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## FEMPOWER PAKISTAN

# (Feminist Leadership for Accountability and Political Rights)

Project No. P006186

PROJECT OPERATIONS REPORT- April, 2020-March 2021

## **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 the understanding of context has changed over the reporting period and how this has affected project implementation

### **Human Rights under Covid 19**

Covid 19 highlighted the precarity of the Human Rights situation in Pakistan for the economically under privileged including the increased vulnerability of women, children, the elderly and transgender populations to gender based and economic violence. Closure of markets, businesses including domestic service rendered large numbers, particularly contract labour, daily wagers and domestic labour which largely comprises women, either jobless or with drastically reduced incomes. Relief measures by the government such as subsidies for the construction industry to give a fillip to the economy did little to help the poorest sections of society as they were heavily tilted in favour of an already rich industry including land mafias. In the context of rising poverty, instructions to already indifferent owners or management to look after labour interests without concrete steps to ensure that this was done or that existing laws on labour rights were being implemented were little more than a rhetorical gesture.

While, there were no direct reports of domestic violence from the communities with whom Simorgh is working, given the pressures of daily subsistence it would appear that this was more because domestic violence shrank into insignificance in the face of imminent starvation, and less a sign of its absence. However, reports from other organisations and helpline services showed that other than the routine forms of gender based violence, the little relief provided to women and young girls through escape to the workplace or school had been lost to the constant and now angry and frustrated male presence in the house due to job loss etc. there were also reports of children especially girls dropping out of school due to school closure as well as parents' inability to pay school fees. This added to the numerical strength of street children and served to encourage underage marriage for girls. In this regard, the Punjab government's refusal to rise the age of marriage for girls to 18 as has been done in Sindh, has been no help.

Further, the shift to virtual means of communication as opposed to physical field presence for project implementation activities served to highlight and confirm women's low access to resources and voice. Zoom and WhatsApp meetings revealed women's lack of ownership and or access to smart phones, laptops and internet facilities as they had to rely on male ASN and CBO leaders for these facilities. The refusal and or reluctance of the latter to hand over the mic or phone to women participants during discussions was both an indicator and reminder of women's low and difficult access to their own voice. Similarly during relief dispersal, it was found that the women who most needed relief were reliant on telephones owned by male members of the family. As a result, in some cases they failed to access relief money which was claimed by the men who owned the phones and who were the first to be apprised that the money had arrived.

### **The Local Government Scene**

Covid 19 is not the only factor that impacted on project implementation work. Uncertainties regarding the terms of the new local government law combined with the government's unwillingness to finalise the date for the local government elections have impacted on project activities. Initially, government sources hinted that local government elections would be held in September 2020; then the date was moved to December of the same year and then indefinitely.

In January 2021 the Punjab Provincial Government made amendments in Punjab Local Government Act 2019. This raised the level of the already existing confusion regarding the new law and its

implementation at the provincial level. Sources in the Election Commission and across political party platforms predicted that the current government was not interested in holding local government elections as PML (N) has a large grassroots voter support that could cost the PTI government. As a result Simorgh has had to delay its LG replication workshops so that appropriate additions/changes that are commensurate with the changes in the local government law can be made in the training content. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court (SC) has ordered the restoration of local government bodies in the Punjab and declared Section 3 of the Punjab Local Government Act 2019 as ultra vires to the Constitution. The SC also issued the order for the elections to be held in May 2021. Combined with the third Covid wave, Simorgh's plans for implementation of project activities have once again be thrown into disarray.

#### Impact of Covid 19 on FEMPOWER project implementation

The pattern for Year 2 of the FEMPOWER project including risks and challenges and impact on the human rights situation in the country was set by the Covid 19 pandemic. All partners were compelled to negotiate their way around lock downs, SOP observation and limited access to project sites. Working in tandem with each other, some strategies were developed jointly, in others each partner organisation charted out its own path for implementation of activities and promotion of the overall goal of women's political empowerment.

Starting with a two-month lockdown and suspension of intercity public transport from March-June 2020, this reporting period for Year 2 witnessed three waves of Corona including an additional two-week closure of the Simorgh office when two of our project staff tested positive with Covid 19 in January 2021. Even now at the time of writing this report two of our field partners and their families have reported sick with Covid 19.

