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FEMPOWER PAKISTAN

(Feminist Leadership for Accountability and Political Rights)

Project No. P006186

PROJECT OPERATIONS REPORT- April 2019-March 2020

1) Changes in Context

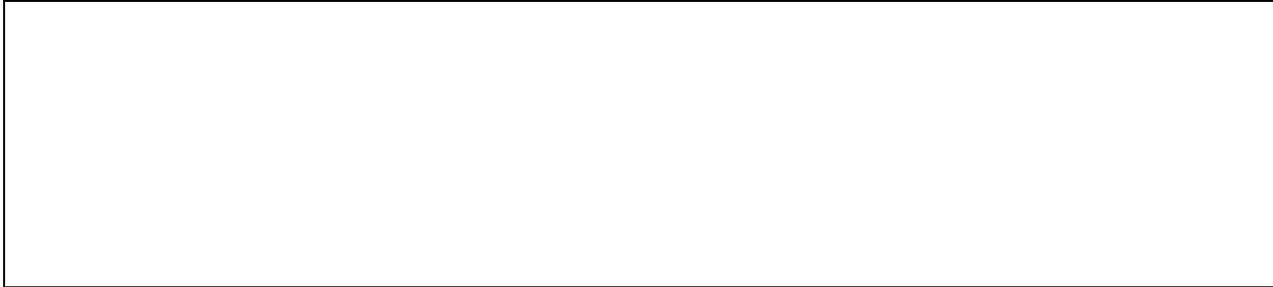
Report on changes to country/region context (gender equality, human rights, environment, socio economic, political, and cultural) which have affected the project only during the reporting period. Explain if and how understanding of context has changed over the reporting period and how this has affected project implementation

The scrapping/amendments of the existing **Punjab Local Government ACT 2013** by the Punjab government in May 2019 and the subsequent delay in Local Government elections impacted on the nature and focus of project activities. This led the project partners to reschedule and redesign some project activities in the project implementation plan. These redesigned activities and rescheduled Action Plan were shared with GAC representatives in the project Inception Meeting and submitted for GAC approval. GAC instructed FEMPOWER partners to suspend all activities till it had approved the proposed changes to activities and Action Plan.

GAC approval took 3 months to come through, resulting in delays in funds transfer as well as in the implementation of activities scheduled for Year 1 of the project. The only exception in this regard was the socio-legal journal 'Bayan'. Special permission was asked for and received from GAC to undertake these activities as closely as possible to the original work plan.

The final approval from GAC came through in **November 2019** and Simorgh began work on scheduled activities after a delay of almost 9 months since the time the project was formally approved **on 1st April 2019** and funds for project activities released **on 30th August 2019, and 24th December 2019**. This included: (i) identification and selection of target sites in three selected districts in Punjab (ii) identification and selection of district Focal Persons and short listing of local CBOS, (iii) Identification and selection of Union Councils and local communities in concert with Focal Persons, (iii) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and community conversations at selected sites in all 3 districts through selected CBOs. With the exception of two FGDs in district Kasur, this activity was undertaken and completed by mid-March at all selected sites.

In mid-March, the project was thrown into disarray by Covid 19. In consultation with project partner and teams, all field activities were suspended. Without losing site of the project goal of women's political empowerment, additional Covid 19 specific changes were made to project activities and work plans and communication methods. These included a reliance on online communication as well as developing online channels of communication and information dissemination with Focal Persons, CBOs and communities telephonically and through Zoom. Changes in focus and additional activities included (i) an enhanced emphasis on detailed data collection especially social mapping, employment patterns, etc. Designed initially for community relief purposes this information is being gathered with the long term view of building a detailed data base to influence policy making, relevant legislation etc, (ii) immediate relief provision to the most vulnerable at selected project sites and (iii) provision of information on Covid 19 safety information through IEC material etc.



2) Progress on Outputs and Activities

Analyze the actual data in the Outputs and Activities Reporting Worksheet for all the indicators measuring each output (and their corresponding baseline and target), and then use this analysis as the basis of your narrative assessment of activities and outputs and, where appropriate, on progress on or towards the expected immediate outcomes.

