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LEGAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SOUTH PUNJAB: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS (2001-2020)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores action and projects undertaken by international development partners to operationalise the legal empowerment of women in South Punjab within a short of twenty years (2001-2020) on the one hand and on the other hand, it describes new issues and opportunities. Assessing the liberal feminist school of thought on intentions of bringing planned change through legal, institutional, and social interventions, the study places the historicity and theory behind the position of enhancing legal empowerment of women in South Punjab. To investigate how citizens envision empowerment and how they think the system is currently working against women in the ability to claim their legal rights, the study will use the tools of focus group discussions on participants involved in the program, and structured interviews of policymakers, planners, political leaders, and community representatives. The results have shown that although international development partners have made serious contributions to increasing the access that women have to legal aid, increased educational opportunities, improving economic prospects, socio-cultural norms of suppressing women, legal inequalities among genders, and political barriers are all seen to negate forward progress. The research gives a conclusion that the further empowerment and empowerment of women in legal and healthcare systems and stable assistance of development partners are the key to the enhancement of gender equality and the improvement of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 5 (Gender Equality) in South Punjab by 2030.

Introduction

Women empowerment can be described as an activity which involves influencing women to think of themselves and make their own choices. It also includes the right that they have to influence social change among themselves and fellow women.¹ Enhancement of women is very crucial in achieving sustainable development, enhancement of their political, social, economic, and health statuses as well as gaining freedom and independence. The social and physical development of countries and families depends heavily on empowering women. There is no reason why women should not develop their potentials, add their talents to the labor force and have happier, healthier children when they are allowed to lead well-rounded and safe lives. Women are in the middle of any development².

International donor agencies have also collaborated with governments and non-governmental organizations towards enhancing women rights and gender equality within the area. They

¹ Cornwall, Andrea. "Women's empowerment: What works?." *Journal of International Development* 28, no. 3 (2016): 342-359.

² Menon-Sen, Kalyani, and K. Seeta Prabhu. "The budget: a quick look through a 'Gender Lens'." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2001): 1164-1169.

have been giving technical and support services of building capacity and this has served to advance the capacity of these organizations towards gender equality and promoting women rights. But even after such great work by the international development partners, the women of South Punjab have so many challenges to their empowerment. These are cultural and societal norms, incomplete funding, and the lack of political will. As an example, cultural practices in the area continue to deprive women of education, health, and economic empowerment.

Moreover, several programs that have been managed by the international development partners have had their scope and duration restrictions thus affecting their sustainability and effectiveness. The meaning of empowerment may vary depending on the details related to society, nations and culture. The population in Pakistan 52 percent is women.³ Lots of problems in Pakistan are bothering the Pakistani women. Others are highly dangerous problems to women in Pakistan like violence against women and girls, ragging, so-called honour killing, acid attacks, domestic violence, forced marriage and the childhood marriage. Medical challenges are critical problems. However, various issues have afflicted the women of Punjab e.g.; illiteracy, low level of education, early marriage age, and rural family. The factors affecting women living in Punjab on acquiring better health care services include low work participation and other cultural practices of these women⁴.

Women are deprived of legal rights through a number of conventions, rituals as well as practices. Women are thus found in a horrible condition. It is high time to provide women with places of work, business conditions which favour and embrace women to the benefit of the entire society. Pakistan requires a mass movement that can put it out of the economical and social morass that it is engaged in now. We the sufferers of unholy manners; unless your women stand by you no land shall know such elevation, as grandeur. The incarceration of our women into the four walls of their domiciles as prisoners is a crime against humanity⁵.

The present research analyzed the contribution of the International development partners in enhancing legal empowerment of women in Southern Punjab of Pakistan in 2001-2020.

Research Problem

The study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the influence of

³Ali, Waqas, Muhammad Ishaque Fani, Saima Afzal, and Ghulam Yasin. "Cultural barriers in women empowerment: a sociological analysis of Multan, Pakistan." *European Journal of Social Sciences* 18, no. 1 (2010): 147-155.

⁴Sarfraz, Mariyam, Saira Tariq, Saima Hamid, and Nafeesa Iqbal. "Social and societal barriers in utilization of maternal health care services in rural punjab, Pakistan." *J Ayub Med Coll Abbottabad* 27, no. 4 (2015): 843-9.