Under these circumstances the two major concerns for project partners were (i) the safety of project staff and protection of the communities we were working with including mitigation of the Covid threat, and (ii) implementation of project activities in keeping with the overall project goals. While decisions on specific strategies were the responsibility of individual partners, it was jointly decided to modify the project work plan in accordance with Covid safety measures and provide cash or kind relief to the most vulnerable in the communities where FEMPOWER was being implemented.

These changes entailed:

#### i. Work plan Modification

- Selectively defer some field activities to later dates, by when we hoped the pandemic would have spent itself
- Modification of other field activities for implementation through virtual means
- Bring forward activities planned for a later date but which could be undertaken from the home or office through virtual means or undertaken in small groups with SOP observation. These included but were not limited to the production of IEC material and in Simorgh's case the production and dissemination of its bi annual socio-legal journal 'Bayan'.

#### ii. Relief Provision

City lockdowns, closure of businesses etc. had resulted in loss of livelihoods for the economically under privileged particularly contract labour, daily wagers and domestic help that consists largely of women. Relief provision to the most vulnerable families at different FEMPOWER sites, which was undertaken for primarily for humanitarian reasons, also served to build trust with concerned communities and to some extent made up for our physical absence from the field.

Providing immediate financial relief to its communities through Easypaisa cash transfers, during the

period July, 2020. The Simorgh Covid 19 relief plan dispersed cash of 5000 approx. to the most vulnerable individuals and families, particularly those supported by women, though not necessarily headed by them, who had lost their jobs due to Covid safety measures.

Relief funds were drawn from moneys left over from cancelled field activities. In all cash relief was disbursed to 400 women claimants in project sites in districts Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh.

iii. Covid Protection Measures

Other than taking safety measures to protect its team and field partners through provision of masks, hand sanitisers and SOP observation, Simorgh in partnership with CBO partners, area focal persons and ASNs part in an information dissemination and awareness activity through relevant IEC material on Covid awareness at selected project sites in the three districts of Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh. For reasons of cost effectiveness and also to save time, Simorgh did not always produce new material for this purpose but took permission from concerned civil society organisations. Other than IEC material Simorgh also distributed PPE suits donated by Zaman Foundation among field partners and frontline workers such as janitorial staff of local waste management authorities etc who were residents at our project sites

### **Lessons Learned**

i. Between the real and virtual world

Relying largely on telephonic conversations and WhatsApp communication, the Simorgh project team managed to maintain its newly built connections with CSOs in the field and build a trust-based relationship with them. However, the shift from on-site community meetings to virtual communications was difficult. A learning process for all of us, including the Simorgh team, was especially difficult for our field partners who were particularly resistant to this mode of communication. Apart from unfamiliarity with the idea of virtual communication and problems caused by lack of or uncertain access to internet facilities; power break downs etc. was community skepticism or lack of understanding of Covid 19 and the risks entailed. As a result, they tended to see our absence as a breach of trust or at best a lack of seriousness about the project, and the reliance on virtual communication as an unnecessary complication.

On a more positive note, the shift to online communication including the use of Zoom etc helped develop our own and community skills in this field. It was found that field partners particularly women were quick to learn how to handle the new technology. Given their poor access to smart phones etc. as well as low educational including literacy levels, this boded well for future communication. At the same time, women's low access to resources evidenced by their reliance on male CSO staff and family members and smart phones etc combined with the fact that most CSOs are male led shed a sharper light on community gender dynamics regarding women's low access to resources and voice and highlighted areas of unmet important need.

This experience also led to the growing realization that virtual communication may become a dominant mode in the not too distant future. At the same time, it highlighted the fact that it cannot effectively

substitute for physical communication especially for trainings and discussion sessions.

ii. CBO/ASN capacity building

Covid 19 resulted in a heavy and unprecedented reliance on CBOs and ASNs for project implementation activities and revealed that as link organisations between CSOs and the community, both entities were ill prepared for the work in terms of documentation skills such as simple community surveys for relief disbursement including a poor work ethic. This last was evidenced in the widespread perception that CBOs are a means to livelihood and a way to build local networks of patronage with little reference to the aims and objectives of task at hand. This can be testified by the fact that some field partners decided not to continue working with us when they realised that the activity expenditures had to be accounted for in detail and funding itself was commensurate with the activity undertaken. This may be a result of the mainstream stress on quantifiable data such as numerical outreach of the project measurable by the number of participants at an activity and not by the nature and quality of the activity's impact. Whatever the reason for this lack, CBOs and ASNs are a valuable resource and efforts must be made to build their capacity for constructive, in-depth, meaningful work.

