

SIMORGH

Women's Resource and Publication Centre, Lahore

Annual Report 2021

Introduction

The year 2021 has been a highly productive period for Simorgh. The year was dominated by three episodes of COVID-19 lockdowns and several events of national political upheaval, which subsequently affected the project plans/activities. Despite the challenging and unprecedented circumstances and the limited financial resources available due to them, Simorgh managed to adapt, implement project plans and engage with the communities quite successfully. Overall, the year proved to be beneficial in terms of liaison building with the Simorgh Board, stakeholders, and communities at project sites.

In–House Matters

2021 saw several in-house developments, which have been detailed below:

- Simorgh was awarded certification by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) in January 2021.
- An MoU was signed with EAD for our project "Body Politics - Breaking the Season of Silence" in July 2021.
- After the sad and untimely death of Dr. Rubina Saigol – a member of the Simorgh Board in August 2021, Ms. Aisha Amir Ahmad was invited to join Simorgh as a member of the Simorgh Board which she has very kindly accepted.

Staff changes

During the year 2021, Simorgh underwent several personnel changes detailed below:

- Ms. Nida Afzal joined as a Researcher from 1st April 2021
- Ms. Shafaq Javaid joined as a Researcher from 26th April
- Ms. Rimsha Munir joined as a Researcher from 7th June 2021
- Mr. Parvaiz Chaudhary joined as a driver from 26th August 2021
- Services of Mr. Moosa Eleazar (Researcher) and Mr. Yaqboob Masih were terminated from 4th February 2021 and 25th August 2021 respectively.
- Ms. Shafaq Javaid (Researcher) resigned on 25th May 2021 due to family reasons.

Work in Progress

1. Our Bodies – Our Lives – Pushing the Boundaries - Extending Outreach

Funding: Amplify Change

Project Location: Selected sites in Districts Lahore and Hafizabad

Target Communities: Women, female/male adolescents, Lady Health Workers/Visitors (LHWs/LHVs) community men, transgender persons, and sex workers.

Background:

“Our Bodies - Our Lives - Pushing the Boundaries - Extending Outreach”, was initiated by Simorgh in 2016. The project aimed to tackle: (i) the stigma and misinformation surrounding SRHR and issues of gender-based violence and (ii) the consequential lack of services and policies related to SRH. Through intervention activities such as awareness and advocacy sessions, policy dialogues, and resource facilitation (health camps and IEC material), the initiative aimed to directly benefit women and adolescent girls, LHWs/LHVs as basic health service providers, marginalized gender communities, and school/college dropouts, and accomplish the following goals:

- Facilitate confidence-building and effective communication in women to enable them to identify and address various health concerns.
- Information dissemination and access provision to women, girls, and transgender individuals regarding SRHR, legal rights, and basic healthcare.
- Provision of age-appropriate life skills education to women, children, and adolescent girls and boys.
- Diversifying targeted regions and introducing the project to women and girls in various communities.
- To address and mitigate stereotypes and stigma surrounding transgender visibility, general health, and SRHR issues such as reproductive rights, contraceptive access, gender-based violence, and discrimination.
- Establish effective liaising with relevant communities, duty bearers, and policy-makers.

Implementation Activities:

- **In-house Capacity Building**
- **Free Medical Camps** were organized for need-based access to doctors and medical care including basic medicines in target locations.
- **Policy Dialogues** to link communities with policymakers and service providers to facilitate healthcare and access for women in marginalized communities.
- **Health Sessions** to discuss SRH, hygiene, and health concerns among girls and women.
- Production and distribution of printed material regarding SRHR and relevant concerns among target communities.
- Training for front-line resource persons (trainers, LHWs, LHVs, Midwives, pharmaceutical workers) to acquaint and sensitize them as SRH facilitators in their communities.
- **Aware Mother – Safe, Healthy Daughter** sessions to facilitate mother-daughter communication among target communities.
- Production and dissemination of IEC material among beneficiaries in target locations.
- **M&E “Mind Changing Stories”**: Interview-based impact evaluations centering women, youth, LHWs, and transgender individuals.

During this reporting period, several new target communities were identified, including various marginalized communities that are isolated by varying degrees of social and cultural stigma. Project outreach also witnessed an expansion with high school/college students and medical/pharmaceutical professionals being trained as community facilitators and advocates.

The project saw several setbacks on account of COVID-19 and the resultant regulations imposed by the government. In-person activities and field visits were replaced by online communication through platforms such as Zoom. Community outreach and trust-building were also significantly impacted as a result of this, and a no-cost extension had to be undertaken to execute the project more efficiently.