⁵Aycan, Zeynep. "Key success factors for women in management in Turkey." *Applied Psychology* 53, no. 3 (2004): 453-477.

international development partners in legal empowerment of women in 2001 to 2020 in South Punjab, Pakistan. It seeks to present insight into the initiatives and programs that are undertaken by these partners and also to determine the effectiveness of this undertaking towards empowerment of women in the region. The research will also examine issues and prospects of enhancing women legal capacity in South Punjab and some recommendations will be made towards future policy and practice. On the whole, the study will add to the existing body of knowledge in the area of women empowerment in Pakistan and increase the knowledge concerning the role that international development partners play in enhancing gender equality and the rights of women in this region.

International experience confirms that generally social sector programs and investments in human development have brought about an improvement in the living standards of the poor and economic sustainability in the long run. However, in Pakistan the experience has been otherwise. Seventy-six years of development experience has demonstrated that macro-economic discipline, extended investments and donors' Interventions failed to achieve the sustained economic growth and an overall enhancement in societal well-being in Pakistan.

Research Questions

- i. What initiatives and programs were implemented by international development partners to promote the legal empowerment of women in South Punjab between 2001 and 2020?
- ii. What has been the impact of these initiatives by international development partners on the legal empowerment of women in South Punjab during the period 2001 to 2020?
- iii. What challenges and opportunities have emerged in the process of promoting legal empowerment of women in South Punjab between 2001 and 2020?

Research Objectives

- i. To give detailed explanation about the theory as well as the history of the concept of legal empowerment of women in Punjab and most specifically the south Punjab.
- ii. To examine the policies and programs embraced towards the legal empowerment of Women in South Punjab with particular reference to those initiated by or facilitated by the international development partners.
- iii. To explore the contribution of international development partners that had helped in the legal empowerment of women in South Punjab between 2001 and 2020 and to evaluate their contribution, the impact they have had and the limitations they have had.

Justification of Study

South Punjab comprises three administrative divisions — Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan — which are home to the

majority of Saraiki-speaking communities. The region accounts for approximately 52% of the total land area of Punjab province and about 32% of its population. According to the 2021 estimates, South Punjab is home to around 34.7 million people.

Research Methodology

The paper makes use of the empirical analysis of the budgetary information, applying the relevant tools of statistics to determine the effects of extra funding on the social indicators in the region of South Punjab. The approach also includes the study of trends of social development at foreign financial and technical aid with the subsequent qualitative analysis of the interviews and the policy documents and program reports by means of the NVivo computer software.

Tools for Data Collection and Engaging Key Informants

This study employed a combination of qualitative tools to gather in-depth insights from key informants and community stakeholders in South Punjab.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted as group interviews with selected programme stakeholders to discuss changes observed among girls participating in empowerment initiatives. This method proved effective in bringing together individuals with shared backgrounds or experiences to explore specific issues related to legal empowerment and social change.

Structured Interviews

Structured interviews were held with ten policymakers, planners, political leaders, and household representatives to collect information about their objectives and strategies for implementing women's legal aid and empowerment programs in South Punjab.

Household Interviews

Household interviews served as a primary and reliable source of data collection, enabling the collection of detailed responses from family members on the research questions. According to Green and Thorogood (2004), collective household interviews effectively capture relevant perspectives essential for research analysis.

Informal Discussions and Participant Observation

Informal discussions with various groups of men and women were also conducted, allowing participants to share information comfortably and openly. Representatives of NGOs utilized these discussions to gather valuable insights from community members. Additionally, participant observation was employed to understand community dynamics and behavioral patterns related to women's access to legal services and social empowerment initiatives.

Data Analysis Methods

In the analysis of the data collected by the present study, both quantitative and qualitative methods are going to be used. Various methods are used as outlined in pertinent literature including statistical analysis of quantitative data, content analysis, grounded theory, and thematic analysis of qualitative data. These will be

used to discuss the importance of the international development partners in building women empowerment in South Punjab region.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in feminist theory and empowerment theory. Feminist theory underscores the need to challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and restrict women's opportunities for empowerment. It highlights the significance of social, economic, and political factors that shape women's lived experiences and influence their access to rights and resources.