**General Comment**

During this reporting period the overall tempo of project activities remained slow. Work picked up speed after the lifting of the first lockdown. Regular office work began in August with strict SOPs being maintained. Low-scale field activities were started in the second quarter. The project team felt field activities were necessary to (i) avoid miscommunication with concerned communities, (ii) address trust deficit issues with field partners, and (iii) as a preliminary to field activities that are part of the original work plan and given timelines. However, our attempt at strict SOP observation was not entirely successful due to community level unawareness including their inability to take the pandemic seriously. For example, 50 participants turned up for an activity designed for fewer numbers.

Project activities were planned with field partners and limited number of participants at open venues to minimize the COVID risk for staff and communities. These included workshops on Local Government to be held in all three districts in November, 2020 in all districts. The sudden onset of the second wave of Coronavirus and the announcement of smart lock down by the Government of the Punjab put an end to these – at least for the time being.

Subsequently, the project team took the following actions in this period:

- It re-planned its activities, keeping in view the safety of field staff and project communities. Most of the activities were conducted at different project sites following Corona's SOPs.
- ASN meetings, Gup Shup sessions under the frame of open mics, and advocacy campaign actions by CSOs were conducted with the limited numbers of participants to avoid large public gatherings.
- Project staff monitored and backstopped activities through virtual means (Zoom or WhatsApp) to maintain the quality of the project activities.

Overall, the lessons learned in the third quarter helped the project team to manage the project activities effectively and the team remained engaged in discussions with field partners to undertake further project activities. Then in January 2021 two team members tested positive with Corona and led to the two weeks office closure and quarantine for all staff. In the middle of February, Corona cases started to drop numerically; a partners meeting was held and the decision taken to kick start project activities

again to meet annual targets. This helped the project team to conduct the remaining project activities and local government replications at all project sites in the last month of the project year. A few activities that included exposure visits to government service providers in district Kasur and Toba Tek Singh had to be cancelled on request of concerned government departments as per the government's COVID 19 guidelines. The third wave brought an intensive outbreak of the Coronavirus which again led to the country-wide smart lockdown and strict implementation of SOPs by the provincial government. Soon after this, Simorgh management assessed the situation as not suitable for field activities, and once again it was decided to hold field activities until the situation becomes suitable to conduct project activities.

## **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***

1121.3: Advocacy campaigns by CSO alliances & district field partners

### **Progress:**

Under the advocacy campaign theme **"From Voters to Representatives"** different actions were suggested by CSO partners to strengthen women's political participation and leadership in upcoming Local Government elections. A total 10 actions were undertaken by the CSO partners in district Lahore and Kasur. Mostly actions took the form of community level seminars and awareness sessions. These sessions aimed to increase the local community's awareness on the:

- i. Importance of ID card registration and its benefits for women
- ii. Orientation on The Punjab Local Government Act (PLGA) 2019
- iii. Women's representation in Local Government Elections as voters and councilors

Other activities included awareness walks with a focus on strengthening women's political participation and door-to-door voter education campaigns and direct contact with potential voters to educate them on voting procedures. Through these actions almost 750 community women, men and transgender individuals were directly approached.

**Actions Taken:**

- Two of our CSO partners in district Kasur carried out five advocacy actions on their own behalf as voluntary campaign actions.
- Al-Sufa Welfare Trust (ASWT) organized two awareness raising seminars with 258 community women for awareness raising and mobilization them on citizen's rights and the importance of CNICs.
- ASWT arranged two (MRV) s to facilitate 120 community women to get registered with NADRA.
- Fikr-e-Farda Welfare Organization (FFWO) conducted one seminar on women's socio political rights and encouraged participants to take active part in public political life as responsive and responsible citizens.

***Output 1122: Technical training provided to journalists from 4 provincial capitals and 11 districts on gender sensitive reporting******Activity 1122.1: Module and manual development*****Progress:****Module and Media Workshops**

Preparation of modules and materials for the media workshops is underway including upgradation of the Simorgh-Shirkat Gah Media Guide 'The Squint in the Eye', prepared for an earlier Shirkat Gah-Simorgh project, PEHL. An Urdu edition of the Manual is being planned for wider outreach and use by media workers. The matter has been discussed with translator Farzana Shamim who has agreed to take on the task. This Manual will be translated into Urdu for wider outreach and communication local media workers who will replicate these workshops in their respective districts.