Due to the revised policies of the State Bank, there was a delay in funds transfer, resulting in the project being initiated later than the previously developed timeline. Several planned activities also had to be postponed or revised due to the onset of COVID-19 and the resultant restrictions and inter-city lockdowns placed by the government. A breakdown of the activities which were successfully executed during this reporting period is detailed below:

- Baseline data collection and tabulation were conducted at target locations to assess, evaluate and identify a target demographic, project impacts, and key issues which needed to be considered and addressed accordingly.
- Medical and pharmaceutical staff were identified as key facilitators in the dissemination of information regarding SRHR and gender-based health concerns. With the onset of COVID-19, sensitization training had to be postponed. However, data identifying the various pharmacies and medical facilities which could be targeted for outreach has been collected and compiled.
- **Aware Mother – Safe, Healthy Daughter:** Due to COVID-19, the mother-daughter awareness sessions had to be postponed. Data regarding the target population and groups has been compiled.
- 5 one-day online meetings were organized with 51 legislative representatives, policymakers, health department representatives, and other stakeholders to discuss various SRHR issues and the necessary interventions that could be implemented to improve sexual and reproductive health rights.
- 100 flip cards and 2000 health and hygiene kits were produced and distributed among adolescents from schools and colleges within the target locations. The health kits included information booklets and various basic hygiene essentials while the flip cards contained information regarding SRHR rights, discrimination, physical changes, family planning, and transgender rights.
- 8 one-day meetings and shortlisting of champions were conducted virtually at the prior project target locations, with 160 champions being shortlisted for the outreach. These included LHWs/ LHVs, Midwives, community men, women, and youth

2. FEMPOWER- women’s political empowerment

Funds: Global Affairs Canada (GAC)

Project Sites: Districts Lahore, Kasur, Toba Tek Singh – Punjab

National/Regional Outreach: Media Training Workshops & Bayan

Project Details:

Initiated in 2019, FEMPOWER, in collaboration with three partner organizations aims to promote and enable the political empowerment of women in political spaces. Through education, awareness, and advocacy, disseminated through a variety of activities such as trainings, liaising with government and administrative bodies, and community outreach, the Simorgh team fulfilled different project goals. These included; providing women with rights information and engaging more women in political domains, facilitating women in gaining access to government bodies, and enabling women to participate more proactively in decision-making processes independently and alongside their male counterparts.

The project team was able to undertake several long overdue activities this year. These comprised: Area Support Network meetings, Local Government Workshops, Exposure Visits, Women Political Forum meetings, Advocacy Campaigns, Social Accountability Workshops, PRA activities under Social Accountability, Leadership Workshops, and socio-legal Journal – Bayan.

COVID Lockdowns: The country faced a rise in COVID-19 cases throughout the year, to combat which, the government imposed smart lockdowns throughout the country. This significantly affected the project plans/activities. However, despite this challenge, the project team managed to ensure the safety of the staff and the community Fe/males who participated in the activities. The timeline of the lockdowns is as follows:

Two-week Lockdown – from 27th April to 11th May 2021

2nd phase of Smart Lockdown – Mid July (before Eid-ul-Azha)

3rd phase of Lockdown – September 2021

The details of the project activities are as follows:

Area Support Network Meetings: In the year 2021, team Simorgh managed to effectively liaison with relevant government bodies and facilitated CSO partners in accomplishing their tasks under the Area Support Network. This work was greatly strengthened by the involvement of government officials and local duty bearers. Overall, the Area Support Network meetings helped the team in identifying major issues prevalent in the districts and facilitating people in addressing issues and social programs. This platform also allowed the CSO partners and councilors to effectively undertake social action initiatives in their areas. Several challenges arose during these meetings but were mitigated and tackled effectively.

A total of 12 ASN meetings were conducted in the year 2021. The timeline of these ASN meetings in the three target districts is as follows:

Lahore:

3rd ASN Meeting – 26th February 2021

4th ASN Meeting – 2nd June 2021

5th ASN Meeting – 28th September 2021

6th ASN Meeting – 28th December 2021

Kasur:

2nd ASN Meeting – 11th Jan 2021

3rd ASN Meeting – 25th February 2021

4th ASN Meeting – 4th June 2021

5th ASN Meeting – 30th September 2021

6th ASN Meeting – 30th December 2021

Toba Tek Singh:

3rd ASN Meeting – 10th March 2021

4th ASN Meeting – 25th August 2021

5th ASN Meeting – 16th December 2021

Local Government Workshops (March 2021): The project team conducted local government workshops in all three districts; Lahore, Kasur, and Toba Tek Singh. A total of 24 training workshops were conducted, which benefitted 521 male and female community members. The training focused on Local Government Acts, responsibilities of the local representatives, planning and budgeting, understanding the electoral system, and functioning of the systems. COVID-19 SOPs were followed throughout the activities.