Empowerment theory aims at giving people and groups the power to take charge of their lives and take decisions that impact on their lives. It focuses upon how to encourage the process of empowerment and long-term change through agency, self-determination and participatory processes.

In the context of this study, feminist and empowerment theories offer a lens through which to examine the role of international development partners in advancing women's legal empowerment in South Punjab. These theories guide the analysis by emphasizing the need to address gender inequalities, promote women's participation and agency, and empower women to make decisions that directly impact their lives and well-being.

Legal Empowerment of Women in Pakistan

The history of laws affecting women's rights and empowerment in Pakistan is characterised by a complex pattern of victories and defeats. The state's attempts to define women's rights are hampered by the need to strike a balance between opposing viewpoints regarding the status of women in Pakistani society. Women's rights, which had been severely restricted by General Zia-ul-Islamization Haq's programme, came to light following General Pervez Musharraf's overthrow in 1999 due to a number of causes, including international opinions of Pakistan. The Protection of Women Act, which was created in 2006 as a result of the Hudood Laws' amendment, was the most significant change to women's rights during this time.

The pattern of gains and losses of Pakistani laws regarding the rights and empowerment of women is difficult to comprehend. The initiatives made by the state in defining the rights of women are disadvantaged by the fact that the determination has to be achieved within the various contrasting arguments as far as women in Pakistani society are concerned. The rights of the women, who were so much restricted by the Islamization Haq programme of General Zia, were brought back to fore after General Pervez Musharraf was overthrown in 1999 as a result of various reasons including international criticism of Pakistan. The most drastic modification in the rights of women in this period was the Protection of Women act that was enacted in the year 2006 as an outcome of the amendment in the Hudood Laws, but it was in

alignment with the Islamic teachings⁶.

Finding a consensus on what constitutes women's rights and what legal measures will best safeguard these rights in Pakistan remains challenging. The promotion of laws to protect women's rights, such as outlawing forced weddings and marriages performed as acts of retaliation, ending discriminatory inheritance customs, and combating sexual harassment and domestic abuse, is significantly impacted by ongoing political crises.

Although the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government publicly espouses the empowerment of women, its record in actually expanding these rights is still patchy. Many of the most recent legislation changes made to protect women's rights go directly opposite to what the bulk of Islamist political organisations claim is required to do so. There are several contexts in which the empowerment of women in Pakistan can be thought about, but none is more crucial than the law: how women's legal rights are articulated is essential when thinking about how to effectively advance women's empowerment. This paper first describes the legal rights of women in Pakistan before reviewing important aspects of recent legislation influencing those rights, delving into the controversy surrounding that legislation, and elaborating on remaining difficulties to progress. The legal empowerment of women in Pakistan has qualitatively advanced to this point, but much more work needs to be done to enable the laws to be implemented, bring Pakistan into compliance with the CEDAW's goals and ideals, and create an environment where all women in Pakistan, regardless of class, can make viable decisions in their lives.

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⁶ Weiss, Anita M. Moving forward with the legal empowerment of women in Pakistan. US Institute of Peace, 2012.

CEDAW's goals and ideals, and create an environment where all women in Pakistan, regardless of class, can make viable decisions in their lives⁷.

Legal Empowerment Intervention

In partnership with the Aurat Publication and Information Service Service Foundation (Aurat Foundation), the Asian Development Bank helped in strengthening the capacity of the health monitoring committees to regulate on health services provided by the state. The Aurat foundation devised ways through which the health monitoring committees could relate well with the local government representatives at the union council level. This was aimed at ensuring that the women and other underrepresented groups got all the benefits of the project.⁸

Legal Reform and Women's Empowerment

The very concept of the rights of women refers to the numerous conflicting images in the contemporary Pakistan. The very issue of what the rights of women are, who establishes them, and who must implement them, is a very much controversial one and apparently leaves only two sides of the coin with absolutely no chances to negotiate something in between the sides. Though the conflict has been there in various ways since the inception of Pakistan, it has not started to cause crises in the political and social stability of the country until recently. Mistakenly, the state has tried the tough task of conceptualizing culturally appropriate versions of women rights, culturally acceptable approval measures to use to implement them. So, Pakistan remains a reshaping of certain political attempts which often cannot coincide with each other, two distinct threads expressing the contradicting ideas concerning women rights and communicating slogans to implement the new laws and organizations based on the Islamic heritage.⁹