Training of trainer media workshops will be held by Simorgh for media workers nationally who will then replicate them with local media workers.

***Immediate Outcome 1210: Improved ability of women to assume leadership roles in public processes and spaces supported by sensitized male allies in 11 districts******Output 1212: Women provided with opportunities for self-expression and developing/practicing leadership skills***

1212.2: Facilitation of opportunities for self-expression through open mics and gup-shups or Chit-Chats: face-to-face meetings of 5-10 people maintaining social distancing and protocols

**Progress:**

Simorgh arranged three online trainings with the female CBO representatives through Gupshup sessions based on the SALT approach (Support, Appreciate, Learn and Transfer). These trainings were designed to increase community strength in a way that group could together identify their problems, Find and share solutions and take self-initiated actions.

Women who had undergone training later organized and replicated these sessions in their communities with groups of 10 to 12 women. A total of 28 sessions were conducted at different project sites (10

sessions in Toba Tek Singh, 10 in Kasur and 8 sessions in district Lahore).

Overall, these sessions helped community women to share their thoughts and values, as well as their personal understanding of the idea of 'humanity' or human concerns, so as to enhance their strengths for collective ownership of community initiatives. At some project sites women also identified the need of women's political leadership at local levels as a means to better outcomes for women, girls and the community as a whole. In a few communities, participatory engagement of these women helped to identify issues and their action towards desired solutions.

The following are some of the issues identified by community participants including proposed actions:

- Early marriage and gender-based violence. Proposed action: to collectively raise their voice against these abusive practices.
- Collective actions to be taken for the cleanliness of the area and rehabilitation of the community park
- One community woman showed her interest in standing as a candidate in the upcoming elections in order to represent her community women's issues

#### **Follow-Ups/Actions**

Simorgh followed-up the issues taken up by women with further activities to deepen and sustain their interest and active engagement in public life. The actions undertaken were:

- Working Women Development Foundation (WWDF) registered two gender-based violence cases and helped survivors to file and initiate cases.
- WWDF community UC 234, Township woman councilor and active women of the area rehabilitated their community park and made it safe for community women and children.
- Women Worker Helpline (WWHL) developed a committee of active community women to raise awareness and help community residents of UC 92 on basic citizenship documents and women issues. Almost 200 households in the area have been targeted till now.
- Aika Welfare Foundation (AWF) raising awareness on child abuse through educating teachers, parents and children over child abuse prevention methods.

#### **Challenges**

Attitude/behavior of male CSO heads (Backstopping observation): Male CSO heads had helped arrange 'Women's Only' discussion sessions and provided them with meeting space and internet facilities etc. However, it was observed that during these sessions, they found it difficult to hand over control of the proceedings not only did they refuse to leave the sessions; they consistently interrupted women speakers and often refused to give them the mike or smart phone. It took sustained effort by the project team to convince them of the fact that these were women specific sessions where women could comfortably share their experiences, and not spaces for men to tell women what they should do or explain their experiences to them.

***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***

1221.3: Production of print & online socio-legal journal '**Bayan**' featuring critical essays from a feminist perspective on laws and judicial decision-making to generate wider public debate

#### **Progress:**

To make up for the unpredictable COVID situation and avoid future delays, Simorgh's editorial team started to work simultaneously on three volumes of 'Bayan' in the second year. Paper writers were identified and started to write their papers. Meanwhile, the editorial team had also decided to work on setting up the system for online publication to increase the outreach of the journal 'Bayan'. The first volume of Bayan on the theme: "Freedom of Speech and Expression" was due in April 2021 but has been furthered delayed because of the latest Covid lockdown. A small print edition will follow the e journal.

Activities during the last year included:

#### **1. 'Bayan'**

- i. Commissioning, editing and finalizing the content for this particular volume comprising a total of 7 pieces (4 papers, excerpts from a paper from Bayan archives, a reflection essay, and an op-ed style comment)
- ii. Commissioning of papers, signing of contracts with writers and receipt of and payment for papers for Bayan Vols. 1, 2 and 3/The themes of Vols 2 and 3 are: COVID-19 and Local Government with a focus on women's political participation.
- iii. Bayan volume 1.