Women’s Political Forum Meetings: The project team was successful in involving women councilors in each district. Their active involvement paved the way for councilors to make their district development plans and take social action initiatives such as waste management, tree plantation, etc. All the meetings were held physically and prevalent issues were identified to be worked on. The project team also conducted follow-ups with the councilors regarding their plans and facilitated them in writing applications and media coverage. Several challenges arose but were tackled effectively throughout the process (i.e. conflict of interest with some of the councilors who were politically biased). All the forum members took various effective social action initiatives in their community through the platform of WPF.

A total of 7 meetings were conducted under the women's political forum. The dates of the meetings and follow-ups are mentioned below.

Lahore:

WPF Lahore Meeting – 4th March 2021

WPF Follow-up Meeting – 8th June 2021

WPF Lahore Meeting – 29th September 2021

Kasur:

WPF Kasur Meeting – 2nd March 2021

WPF Follow-up Meeting – 30th June 2021

WPF Kasur Meeting – 27th September 2021

Toba Tek Singh:

WPF Toba Tek Singh Meeting – 1st September 2021

Community Women’s Exposure Visits: Exposure visits to various government departments and local privately run facilities such as women’s shelters were arranged and successfully conducted for the awareness of community women across all three districts. These visits helped the community women gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the services provided by different government departments and private sector initiatives including understanding of relevant rules, and regulations. A total of 3 exposure visits were undertaken. A breakdown of these visits is given below:

Lahore: Exposure Visit (district Social Welfare Office Kot Khawaja Panahgah) – 29th March 2021

Kasur: Exposure Visit (Dar-ul-Amaan) – 30th June 2021

Toba Tek Singh: Exposure Visit (Sanatar, Old Age Home – Dar-ul-Amaan) – 16th August 2021

Advocacy Campaigns: Various activities were undertaken by the CSO partners throughout 2021 to enhance women’s political participation and promote female leadership in the upcoming local government elections. The CSO partners arranged seminars, corner meetings, and door-to-door campaigns in all three districts regarding issues such as CNIC registration, identification of social problems, and citizens’ rights.

Social Accountability Workshop (June 2021): Simorgh conducted a three-day Social Accountability training with CSO partners from 22nd to 24th June 2021. A total of 22 participants, including 19 CSO representatives and two district focal persons were trained on social accountability tools and strategies. The training was conducted by Simorgh team members, who had previously been trained by the Omar Asghar Khan Foundation. All in all, the training helped participants understand the participatory learning approach and acquainted them with Social Accountability tools and effective ways of using them to address and mitigate community issues.

Social Mapping Activity – PRA: A total of 21 PRA activities were conducted under the Social Accountability component in all three districts; 10 PRAs in Lahore, 6 PRAs in Kasur, and 5 PRAs in Toba Tek Singh. Through social mapping, the situation of government facilities was analyzed effectively and various social action plans (SAPs) were developed. A total of 194 SAPs were developed through all the activities.

Leadership Training Workshop (December 2021): After the restoration of Local Governments the Fempower team conducted the previously planned workshop on leadership with the CSO partners. The Leadership Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop was held from 1st to 3rd December 2021. A total of 21

participants, including 20 CSO representatives from all three districts and one focal person were trained in Leadership skills. The workshop aimed at enhancing the leadership capacities of the CSO partners as change-makers. It also helped increase awareness regarding gender systems, systemic discriminations, state-citizen relationships, a human-rights-based approach to development, and the significance of advocacy.

Leadership Training Replications: Under the Leadership component, training replications were held in all three districts with 10 selected trainers from the previously conducted TOT workshop. A total of 16 replications were held; 6 in Toba Tek Singh, 6 in Kasur, and 5 replications in district Lahore. Replications were held between the dates of 8th December and 24th December. The replications trained 490 Fe/males from the community.

Socio-legal Journal – Bayan:

Work on the socio-legal journal ‘Bayan’ is going according to plan. Due to Covid delays work was undertaken simultaneously on three volumes, with the view that they would be published on the first completed first published basis.

3. From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice

Funding: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Project Location: Union Councils in Districts **Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot.**

- **Lahore:** Qainchi Amar Sidhu, UC 227. Yohanabad- UC 246. Baagriyan- Green Town-UC 236.
- **Sialkot:** Gondal, UC 40. Bhalanwala, UC 33. Chak Mandhar, UC 10.
- **Faisalabad:** Muzaffar Colony, UC 258. Baghbanpura, UC 206. Samnabad, UC 261

Target Communities: women, youth, community men, local duty bearers, labour union representatives (female and male), local college students (female and male), school/college dropouts, and unemployed youth (female and male).