Different groups are sharply split over what constitutes appropriate duties and rights for women. The discussion has become more heated in recent years as a result of Pakistan's decision to again reserve seats in the parliament for women, revisions to the Hudood Laws that led to the 2006 Protection of Women Act, and Pakistan's submission and successful defence of its CEDAW report before the Division for the Advancement of Women at the United Nation in spring 2007. In the meantime, terrorists continue to target girls' schools and work violently to restrict women's freedoms, and a recent ruling by the federal Shariat Court ruled that four provisions of the Protection of Women

⁷ Weiss, Anita. *Interpreting Islam, Modernity, And Women's Rights In Pakistan*. Springer, 2014.

⁸ ADB Support for Gender and Development (2005–2015) Supplementary Linked Document E (Country Portfolio Assessment)

⁹The Rising Voices Of Women In Pakistan, Published February 6, 2019

Act were un-Islamic and hence unconstitutional¹⁰.

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The three or four areas that impact on the legal rights of women in Pakistan the most today include the need to develop legislation touching on the most fundamental rights of women as citizens and family members; to women and their economic rights as well as jobs and employment opportunities; to safety as women venture out into the world; and to come up with new legislation that can be used to safeguard women against the bad or discriminating traditional practises. Enforcement of laws is necessary but this issue only comes up after laws are adopted. Pakistan is at the crossroads. What are the priorities of this elected government and what can and will it prioritize, so as to promote women rights?¹²

The mentality of supporting more countries through technical assistance (TA) was practiced by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) through three developing Asian countries, namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan [Aimee Seligstein, September 25, 2021. The initiative examined the role of legal empowerment and how the approach can be used to reduce poverty, improve governance, and promote more women friendly development. The project included a detailed value action plan, experimental legal empowerment programmes that assumed the host Asian Development Bank financing, and early national situation analysis. It wanted to carry out by identifying and testing strategies of legal empowerment which enhance access of women and other

¹⁰ WOMEN IN PAKISTAN ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK Programs Department (West) and Office of Environment and Social Development July 2004

¹¹ Gender Discrimination: A myth or truth Women status in Pakistan, IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) e-ISSN: 2278-487X. Volume 8, Issue 2 (Jan. - Feb. 2013), PP 88-97 by Farah Yasmin Bukhari, Prof Dr. Muhammad Ramzan Research Scholar, Superior University Lahore Superior University Lahore Contemporary South Asia , Volume 27, 2019 - Issue 4: Contentious Empowerment: Women, Development and Power in South Asia , Sohela Nazneen

disadvantaged populations to essential social services, productive resources, and opportunities; and (ii) promote wider incorporation of legal empowerment programs into ongoing standard development projects.

The initiative was funded through the TA 6248-REG-Legal Empowerment of Women and Disadvantaged Groups that was financed by the Asian Development Bank. TAF was recruited by Asian Development Bank to fulfill project activities. The conclusion that is outlined in this paper considers comments given by participants of the regional conference on legal empowerment of women and disadvantaged populations which was held on December 13-14, 2007 at ADB in Manila. The report was published at the conference to indicate the conclusion of the project.

What Kind of Work Do Legal Empowerment Activists Do?

Legal empowerment organisations help people and communities access justice through a staggering array of activity at the local, governmental, and international levels. Some groups strive to increase local residents' understanding of the regulations that are already in place. Some provide guidance or advocacy. Others take part in strategic litigation and promote new legislation that better serve the needs of the community. Some people carry out all of their tasks.¹³

Groups from various industries and regions work together to exchange ideas and take part in collective advocacy. The size of the justice gap and the pressing need for long-term, scalable remedies are powerfully demonstrated by the worldwide legal empowerment movement.

Legal Empowerment Fund

The legal empowerment organizations, although being rather efficient and innovative, remain to be ignored and forgotten about. The Fund for Global Human Rights is carving a path into solving this problem by undertaking a multi-million dollar project known as Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF), scheduled to be ten years long. The LEF aims at benefitting the grassroots groups and frontline activists wherein it will supply the relevant resources needed to fill the global justice gap. In collaboration with other partners and allies such as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Namath and Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the LEF will empower grassroots organizations to help communities use the law to get justice.