The editorial team was able to commission a wide array of topics for Vol 1 writers. Details follow:

- Shmyla Khan – Online Freedom and Gendered Abuse
- Adnan Rehmat – PEMRA's role as a Media regulator
- Ishtiaq Ahmed – Censorship and Control of Print Media in Pakistan (1947 – till today)
- Zaki Rehman – The Right to Freedom of Speech etc. Concept and critical history with reference to Pakistan.
- Rubina Saigol – Silence is not golden (a reflection essay on the culture of silence)
- Nighat Dad & Zainab Durrani – On the removal and blocking of unlawful content and the rights of the citizen (an op-ed/ a critical appreciation)
- Excerpts from a paper on censorship in Pakistan by Kamila Hyat from 'Bayan' archives written during the Musharraf government

#### **Current Status**

- Work on all papers is complete.
  - The editorial team commissioned a digital artist an illustration relevant to the theme of the volume i.e. "Freedom of Speech and Expression", which was approved and finalized.
- iv. Contracts  
Contracts for payments to contributors were drawn out and signed, and payments were made.

#### **2. Bayan Website**

A separate website for Bayan has been set up after thorough discussions with the website creators. Features are being tested, and the website is in its final stages of tweaking and adjustments so it is user-friendly for all devices. Social media sites have been set up and once the volume goes to print, and is published online, social media will be allowed access.

### **3. Bayan Webinars**

Webinars on published papers are planned for wider civil society outreach particularly to college and university students. This process will be initiated once Bayan vol. 1 is out.

#### **Future Plans:**

The Bayan team is greatly looking forward to printing and publishing online the volume on “Free Speech and Expression”. The pressures of COVID have caused delays in getting the material for the volume together. The team has adapted to the evolving situation and also gotten a head-start on bringing together pieces for the later volumes. The plans for the future publications including Vol 4 will depend on the evolving COVID situation.

***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***

1311.3: Regular ASN meetings

#### **Progress:**

Area Support Networks (ASNs) have been developed and are functioning in three districts; Lahore, Kasur, and Toba Tek Singh. Area Support Networks were developed from orientation meetings and include people from various professions such as government officials, media practitioners, lawyers, CSO representatives, and women community leaders. Once established these groups started functioning in their respective areas to develop a gender-responsive approach towards community issues. During the second year, three meetings of each district network were conducted. The details of each ASN performance are as follows:

##### **➤ Area Support Network, Lahore**

**The First ASN Meeting (17<sup>th</sup> September 2020):** This group consisted of CSO representatives, lawyers, councilors, and govt. officials. Several ASN members were unable to participate due to official reasons. Miss Neelam Hussain briefly explained the project and stated the objectives of ASN to the meeting participants.

#### **Issues of the community:**

1. **CNIC Registration Procedures:** Participants showed dissatisfaction mostly over the unavailability of CNIC procedures. The NADRA official who was present at the meeting gave an undertaking to assist in CNIC-related matters.
2. **Voter Mobilization:** There is a high need for voter education among the women of the

community. It was suggested that CBOs and councilors should work together to provide voter education in their communities.

However, due to the absence of several invited ASN members, the overall meeting did not work towards a solution and remained less participatory.

**Second ASN Meeting (16th December 2020):** This meeting was organized at the District Election Commission (ECP) office. The District Election Commissioner Lahore facilitated the meeting and addressed the issues related to NADRA and ECP. Discussions covered the following issues:

**Issues and Discussion:**

1. **Issue of CNIC Cards:** All the issues regarding CNIC Cards were discussed. Among the issues raised in this regard were those of women who do not have basic documents (B-forms, matriculation and/or marriage certificates). The DEC explained the procedures for each case and emphasized need and importance of proper documents for NADRA registration. Mr. Tauqeer further explained that women who do not have identification cards due to the unavailability of documents should fill in an affidavit on required information. Once verified by the local councilor it was eligible for submission at the NADRA office.
2. **Unavailability of NADRA centers:** This issue under discussion was the absence of NADRA offices in neighbouring areas of Gajumatta to Model Town and the need to arrange of NADRA mobile vans to enable local residents particularly those from economically under privileged classes, to register with the national database. The DEC Mr. Tauqeer, advised that : i. residents should give a written application to the NADRA office requesting that a NADRA centre be set up in their area and (ii). Regarding the arrangement of NADRA mobile vans for issuance of CNICs, suggested that proper homework and preparation was necessary. If any of CBO or councilor interested in arranging a mobile van in their area should provide a proper list of a minimum of 60 applicants apply for a mobile van to the Deputy Director NADRA who is responsible for such arrangements.
3. **Voter registration/Mobilization:** Residents of newly developed societies discussed the issue of voter registration of residents and shared the difficulties they face during vote casting. Mr. Taqeer responded in detail and shared that the uncertain status of non-registered societies/colonies with LDA is problematic and the reason why the NADRA office does not show their data. Voter lists of ECP get updated with the computerized data of NADRA. He also added that votes can be registered or transferred through particular procedures. All rules are written in the law.
4. **In response to a question** on the possible the dates of local government elections, the DEC informed that they would be held after the finalization of constituencies and upon the instructions of the Punjab Government.
5. **Voting Procedures for Polling Staff:** Regarding a query about voting procedures for polling staff especially women who are on all day duty at given polling stations and therefore are unable to cast their own vote, the DEC said there was a special procedure for polling agents and they do get to cast their vote but did not give any information on the method and way of doing so.