Describe how the project is progressing, determine whether activities are leading to outputs and outcomes as planned, and what changes may be necessary to the activities in the next reporting period

Immediate Outcome 1120: Increased effectiveness of civil society, national and local CSOs in particular those focused on marginalized groups to advocate for gender equality and inclusive democratic governance systems

Output 1121: Evidence-based provincial and national advocacy/campaigns conducted on women's rights with CSOs and alliances

Activity 1121.3: Advocacy campaigns by CSO alliances and district field partners

Progress: Simorgh was in the process of establishing its contacts with CSOs and district level stakeholders through Focal Persons. Due to suspension of field activities, this work is largely on hold. However, online contact is being maintained with CBOS and Focal persons including sessions for information dissemination and conceptual clarity on issues pertaining to women's political empowerment etc. with regards Covid 19 and the projects long term goals. This is a continuous process.

Immediate Outcome1220: Strengthened capacity of female citizens, students and women's organizations to articulate feminist change agenda for inclusive democracy in Pakistan

Output 1221: Feminist understanding & knowledge production facilitated

Activity 1221.3: Production of print and online socio-legal journal 'Bayan' featuring critical essays from a on laws, gender based issues and human and democratic rights for knowledge building, awareness raising and generating wider public debate

Activity in Process:

October 2019

- Hiring of 'Bayan' editorial team comprising 2 editors (with a background in law and social sciences respectively) and for one researcher.

October- November

- Selection and formation of the Bayan Advisory Board
- Editorial Team meetings on: (i) Editorial policy, (ii) identification of 'Bayan' Advisory Board, (iii) Selection of theme for Bayan Vol. 1: Local Government, devolution and women's political empowerment (iv) identification of writers for Bayan Vol. 1

December

- Contacting writers, drawing up contracts, planning the first Advisory Board Meeting etc
- 5 writers agreed to write for Bayan: Farida Shaheed – social sciences/women's rights activist; Nadim Malik – social sciences; Usama Khalid – lawyer; Sohail Warraich – lawyer/HR activist

January 2020

- Planning Advisory Board Meeting
- Preparing (i) Introductory Note for Advisory Board Meeting, (ii) Meeting Agenda including editorial policy and possibility of online publication alongside printed edition etc. (iii) decision regarding venue etc

February

- Routine editorial work viz maintaining contact with writers etc.
- Advisory Board Meeting preparations including finalization of date in consultation with members
- Advisory Board Meeting held on 28th February, 2020
Presentations by Neelam Hussain, Iqra Khan, Enum Naseer and Ajwa Zulfiqar were given at the meeting.
Discussion points included: Editorial Policy; themes and issues; uses of online publication including setting up of Bayan Website; possibility of an Urdu edition based on translated papers from the English edition for wider accessibility and outreach.

March-May

Editorial Work in Process

- Papers in draft form for Bayan Vol. 1 have begun to come in despite delays caused by Covid 19. Those received have been read and sent back with editorial comment for necessary changes etc.
- Themes for the next volumes have been identified, writers selected and approached along routine lines. Payment for papers will be made on the receipt of final copies.
- The themes identified for Bayan Vols. 2: 'Freedom of Speech, Expression and Belief'. Covid 19 has cast into sharp relief governmental neglect of people's needs particularly in the areas of health, education, gender biased and elite centric policies etc including the importance of inclusive and participatory democracy. With this in mind, Bayan Vol. 3 will be built around the theme of 'Democracy and Decentralisation in the post Covid World.

Writers for both volumes have been identified and contacted and paper writing is in process.

Immediate Outcome 1310: Increased gender-equitable access of grassroots women to gender responsive duty bearers and service providers in 11 districts

Output 1311: Formation and operationalization of District/Agency specific Multi-Stakeholder Area Support Networks (ASN) bringing together duty-bearers, CSOs, and service providers with women grassroots leaders

Activity: 1311.2: Selection and sensitization of ASN members including community prioritized government officials has been initiated in consultation with community women

Progress: Consultations were organised through Focal Persons in each district. Names of interested organisations were provided by Focal Persons in Lahore and Toba Tek Singh and got names of interested candidates. Consultations for Kasur based ASN members were under process.

Immediate Outcome1320: Strengthened capacity of local government, especially women, councilors to effectively fulfill their mandate and undertake gender responsive actions in 11 districts

Output 1321: Technical training provided to women, youth, minority and peasant/labor councilors on provincial local government systems, planning and budgets

Activity 1321.2 Baseline Survey with Councilors for problems and needs identification

Progress: (i) Baseline meeting were held with councilors for problems and needs identification, (ii) Research tools based on Baseline findings developed in the second quarter, (iii) Literature Review undertaken for use in developing FGD guidelines for community women, (iv) FGD guidelines prepared, with a focus on identifying obstacles and gaps regarding women's access to rights, services and political participation, (v) 13 FGDs conducted with community women in different locations of district Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh.