What Does the Legal Empowerment Fund Hope to Achieve?

The Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) will offer flexible, long-term funding with three primary objectives: (i) to promote engagement in legal empowerment activities, (ii) to support global organizations focused on legal empowerment, and (iii) to foster innovation, experimentation, and learning. The LEF's grant-making activities will have the following goals: Through this grant-making, the LEF

¹³ The Asia Foundation, Legal Empowerment for Women and Disadvantaged Groups

will:

- i. Allocate resources to front organizations of civil society
- ii. Motivate and disseminate information on viable legal empowerment practices
- iii. Empower the group voice and agency of the marginalised groups such as women, indigenous communities and children
- iv. Increase access to justice, effect constructive changes to laws and policies and create systemic change.

Framework of Legal Empowerment Initiatives and Measuring their Impact

The development community has given legal empowerment, a notion that comes from the specialised field of law, more attention over the previous five years. The idea has been incorporated into more general development jargon by the development community. Even among nongovernment organisations that offer legal empowerment services, there is not enough uniformity, accuracy, or clarity about what it implies despite this increased attention. These defining characteristics do not constitute a precise definition of legal empowerment, but they do provide a general framework for doing so. Finding a suitable definition for legal terms may be best described by the famous dictum The search of definition of legal empowerment may best be described by the term that originated by Justice Potter Stewart of the United States Supreme Court in stating whether something was considered obscene language, and Stewart said: I know it when I see it. The 2001 ADB legal empowerment study defined legal empowerment as, the deployment of legislative measures in an attempt to heighten the amount of control over their lives enjoyed by oppressed groups in the population.¹⁴

The project team for this regional technical assistance decided during the kickoff meeting that the 2001 definition would not be appropriate for the project's goals, especially given that this project calls for a thorough evaluation of the effects of legal empowerment measures. The team believed that in order to provide a reliable basis for assessing whether the project interventions accomplish the objective goal of legal empowerment, a feasible definition needed to be sufficiently explicit. The prior definition raised a number of issues for the project team, one of which was the idea of "greater control." A profoundly subjective psychological experience, having a sense of control over one's life can be linked to a variety of causes.

In this case, certain people might find that they become happier others can be materially better off but not with the improved feeling of control which shaped their mood despite the fact that their situation has not changed. These ambiguities

¹⁴ Borg J, Bergman AK, Östergren PO. Is 'legal empowerment of the poor' relevant to people with disabilities in developing countries? An empirical and normative review. Glob Health Action. 2013 Nov 15;6:22854. doi: 10.3402/gha.v6i0.22854. PMID: 24241720; PMCID: PMC3831029.

compelled the project team to develop a definition, which is more concrete, clear, and related to the work of other international organisations and their government counterparts including ADB. Legal empowerment in the project was defined as the aptitude of women and members of disadvantaged groups to avail resources, services and opportunities through legal and administrative processes and structures. This formulation emphasised a practical understanding of legal empowerment, highlighting its ability to facilitate improved access to tangible results.

Some parties voiced concern that this definition was too limited and might not cover all concerns relating to legal empowerment throughout the consultation process. For instance, it was claimed that the existing definition does not cover matters linked to domestic abuse because it excludes the private domain. Although the concept was created primarily to track and assess legal empowerment programmes under ADB development projects, this was a legitimate issue. It's possible that the definition is not exhaustive or universally applicable. However, it has a specific function for this project¹⁵.

What makes legal empowerment different from other rule of law reforms?

A potent, people-centered approach to addressing community needs and promoting long-lasting social justice is legal empowerment. Many initiatives to change the justice system have taken a top-down approach meant to change influential national institutions and bodies. But local people frequently mistrust national institutions as a result of years of mistreatment and neglect¹⁶.