The DEC offered Simorgh to get registered with ECP so it could be a part of their planning meetings and election training workshops. Overall, this meeting turned out to be productive in terms of facilitation and guidance towards the community's issues.

**Third ASN Meeting (26th February 2021):** This meeting was organized at the Regional Social Welfare Office. The discussion of the meeting was around the follow-ups over CNIC registration, health facilities available for women in government hospitals, GBV cases, and related response services. The meeting proceedings are as follows:

1. **Follow-up on the issue of CNIC Cards:** The meeting began with the follow-up over the ID card lists provided by the CSOs and councilors to avail the facility of NADRA mobile van in their communities especially for registration of community women. Issues and availability of facilities were discussed concerning CNIC registration by the participants who had missed the earlier meeting.
2. **Domestic Workers Registration:** A female councilor raised the issue of difficulty in domestic worker's registration and unavailability of social welfare services for them. She also shared her experiences regarding the obstructive procedure of workers registration.
3. **Health Card:** A mobilizer present in the meeting gave a briefing about health cards and their relevant procedures. Health has been seen as one of the major issues of the communities.
4. **Lack of Availability of Hospitals Wards:** A woman councilor Ms. Shameem raised the issue of the unavailability of gynecological wards in hospitals for pregnant women especially in the COVID-19 period. Upon this, Ms. Anwar Saeed responded that the government has not given any instructions to hospitals on this matter; therefore this issue should be reported and resolved.
5. **Gender-Based Violence cases and Solutions:** Participants shared experiences of a whole range of incidents of social and political violence and abuse. They agreed that awareness was an essential component for the resolution of such cases. They were also given information on government plans to set up **Shelter Homes (Dar-ul-Amaan) for all categories** of distressed women including a special helpline for women. They provide a lot of information and have a special helpline as well.

In conclusion, this meeting was effective regarding the diagnosis of the problems of the community including formulation of ways to resolve and/or provide redress in cases that are encountered by the councilors.

➤ **Area Support Network, Kasur**

**First Area Support Meeting (20<sup>th</sup> September 2020):** This meeting was held sequentially at two different places in district Kasur so that Covid SOPs could be maintained. The issues discussed included:

1. **CNIC Card Registration:** Women's CNIC registration was discussed as an important component for their empowerment. According to a CSO representative, there were almost 1,500,000 women in Kasur who did not have ID cards in the last elections. Participants suggested that it is necessary to get women registered in the NADRA database to empower them politically. This would enable their access to government schemes such as **Sehat Sahulat Programme, Kafalat, Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme, Waseela-e-Taleem**, etc. Meeting participants said that CBOs could play a major role in facilitating women's registration with NADRA.
2. **The Inability of Women to Vote:** Women teachers in the meeting raised their concern about not being able to cast votes as they were appointed as polling agents. Upon this, ASN members informed that special procedures are in place to enable people in such situations to cast their votes. The necessary information is available with the Election Commission, however, it needs to be widely disseminated and procedures need to be explained to the polling staff. The lack of information availability in this regard was seen as a failure on part of the Election Commission.

- 3. Need of Skill Centre:** The importance of a skill training centre for income generation in Kasur was discussed. Participants stated this could become a source of income generation for women and unemployed young adults in the community. In response, DDO Social Welfare shared that the Social Welfare Department has a district-level skill centre, which provides skill development courses for women. Besides this, there are TEVTA centres that provide vocational courses. He affirmed his assistance in this matter.

