a necessity when your children have no food to eat", she exclaimed.

“Finally I decided to come to the LSO for help and confided in Ruqqaiya Baji for help”, she narrated.

Ruqqaiya Bibi, President of LSO Dua, Tatar Wala and a community paralegal met with Parveen Bibi's husband. She explained to him that providing basic necessities for his wife and children is not a matter of choice, but a legal obligation.

“I informed him that if he doesn't start providing expenses for his wife, we would have to go to court. I told him it is her right to receive expenses from him and not a favour that he will be doing her. Many people in our community don't fear moral or social disapproval but they all fear the law. That is what worked in this case too” Ruqqaiya Bibi stated.

After a brief pause she added *“I also pacified him and heard his version about how everything is so expensive these days. I felt I needed to do that so he knows I am not taking sides, but just want the best for his family. I then explained to him that he has to provide for his own wife and children as he is the head of the family. It is important to not be confrontational in some cases but reach a solution among the parties themselves”.*

It has been a year since this meeting and Parveen Bibi's husband has been regularly providing for his wife and children.

“He even gets them “cerelac “boxes now. The same man who wouldn't give me money for their clothes now brings them toys and sweets too. I am very happy that he has realized his duty towards his family”, exclaimed a beaming Parveen Bibi.

This story is a perfect example of how the 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment' Project's community paralegal model is an effective approach in resolving disputes. The solution lies within the parties and all they need is a nudge in the right direction. This kind of problem solving that stems from the heart of the community is the essence of this project.



Asia Bibi's story

A mother's fight for her family

Asia Bibi, aged 30, was born and raised in Tehsil Rojhan, Union Council Umar Kot, Rajanpur District. She was blessed with two daughters and was happily married until last year, when her husband started visiting Karachi frequently without giving her much of an explanation as to the purpose of these trips.

One fine day he came home and informed her that he had married another woman in Karachi and he would like Asia Bibi and her daughters to leave his home as he would like to bring his second wife to Rajanpur.

"The ground slipped from under my feet. I was in shock. When I protested and tried to fight him he physically pushed me and our daughters out of the house and onto the road. I had no option but go to my brother's house", explained a tearful Asia Bibi.

Asia Bibi's father-in-law had gifted her piece of land during her marriage .She used this land to cultivate and earn a livelihood for her daughters and herself. After her husband forced her to leave their matrimonial home he also took physical possession of the land, claiming it belonged to him and he needed it to earn a living for himself and his new wife.

"I was helpless and didn't know what to do and who to turn to. That is when my brother suggested I come to the LSO and speak to Jameela Bibi", explained Asia Bibi.

Asia Bibi met Jameela Bibi, President LSO Umar Kot and a community Paralegal. Jameela Bibi registered her case by filling a case intake form and keeping a copy of her National Identity Card (as is the protocol for all cases).

“I tried to meet her husband and sort out the issue. I explained the law on second marriages and maintenance to him. But he told me he would not cooperate under any circumstances. I knew I had to help her for the sake of her two young daughters!” exclaimed Jameela Bibi.

Asia Bibi's brother, Ahmad, encouraged his sister to fight for her right and not give up. He supported her despite the immense financial burden on him as a result of Asia Bibi and her daughters residing in his home.

“I told her that I would support her for as long as the fight continues. I told her that if her ex-husband does not hand over possession of her land and pay maintenance for the children, then we must take this issue to court. I told her to not be afraid”, added Ahmad.

Asia Bibi's case is currently in court. She found the courage to knock on the door of the justice system and fight for her right to her land and maintenance for her children.

“If Jameela Bibi hadn't supported us and given us strength and courage we would never have been able to do it. Once I had made up my mind, it was Jameela who put me in touch with a lawyer who is fighting my case for free. I am sure I will get justice for myself and my daughters”, explained a resilient Asia Bibi.

This case is a testament to the impact the *“Strengthening Legal Empowerment”* project has had in enabling women like Asia Bibi to understand their rights and pursue justice.



Amna's Story

A Young girl's struggle for her dues

Amna is 24 years old and lives in (village) Chak No.26 BC Tehsil, District Bahawalpur. In December 2015, Amna started working as a substitute teacher in a government school.

Her arrangement with the school management entailed her salary being deposited in the bank account of the teacher she was substituting for. This was because Amna was not allotted an appointment letter and hence, could not open an account in the school's registered treasury in Punjab Bank. Amna initially agreed to this arrangement because the teacher she was replacing was a friend of hers and she was assured by both her and the school management that her pay would be regularly handed to her.

Amna fulfilled her duties as a teacher whole heartedly but didn't receive any payment for three months. She enquired from her friend (the teacher) if the salary had been deposited in her account and could be handed to her as per the initial agreement. Her friend denied any payment had been made into her account by the school. Amna took her friend's word and kept waiting patiently.