Legal Reforms Activities Positions

Standing Result Executive Committee, Supreme Court Bar Association selected 2003-2004 (by general election amongst the professional lawyers of the Pakistan nation). won the largest vote. Committee member Federal Government Monitoring Committee for Women Development, Member Legal Aid Committee, Lahore High Court Bar Association, 2001. President / Founder Member of Legal Aid Welfare Society (LAWS). Chairm. Legal Aid All Pakistan Women Association (APWA), Punjab. Punjab, Former Vice President Pakistan Women Lawyers Association (PAWLA). Charter Member PAWLA Legal Aid Center Karachi. Pakistan Law Journal Honorary Editor. NGO Posts held with the government of Punjab: Vice Chairperson, Steering Committee for Women Development, Legal Consultant, Government of Punjab, Directorate of Social Welfare and Women Development, Conducted an in depth research of the project, The

¹⁵ Anuradha Joshi,

Legal Empowerment and Social Accountability: Complementary Strategies Toward Rights-based Development in Health, World Development, Volume 99, 2017, Pages 160-172,

¹⁶ Bohren MA, Hunter EC, Munthe-Kaas HM, Souza JP, Vogel JP, Gülmezoglu AM. Facilitators and barriers to facility-based delivery in low- and middle-income countries: a qualitative evidence synthesis. *Reprod Health*. 2014;11(1):71. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1742-4755-11-71>.

implementation of CEDAW in Pakistan¹⁷”.

The UNICEF financed this project. In December, 1999, member of Police Reforms Committee, Govt. of the Punjab, Home Department, in Institutional Reforms Group (IRG). In January 2000 she was appointed Member of the Task Force on Women Empowerment of the Government of Punjab, under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women Development & Bait-ul-Mal. Aurat foundation, member legislative watch group. Professional: This lawyer has more than 27 of experience. She was one among the rare number of females lawyers who was enrolled as an advocate of Supreme Court of Pakistan. In the panel of the proponents of the Justice Division of the Federal Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs. In the lawsuit The Committee had made him once an expert in drafting the proposed amendment in the Family Laws of Pakistan¹⁸.

The existence of this committee was developed by the Federal Ministry of Women Development in March 2002, Islamabad. Lahore High Court Bar association, Member Executive 2005-2006-2008-2009. National Seminars/conferences programs -organized and run: Organized, chaired and successfully completed a number of conferences, symposia, seminars, workshops and service and advocacy campaigns since 1980 on a number of issues and topics including Women Status, Rights, Legal Aid, Legal Awareness, Literacy and Reforms. These were being hosted individually along with those that are under the stewardship of local / international NGOs, the private and the government.

Pro-women legislations in Punjab

The following eight bills were passed in the last week of December 2012 in Punjab provinces for

1. The Punjab Protection against the Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment Bill) 2012;
2. The Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill 2012 (Urban);
3. The Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill 2012 (Rural);
4. Legal Protection to Gender Mainstream Committees Bill 2012;
5. Women University Multan (Amendment) Bill 2012;
6. Government College Women University Faisalabad Bill 2012;
7. Government College Women University Sialkot Bill 2012;
8. Government College Women University Bahawalpur Bill 2012;

Women's Rights Association

Women Rights Association is a registered non-governmental, non-profit organization filed under the Social Welfare Registration Act, 1999 which has been struggling to make underprivileged women aware of their social, political and economic rights since its inception in the year 1999 in the Southern Punjab region. Its vision as an organization is to have the vision of having a peaceful and democratic nation where all get equal institutionalized rights and

¹⁷ Imran, Rahat. "Legal injustices: The Zina Hudood Ordinance of Pakistan and its implications for women." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 78-100.

¹⁸ Durrani, Naureen, Anjum Halai, Laila Kadiwal, Salima Karim Rajput, Mario Novelli, and Yusuf Sayed. "Education and social cohesion in Pakistan." *Project Report. UNICEF* (2017).

opportunities. The mission of Women Rights Association will be to organize and empower all segments of society (especially the women and the youth form) to access opportunity and become socially and economically engaging a democratic institution that will allow the use of a peaceful force to get a happy society. The organization is going to advance its mission by:

- i. Providing social and political education and training opportunities to women and youth groups and institutions, as well as promoting volunteerism.
- ii. Offering economic and social opportunities, particularly to women and youth groups, to enable their development and facilitate a collective and peaceful social and political struggle.
- iii. Developing the Women Rights Association as a rights-based institution that serves the people, especially the marginalized, by organizing and empowering organizations and providing high-quality social and economic services.