Introduction:

Designed primarily as a skill and capacity-based training programme, ‘From The Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice’, has been funded by The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and aims to empower women and adolescents as agents of socio-economic growth and development for poverty mitigation. Through community engagement and the development of income generation opportunities, the project is a step towards increasing women’s visibility and involvement at various social and cultural levels. In doing so, the project helps them identify, analyze and adapt accordingly to social, cultural, and administrative problems within the institutions of family, community, and state that women face including; fostering spaces that allow for inclusivity and effective resource provision.

In the previous year, several preparatory activities were undertaken including in-house capacity building, hiring of additional staff, baseline data collection, and identification of Focal Persons. Information material was also distributed in target communities, and advocacy meetings were held with relevant stakeholders to acquaint them with the scope of the project.

Implementation Activities:

Despite the numerous challenges faced during this period, including city-wide COVID lockdowns, personal conflicts within the community, and the unfortunate demise of two District Coordinators, approximately 700 beneficiaries received training through this project. Not only did this have a significant impact on the project outcomes, but it also allowed for greater outreach and information dissemination among target communities. The following implementation activities were conducted during this reporting period:

- Establishing Skill Development Centers in target districts Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot, which would offer the following courses:

(A) Stitching

(B) Beautician/Salon Training

(C) Computer Literacy

- Exhibitions of products to engage the community and increase the outreach of trainees.
- Publication and distribution of IEC material
- **Advanced Courses:** Trainees from the beautician and tailoring courses were set up with salons and vendors respectively, which not only further developed their skill set but also provided them an avenue to turn said skills into a source of stable income.
- **Legal Sessions:** Sessions were held throughout target districts Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot, which concentrated on the various legal rights granted to a Pakistani citizen, as well as information on how to navigate legal and economic structures. Individual counseling sessions were also conducted per the demands of the community to identify and resolve familial and communal issues.

Project Progress:

Workshops

- Three 10-day skill development trainings on Commercial Tailoring were held in districts Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot, targeting 83 beneficiaries.

- A one-month skill development course was conducted to provide beautician/cosmetology training to 225 young female entrepreneurs, to facilitate the establishment of home-based businesses.
- A three-month computer literacy course was conducted with 180 adolescent school dropouts to improve digital literacy and adapt to various mobility concerns surrounding women and girls in target districts.
- A two-month commercial training course on various forms of embroidery and textile techniques was held, targeting 225 women and young girls.
- An advanced course was conducted with 45 semi-skilled women from the three target districts, where they were enrolled in various well-reputed salons, to train in cosmetological skills such as Hairstyling, Aesthetics, and Makeup

Through these workshops and courses, the project facilitated a total of 675 beneficiaries across the three target districts. Due to a shift in the project timeline due to COVID-19, there were several challenges faced during these workshops. However, through pre and post-training evaluations, these gaps were identified and amended.

- 9 skill-development centers were established in the target districts of Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot. These Skill Development Centers also served as exhibition spaces and marketplaces. They also catered to the community women as a safe space to address different socio-cultural and socio-economic issues being faced by them. The hiring of the Center Incharge and the staff was undertaken, and Resource Persons were shortlisted with the assistance of District Coordinators and Focal Persons.
- To facilitate the trainees in their market knowledge, strategy development, and skill level enhancement, MOUs were signed with stakeholders from various individuals and organizations such as TEVTA, APWA, Chamber of Commerce, Sanatzar, Qasr-e-Behood, operating in the three target districts, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sialkot.
- Quarterly Zoom meetings aided by the District Coordinators/Focal Persons were conducted with representatives from various industries to provide project updates, analyze successes and challenges, and plan collective efforts, collaborations, and subsequent steps to be undertaken.

- Following the course completion, an exposure visit was organized for Advance Course Students to Dubai Islamic Bank, where they were introduced to various facilities and procedures regarding banking and finance.
- Legal sessions were conducted among women and adolescents in target districts to raise awareness regarding various citizen rights including laws surrounding labor, sexual harassment gender, etc. as well as information regarding various essential legal and financial processes
- IEC material on Women's Citizenship Rights was produced, published, and distributed among beneficiaries in the aforementioned target locations. The material was published in Urdu and distributed to familiarize beneficiaries with the various aspects of entrepreneurship and citizenship, as well as to aid in the legal literacy sessions to be conducted. The publication was also distributed among 745 in-direct beneficiaries of Simorgh's 'Feminist Leadership for Accountability and Political Rights' (FEMPOWER) project.

Conclusion:

Despite the COVID-influenced logistical setbacks and unprecedented circumstances this year has presented us with, we at Simorgh were able to adapt and face these challenges through the proactive efforts of our team and stakeholders. The changes within our staff created greater facilitation in managing key components of our projects. While the demise of our esteemed board member, Dr. Rubina Saigol was extremely unfortunate, we are grateful to Ms. Aisha Amir Ahmed for accepting the position and offering her expertise to us and look forward to undertaking the activities for the coming year with the knowledge gained throughout this reporting period.