In conclusion it was seen that the two things needing to be identified within communities by the woman councilors and CSOs were; (i) the number of women interested in skill training (ii) the nearest TEVTA centre for the residents of Raja Jang. This meeting ended on a really successful note and members were eager to work towards equitable resolutions in every way.

**Second ASN Meeting (11th January 2021):** This meeting was organized at the Social Welfare Department, Kasur and facilitated by the officials of the social welfare department and district health department.

The meeting was based on an extensive discussion on the following issues:

- 1. Community Skill Centers:** A CSO from Raja Jang raised the issue of a community skill center and public parks. There was a detailed discussion on these need based issues problem and led to the following outcomes:
  - **District municipal committee** can be contacted for the availability of parks.
  - **Sanatzar** works under the Social Welfare Department - they can facilitate skill training programmes on a district level.
  - A large number of skill centers in every area is impossible because of the lack of funds - however, Sanatzar trains people so whoever is interested can get trained and teach in all communities.
- 2. Infrastructural Problems:** Participants highlighted the infrastructural inadequacies in Kasur especially regarding health services. The unavailability of doctors and staff members is a major issue the public faces. DDO Health Department Mr. Asif informed that the government is installing **Biometric systems** and advised participants to report these lapses in public health service delivery to the relevant authorities with evidence.
- 3. Health Services:** There was a briefing over the available health facilities newly introduced by the government such as the **Sehat Sahulat Card** for recognized underprivileged citizens. Both Health and Social Welfare departments are working on this scheme with the help of NADRA. CSOs were advised to play their role in helping to identify deserving people in their communities and helping those who do not have identity cards.
- 4. CNIC Cards Registration:** Another concern shown by the participants was about the need for CNIC registration of a large number of people in different areas who are not registered with NADRA yet. Everyone recognized the importance of the issue. Relevant people who have worked around this issue shared their experiences of public mobilizations and the consequent facilitation of a significant number of people in getting NADRA registrations. Ms. Safia (Ex-District Councilor) suggested that a list of the interested people after their identification should be provided to NADRA to organize a mobile van or to reserve a counter in NADRA centre. She offered her help to the interested participants in organizing an MRV in their respective communities.
- 5. Social Protection Projects:** Mr. Akbar Raza gave a briefing on the social projects undertaken by the government under the umbrella of social protection and briefed participants on **Ba-himmat**

**Buzurg Programme and Humqadam Programme.** He suggested that CSOs who are working with special persons and community welfare workers should take lists from him to inform the senior and disabled persons in their communities to avail these cash stipends.

The meeting went well in terms of identification of community issues, information on running government programmes, and facilitation by the government officials and workers.

**Third ASN Meeting (25th February 2021):** This meeting was held at Social Welfare Department Kasur. The meeting began with follow-up on the problems discussed in the previous meeting and included. Other problems faced by participants faced. These are as follows::

1. **Community Skill Centres:** A major backdrop in this campaign was that women were unable to get to the skill training centres - long distances and mistrust shown by the parents stopped them from availing learning opportunities. On this, the DDO Social Welfare suggested arranging awareness drives to take this matter forward.
2. **CNIC Cards Registration:** In this meeting, CSOs shared lists of their community members for their ID card registration and requested DDO NADRA to arrange MRVs in their areas to facilitate poor residents to get their ID cards. DDO NADRA confirmed his help in the facilitation process.
3. **Community Development Projects:** The Educational Welfare Society shared lists of senior citizens and disabled persons from their area for the **Ba-Himmat Buzurg and Kafalat Programmes** with Mr. Akbar Raza DDO Social Welfare to facilitate identification of the deserving people in their communities.
4. **Gender-Based Violence Cases:** A lady councilor talked about the increasing number of gender-based violence cases in Kasur where victims do not get justice. She further shared that most of the cases she dealt with are related to domestic violence. A detailed debate on the matter took place with the following outcomes:
  - GBV is due mainly to drug addicts and irresponsible persons who do not fulfill their responsibilities. Resultantly, disputes increase.
  - All the members emphasized the point of making people aware and a participant said that helping families in employment opportunities can work effectively in communities.
  - Mr. Akbar Raza also shared that there is a **rehabilitation centre** named **Rehmat Welfare Trust** working for the rehabilitation of drug addicts in Kasur for free. Mr. Akbar he could refer such cases to the trust for the rehabilitation of the drug addicts.