Roshni Welfare Organization

ROSHNI (supported by Shirkat Gah) has started a program to put in place family laws. The first step was to train 15 community activists on the subject of family law and then these trainers conducted the community trainings on the subjects of family laws and issues that guided 1,200 women. Moreover, ROSHNI has established legal aid cell in the organization which has been offering free legal aid to the female victims and Shirkat Gah bears the cost of court fees etc. In addition, the organization has; trained four of its members as mediation paralegals who are aiding families on family matters. In 2014, ROSHNI has offered free legal help to 23 females, and five of them have not been resolved in the court yet.

ROSHNI has carried out study on adoption of family laws at union council level in Multan and Muzaffar Garh districts and the way processes of union council are to be conducted and the way project of Nikah Methanoy of Nikah registrar is to be done. The study was also able to get the feedback of the community and specially the females and other victims who have gotten into difficulties. ROSHNI is also undertaking to apply the convention on the rights of the child (CRC) in Multan and is campaigning towards the enhancement of the jail conditions of the young offenders. Moreover, ROSHNI has given a free legal support to the children and also started a counseling center with contribution of SPARCO.

Measuring the Impact of Legal Empowerment

The development and use of a customised monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodology to evaluate outcomes between locations that received legal empowerment interventions and those that did not was a key component of the project. Designing the pilot interventions was led by the project's definition of legal empowerment, which also served as the foundation for the M&E methodology. Confidence, knowledge, strategies, and outcomes were the four mutually reinforcing elements of legal empowerment

that were the subject of this research. To assess the success of the legal empowerment actions in these four areas, a thorough M&E procedure was created. It was difficult to allow for some comparability without losing the kind of in-depth investigation that would shed light on the relationships between legal empowerment and poverty reduction in a specific location. A common survey instrument that could be locally adapted to capture the distinctive characteristics of the specific host projects and nation contexts was designed to achieve a more effective balance between comparability and causation. In-depth interviews were used in addition to the survey tool to provide a more nuanced understanding of how and why change occurs or does not. The M&E procedure allowed for the collection of baseline and project-ending data. This made it possible for project workers to assess how well the legal empowerment interventions were working:

- i. Are respondents aware of the resources, basic social services, and opportunities available under the Asian Development Bank loan?
- ii. Are respondents able to navigate the system envisioned in the ADB loan?
- iii. Did the pilot project lead respondents to try new strategies?
- iv. Did the respondents' efforts succeed?

The monitoring and evaluation research was carried out in Pakistan at two project locations and one control site that was equivalent. The bigger Asian Development Bank development effort made benefits available to both the intervention and control sites. However, the additional legal empowerment activities were only provided at the intervention sites. The project team may evaluate the effects of various legal empowerment techniques by contrasting the survey findings across project and control sites.

Local Partnerships

The project team picked the Aurat foundation to be the NGO legal service partner during legal empowerment pilot project implementation. Over the last 21 years, the Aurat Foundation has emerged as a leading organisation in the development of women in terms of political and economic strength and also as a motivator in bringing social reforms in Pakistan. Aurat Foundation has established mutual profitable and harmonious relations with a lot of governmental organizations and also with local women of the community in the course of time. It is the biggest district level network of voluntary citizens groups as well as organisations in Pakistan as the Aurat foundation has an office in every one of the nation 110 districts. The Aurat Foundation is a strong organization to battle its problems throughout the nation as well as it can help women with their immediate needs at the local levels. The Aurat Foundation was best utilized as an NGO to conduct operations of the legal empowerment pilot project, as it had been operating in Pakistan for a wide scope of almost all the provinces of the country, had great experience, excellent working relations with TAF and

Asian Development Bank, and was conducting quality work in the country. It sustains a pool of information centers to women in the rural and urban societies in Pakistan¹⁹.

Legal Empowerment Activities

A variety of legal empowerment initiatives were carried out by the Aurat Foundation in collaboration with TAF and the Asian Development Bank..

Public Meetings and Seminars

The majority of the population lacks confidence, is illiterate, and has a limited knowledge of the functions of local government, health monitoring committees, and the idea of legal empowerment. Women and religious minorities have particularly poor outcomes in terms of education, health, and other important metrics. Ten seminars were held in various neighbourhoods within the two pilot union councils in order to effectively inform stakeholders about the goals of the pilot project and increase public outreach. Each session attracted between 100 and 120 attendees. Important information about legal empowerment, health monitoring committees, and the ADB loan was presented throughout the workshops.²⁰.