"I believed my friend. I had joined the school as my friend's substitute on her request so I thought she must be telling the truth. I didn't think she could betray me." So I kept waiting, explained Amna.

Another nine months went by. Amna had now been teaching from December 2015 till December 2016 and wasn't paid her salary. She decided to reach out to Yasmin Rafique, a paralegal of LSO Kehkashan 24 BC.

Yasmin took her to the Director of the school and explained Amna's predicament to him. He immediately showed willingness to rectify the issue and gave his secretary instructions to issue an appointment letter to Amna so her bank account with the school could be opened and authorized.

"From here began a game of cat and mouse. When we went to the Director's secretary he informed us that the letter needed the Director's signature and he had left the office. We returned the next day but got the same answer. Finally I approached another gentleman in the school's management and asked him to speak to the Director. I was adamant to get Amna her salary. She had worked hard for a year and not got a single penny!" exclaimed Yasmin Bibi.

The next day Amna's appointment letter was signed by the Director and she was told to go to Punjab Bank and open her Personal Salary Account to properly receive her pay.

"Amna was ecstatic and I was happy that she got her fair due. I also spoke to her friend; the teacher, who had in fact received a two-month salary for the time that Amna had been substituting for her but had hid it from Amna. I explained to her how this was morally and legally wrong and asked her to return this money to Amna because she was entitled to it because of her hard work", explained Yasmin Bibi.

"I was hesitant at first to approach the school management. I wasn't used to raising my voice against injustice and didn't think I had the courage to do it. But Yasmin Baji helped me and was a pillar of strength for me. I now realize that I did the right thing by fighting for my right and am happy to be working as a successful teacher that gets her fair due. All thanks to Yasmin Baji", stated a smiling Amna.

Amna continues to teach in the same school and receives her salary regularly in her school authorized bank account now. *"I was scared to take that first step. Once I did that I realized the solution was there all long",* said a confident looking Amna.

This case is a perfect example of how sometimes all an individual needs is support to take that first step towards justice. This is the strength of the community paralegal program. It ensures that a solution comes from the client by empowering them through providing validation, assistance and encouragement.



Naeema's Story

Community Paralegals join forces to free Naeema from the shackles of Domestic Violence

Naeema Akhter, aged 33, lives with her husband and five children in Chak No.23 BC Tehsil, District Bahawalpur. Her husband Ghulam Hussain is a labourer and worked on a daily wage basis, whenever he could find work. Due to this, his income was not steady and Naeema worked as a beautician and tailor to make ends meet. Ghulam Hussain also suffered from drug addiction and spent most of his earnings feeding his addiction.

Despite their cumbersome financial situation Ghulam Hussain did not approve of Naeema working as a beautician and this was the source of many of their arguments. One such argument took place on 11th August, 2016 and resulted in Ghulam Hussain being physically violent towards his wife Naeema. The disagreement resulted in Ghulam Hussain throwing her out of the house along with the children and telling her to go to her parent's house and wait for the divorce papers.

"I came home a little late that day because of my work at the salon. He didn't like that and started accusing me of cheating on him and insisted I was with another man. I couldn't stand this kind of character assassination and told him he was wrong. This resulted in him physically assaulting me and throwing me and the children out of the house. I had no choice but to go to my parent's house." explained a tearful Naeema.

Naeema's parents could not bear the financial burden of her five children and things started becoming very difficult. Naeema had heard about

Paralegal Yasmeen Rafique as she was also a resident of the same village. She decided to approach her with the problem.

Paralegal Yasmin reported the case to LSO Kehkashan 24 BC. The matter was then brought to the LSO President who, with the help of a male paralegal and the Capacity Building Officer of NRSP, arranged a meeting with Ghulam Hussain. Together they counselled Ghulam Hussain regarding his role and duties as a father and husband. They also informed him of the laws regarding domestic violence and maintenance. He was made aware of the fact that he was obligated to pay maintenance for his wife and children even if he gets a divorce.

Soon after the meeting Naeema's husband Ghulam Hussain approached her and asked for forgiveness. She and her children returned home on the 21st of September, 2016 and there has not been an incidence of physical abuse since.

"He never raised his hand on me again. I am so glad that there is an LSO close to my mohalla and I could seek help. Its presence changed my life and the future of my children", stated a smiling Naeema.

This story is a testimony to the community paralegals empowering women by creating awareness amongst them regarding their legal rights and providing them with the tools and support needed to fight for these rights.