Expected Changes in the Activities in next reporting period.

Covid 19 has altered the parameters of the familiar world and resulted in (i) changes to Simorgh's approach, methods of communication and project implementation strategy.

- Field work has been replaced by online communication including discussion sessions with local partners such as Focal Persons etc. This includes procedural meetings, training and discussion sessions and dissemination of Covid 19 safety IEC material. While the main aims of this project are kept firmly in view, at the moment our focus is on training CBOs etc on non hierarchical communication strategies including the importance of egalitarian community based initiatives as opposed to the top down NGO/CBO to community approach.

Material is also being prepared for similar work with communities including for lectures, interviews etc all of which, until such a time that field activities can be safely resumed, will take place virtually through different social mediums.

Activity 1121.3: Simorgh has planned to contact CSOs and potential district field partners through virtual mediums to maintain its connections with the community through continuous interactive dialogues and conversations. Once the material for this process has been finalized and preparations completed,

Simorgh will hold virtual meeting with CSO partners, small groups of women from the community particularly women councilors and community leaders and alliances (media personnel, political representatives etc.) at target sites in all three districts.

Activity 1221.3: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, plans to move Bayan to an online platform have been under serious consideration.

Activity: 1311.2: Due to suspension of field activities, Simorgh will, in consultation with district partner, organise workshops for Area Support Networks (ASNs) to sensitise them on issues pertaining to women's political participation and other project interventions.

Activity 1321.2: Two FGDs could not be undertaken in district Kasur due to Covid 19. These will be conducted in the second quarter of Y2. In case the pandemic spills over into the next year, alternatives will have to be developed for this purpose.

3) Operations

a. Changes to Project Governance

Report on: Changes and major developments to project governance, any management issues affecting project implementation and performance, Adjustments in management practices which have been implemented or are being proposed, Major decisions made at stakeholder meeting and steering committees

- (i) Change in office address as Simorgh's moved to new premises.
- (ii) Orientation meetings with Project staff undertaken to ensure that they were on the same plane regarding project parameters preparatory to designing a work plan
- (iii) A session on the concept of Local Government including the Local Government Act of Punjab on 30th September 2019 was held followed by critical analysis and impact on the subsequent nature women's political participation
- (iv) A project plan was drawn up with a focus on knowledge building and awareness raising for selected women's communities to encourage and prepare them for the next Local Body Elections
- (v) A five day capacity building workshop (28th January-3rd February) was held with Simorgh staff on to improve their research and project management skills
- (vi) Simorgh suspended its field activities, keeping in view the safety of its staff and communities and advised staff members to work from home except when unavoidable. In such instances, only necessary staff comes in for minimum time periods

b. Changes to Risk and Analysis

Any new risks identified or changes to identified risks should be discussed. If any risks occurred, explain what action was taken to mitigate the risk, or what action will be required to mitigate the risk

COVID-19

The Covid 19 pandemic emerged as a major risk emerged during the reporting period and impacted seriously on FEMPOWER activities. (i) Field activities were suspended and there was the danger of loss

of contact and the trust established between the Simorgh team and local women's communities, Focal Persons and CBOs (ii) Delay in the production and dissemination of Bayan due to breakdown of communication etc.

Risk Mitigation Strategies:

- Replacement of field activities by online communication through telephone, Zoom and other mediums easily accessible to Focal Persons, CBOs and telephonically to communities of women
- Response to immediate and urgent community/household needs through relief provision. While primarily part of a humanitarian response, relief provision was also seen as an expression of concern that would contribute towards a relationship of trust between concerned communities and Simorgh. As such it would keep pathways open for work on women's political empowerment.
(Funds allocated for relief were received on 4th June, 2020 and the process of relief disbursement will be completed by mid June.)
- Possible delay in the production and dissemination of Bayan has been forestalled by the Covid decision to work on all three volumes simultaneously with the idea of bringing them out on the first completed first produced principle.

Delay in Local Government Elections

Local Government Elections planned for early 2020 have been delayed, initially by the Punjab Government that did not fix a date for them and subsequently by the Covid 19 Pandemic. This has impacted on our plan to engage with the newly elected women Union Councilors to promote women's political empowerment.

Even without the pandemic, delay in Local Government Elections was not an unforeseen risk and alternative strategies had been set up.

Risk mitigation will be through engagement with previously elected women councilors for project purposes. As it is envisaged that many of them will contest the upcoming Local Bodies Elections, this strategy will cover both eventualities. Given suspension of field activities contact will be established and maintained telephonically and through online channels.