Use of counselling cards has been used as a good way of creating awareness and sensitizing people in the rural areas in the 8 targeted union councils. Through 1,439 awareness sessions it was able to sensitize 26,737 people belonging to rural communities, 9,925 men and 16,812 women on several issues including civil documentation, family law, women and child rights, as well as administration.

Legal Aid Clinics

There is a legal aid lawyer in every district to carry out legal aid clinics in local communities at LSO offices and to advise and assist women and men who have legal problems. In the period under reporting, 224 legal aid clinics were conducted in the two districts as awareness creation measures. Using these clinics, there was a provision of 411 legal advice sessions where there were one on one consultations through the clients. In total out of these cases 167 passed to the next level of legal processing in which the document sought by the clients were set down as legal documents to be followed through the legal procedures and 15 cases were conducted as litigation upon agreement by the clients. Some of the areas that the legal advice provided were family problems like child or wife maintenance and domestic violence, civil matters like underage, marriage cancellation, child rights, inheritance, harassment, attempted rape and so on.

Legal Aid Services for Complicated Cases

The project teams in the districts visited 22 organizations which consisted of government and civil society organizations and

¹⁹ GENDER EQUITY PROGRAM FINAL EVALUATION REPORT. November 2016

²⁰ Pakistan National Human Development Report 2020

oriented these organizations to the legal empowerment project and also shared common interests that could be shared to the benefit of the rural communities. The project staff felt grateful that several organizations including but not limited to women and human rights NGOs, BISP, Education Department, Aurat Foundation, Sadat Foundation, and social welfare-interested advocacy organizations had joined hands with the legal empowerment of the rural communities in the target districts. Nevertheless, there were certain government entities including the case of NADRA who were not willing to cooperate in the non-government programs because of the new rules introduced by the ministry of interior.

The legal aid officers of the project provided free legal aid to clients and filed lawsuits in court as per the project's objective. Out of the total number of cases, 2 were settled out of court resulting in withdrawal, 2 cases received favorable verdicts for the clients, while the remaining cases are still in court proceedings. Additionally, traditional justice systems such as jirga or panchayat resolved 5 cases, consisting of disputes between husbands and wives regarding maintenance or the birth of baby girls - 3 cases in Bahawalpur and 2 cases in Rajanpur.

Awareness Sessions

Awareness creation has also been found very essential and effective in training rural communities in the 8 targeted union councils using the application of counselling cards. Sensitization of the 26,737 rural community members comprising of 9,925 men and 16,812 women included 1,439 awareness sessions on various issues including civil documentation, family law, rights of women and children as well as administrative matters. These were carried out by the paralegals after consulting the local support organizations and their local heads of paralegals respectively.

To track project activities and assess the performance of paralegals, a range of tools and instruments were developed during the initial stage of the project. These included monthly reports, status forms, weekly reports, and the tracking of litigation cases, awareness sessions, advice, and follow-ups, with a focus on high-risk cases. Database management also played an important role in project management, particularly in relation to technical details.

Success Stories

During the reporting period RSPN was keen on the collection of success stories. Already 20 accounts have been taken in the targeted districts and there has been successes in several fields namely family laws, civil documentation, domestic violence, breach of contract, protection of child marriages, maintenance of wife and children etc. The stories are being cleaned up to be published and shared with the relevant stakeholders and civil society forums to support and give backbone to the need to conduct similar initiatives.

Concluding

This chapter delves into the perceptions surrounding women's

empowerment and the obstacles women face in obtaining their rights. The author suggests that in order to achieve gender equality, there must be changes made to laws, civil codes, property rights systems, as well as social and legal institutions. To address gender inequalities, liberal feminists propose taking planned actions such as mobilizing existing political and legal channels for change, creating equal economic opportunities, promoting shared responsibilities, monitoring family dynamics, and promoting education.

In Pakistan's prevailing culture, husbands are permitted to divorce their wives at any time without legal complications or proper compensation. The chapter concludes by presenting the results of the research question and sub-questions regarding legal aid provided by international development organizations for women's empowerment. Progress in women's health has been hindered globally due to socio-cultural and political factors. The current international gender backlash poses a significant threat to women's rights. Improving the leadership positions of women in healthcare and supporting their unique values will raise awareness of all topics related to women's health, accelerating the realization of Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5 by 2030.