Shamo Devi's Story

Rights of religious minorities in Pakistan

Shamo Devi, a Hindu woman, and her husband are residents of village Chak No. 18 BC Tehsil, District Bahawalpur. As legal awareness grew in their Mohalla they realized they must have National Identity Cards (NIC) as lawful citizens of Pakistan. Thus, Shamo Devi and her husband went to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) office to the needful to obtain their NICs. They were asked by the representative to hand him their marriage certificate i.e. a Nikah Nama (Muslim marriage certificate). They informed him that they did not possess a Nikah Nama because they belong to the Johar Lal Hindu Caste.

“He responded with a lot of hostility and said 'then there is nothing I can do for you”. We felt humiliated and left the office confused and dejected”, explained Shamo Devi.

Shamo Devi had heard of LSO Kehkashan during community awareness sessions conducted by NRSP staff in the area and decided to approach them for help and guidance. Paralegal Qazi Shahzad Ahmad registered their case and also directed them to the Capacity Building Officer (CBO).

“We were explained by the CBO's Faseeh Sahab that we need to provide solemn affirmation of our marriage and get an affidavit attested from the Oath Commissioner, confirming the same. We got the affidavit and went back to NADRA office” stated Shamo Devi.

However Shamo Devi and her husband's NIC were still not issued. Subsequently, they launched a formal complaint with the Complaint Officer at NADRA who directed the matter to his Assistant Director. Finally, their documents were accepted by NADRA and they were allotted a two-week waiting period for their NICs to arrive.

“We were given guidance and strength by the community paralegal and CO, every step of the way. If they weren't standing by us like pillars of strength we would never have had the courage to stand up against this kind of discrimination and launch a formal complaint. We owe it to them”, stated a smiling Shamo Devi.

Shamo Devi and her husband's NIC cards arrived on June 30th 2016, exactly two weeks after they had lunched a formal complaint at the NADRA office.

This story is a perfect example of how the 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment' project focuses on solutions that are achievable by the client taking an initiative for his/her rights. All they need is support and a nudge in the right direction. This kind of problem solving that stems from the heart of the community is the essence of this project.



Faisal and Firdaus Bibi's Story

Fighting against Child Abuse

The 14 year old Faisal resides in Moza Miani, Tehsil, District Bahawalpur. He helps out at a car mechanic's shop and loves to spend his free time playing with his friends in the playground. On September 12th, 2016 he had an argument with another child in the playground. The child went home and informed his older cousin who arrived at the park and started physically assaulting Faisal.

Faisal was brutally attacked and arrived home with severe scars and bruises all over his body. His mother Firdaus Bibi, on witnessing her son's grave injuries, knew that something had gone terribly gone.

"I was horrified to see his condition. He was bleeding and had scars everywhere. I immediately took him with me and ran to LSO Miani office. I presented my son in front of the President and Manager of the LSO so they would witness his injuries first hand", explained Firdaus Bibi.

At LSO Miani, Firdaus Bibi's case was officially registered and handed to Community Paralegal, Muhammad Akhter. Mr Akhter jotted down the facts using the case intake form and took several pictures of Faisal's injuries, to keep as evidence. He subsequently advised Firdaus Bibi to go to the police station to report the matter to the Station House Officer (S.H.O) by launching a formal First Instance Report (FIR).

"I did not have the courage to go to the police station alone. I had never been there before. I told the paralegal that I am an illiterate widow and have no one to

support me. He gave me a lot of encouragement and informed me that he would accompany me to the police station”, stated Firdaus Bibi.

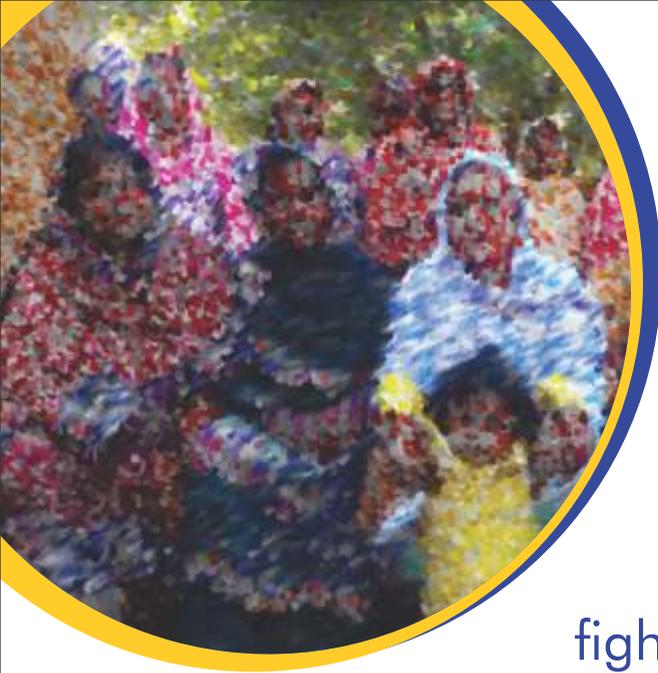
Community Paralegal, Muhammad Akhter, accompanied Firdaus Bibi and Faisal to the police station and reported the matter to the S.H.O. The S.H.O required a medical legal certificate and recommended a visit to the hospital to obtain the above. Firdaus Bibi and her paralegal attained the medical certificate and reported back to have the F.I.R registered.

“Our FIR was finally registered in the police station. The whole process was exhausting but the community paralegal was with us the whole time and that is why we were able to stay strong and get it done. In the end I felt empowered by the fact that I had taken the matter to the police and gotten an FIR registered”, exclaimed a smiling Firdaus Bibi.

Community Paralegal, Firdaus Akhter, and his wife Samina Bibi (political councilor of Moaza Miani) also arranged a meeting with the accused. They counselled him and his family members and explained the legal and social impact of his actions. Furthermore they emphasized on the concept of a community and brotherhood in order to instil a sense of responsibility and kinship within the accused. Soon after, the accused and his father apologized to Firdaus Bibi and the matter was resolved.

“People in our community don't view child abuse as a serious issue. They think children have no rights. After I filed an FIR they realized that there is law to protect children too. It created awareness. I am happy to have done that even though it was very difficult to see my child hurt. I feel like I have made a difference”, explained an earnest Firdaus Bibi.

Faisal and Firdaus Bibi's story of courage and bravery bears testimony to the impact of the 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment' project in bringing about a real change in the community.



Sheeba, Muhammad Zafar, Abdul Majeed and Muhammad Nawaz's story

Joining forces to fight for quality education

Sheeba is a resident of Moza Goth Lal Tehsil, District Bahawalpur. She was one of the three teachers at Government Girls High School Moza Goth Lal. Sheeba was a dedicated teacher at the school and went above and beyond her duties to ensure her availability for the students. This is because she realized that a school that has 164 students enrolled needed more than three teachers. She knew her work was valuable in this severely understaffed government school.

Three months ago Sheeba was transferred temporarily to the Government High School in Jhangi Wala on the recommendation of the Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Bahawalpur. She was informed that the transfer was temporary and she could return to the Government High School in Moza Goth after a month. However, the MPA changed and the new MPA insisted she continue to teach at Government High School Jhangi Wala for another month.

“Government High School Moza Goth was left with only two teachers. I wanted to go back and knew the students were suffering but my hands were tied” explained Sheeba.

Soon parents of the students of Government High School Moza Goth started realizing that their children's education was suffering due to the school being understaff. As a result, some parents namely Muhammad Zafar, Abdul Majeed and Muhammad Nawaz (decided to take action and registered a complaint in the LSO Mari Sheikh Shajra with the help of Community Paralegal Muhammad Saleem.

Paralegal, Muhammad Saleem wrote an application with the signatures of 10 residents of Moza Goth Lal, to the Executive District Officer (EDO) Education in Bahawalpur and waited for 10 days but there was no response. Subsequently he drafted another application and sent it to the District Monitoring Officer (DMO) in Bahawalpur. It met the same fate and received no response. Finally he submitted a third application to the District Coordination Officer (DCO) District Bahawalpur. There was still no response.

“The system had failed us. Our paralegal had tried every possible avenue and knocked on the door of every authority responsible. But nothing happened. Finally we decided we had no choice but to go to the media and create awareness regarding the issue of under staffed government schools with no quality education being provided”, stated Muhammad Nawaz.

Community Paralegal, Muhammad Saleem connected Muhammad Nawaz with a media person on Channel 24. On being questioned by the representatives of Channel 24 The Executive District Officer Education in Bahawalpur stated *“On the one hand I am being pressurized by the MPA and on the other hand I am being pressurized by the community people, media and the civil society, give me two days to solve your problem.”*

Two days later Sheeba was transferred back to Government High School, Moza Goth Lal along with another female teacher, to compensate for the academic loss of the students during the time that she was teaching in the other school.

Government Girls High School Moza Goth Lal currently has a staff of four teachers, including Ms Sheeba, who is happy to be reunited with her students. The parents and students are overjoyed to have her back and look forward to their children passing the final exams with flying colours.

“We are glad we approached the LSO with the problem. Nothing would have been possible without the consistent efforts of community paralegal Muhammad Saleem. It was due to his persistence that our voice was heard”, stated a smiling Muhammad Nawaz.

This case is a testament to the efforts of community paralegals working proactively in their own communities to identify and address collective needs like access to quality education for all.

Vision

Realising people's potential for social and economic development

Mission

Strengthen the Rural Support Programmes to foster institutions of the people



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