This meeting turned out to be productive in terms of facilitation by government departments especially the Social Welfare Department, Kasur and NADRA.

- **Area Support Network, Toba Tek Singh**

**First Area Support Meeting (28<sup>th</sup> August 2020):** The first ASN meeting was held in Toba-Tek Singh where ASN members actively participated in the meeting and discussed the different issues they face, such as:

1. **Voting Inability of Women:** Participants shared their experiences and it was found that family pressure and caste norms are the major reasons for women's inability to cast their vote in some communities in Toba Tek Singh.
2. **Lack of Economic Opportunities for Women:** By hearing all the members, it was highly agreed that the provision of economic opportunities for the women of Toba Tek Singh is vital for community development. So that we can empower them and improve their status in their community.
3. **Exclusion of Women in Public Spaces:** A woman from District Head Quarters (DHQ) Toba-Tek Singh stressed the importance of changing social attitudes towards working women. She said

men tended to be extremely rude and ill-behaved towards women in public spaces. For this, different awareness drives and campaigns can be launched.

Generally, this meeting went well in terms of tracing the problems of the community and devising ways to tackle them.

**Second ASN Meeting (21st December 2020):** The second meeting was organized at a CSO (Society for Human Development) office. Government officials from the district Social Welfare Department and Local Board had been invited to the meeting to speak about the concerned issues. The former were unable to attend due to other official commitments. Mr. Abrar, the Deputy Director of the Local Board explained the new Punjab Local Government Act (PLGA) 2019 and responded to the queries and complaints of the problems faced by women in local government. The following issues were raised by participants:

**1. The Exclusion of Women in Political Spaces:**

- The **inability of successful woman candidates** to honour their election promises to women of their constituency due to the exclusionary attitude and behavior of **male local council members** who consistently ignored their requests.
- **Reluctance or refusal of political parties** to give women candidates tickets for direct election and their relegation to the limited reserved seats.

**2. Exclusion of Women in Structural Bodies:** Sidelineing of women in local government and as party political workers with years of experience by male peers and political parties in the following ways:

- i. **Not invited to or informed** about local body meetings
- ii. **Not provided with space in local government offices.** This hampered community women's access to them including their ability to address their problems
- iii. Little or **no access to community development funds** (when available).
- iv. The practice of **male family members acting as proxies for women representatives** was reported at all sites and particularly by women in Toba Tek Singh.
- v. In situations where a woman counselor is aware of her rights and has the confidence to raise her voice on issues, **male peers gang up against her.** This highlights the need for a **separate office space with a telephone for women** so that they can perform their duties easily.

On the positive side is the fact that women resent this sidelineing. They want to build on their contacts with community women and their needs, understand their problems as women, and are prepared to fight for their right to voice and agency both within the local government system and as party political workers.

• **Suggestions by the Deputy Director:**

Mr. Abrar did not address the above issues directly but stressed the following:

- (i) The need to improve the Local Government System
- (ii) The responsibility of political parties to empower women representatives from their parties and enable them to work effectively for their communities
- (iii) As this is a patriarchal society, women have to speak up for their rights
- (iv) Under PLGA 2019, women political leaders at the grassroots level will get a chance to get elected by it.

This meeting provided women leaders a platform to discuss their issues and helped to provide

guidelines for solutions. The Deputy Director Local Board was quite responsive on woman-raised issues.

**Third ASN Meeting (10th March 2021):** Third ASN meeting was held at a local hotel. It was for the very first time when women lawyers and Chief Officer Municipal Committee participated in the meeting to facilitate the relevant issues. A representative from the office of the district election commissioner couldn't make it on time due to his official commitment. The meeting proceeded with the available members including ex-women councilors, CSO representatives, and lawyers. A breakdown of the issues discussed is as follows:

1. **CNIC Card Registration:** ID card registration issues in Toba Tek Singh were discussed and it was decided that **awareness campaigns** and **mobilization in the communities** over the importance of getting registered with NADRA should be undertaken. A woman participant suggested that community women who feel reluctant to get registered with NADRA can be facilitated through NADRA mobile vans. It was agreed that members would consult with the NADRA's officials regarding the matter.
2. **Health Care and Services:** Mr. Arif gave a briefing on the **Sehat Sahulat Program**, its eligibility criteria and benefits, and the complaint process in detail. Participants asked questions related to health card facilities and Mr. Arif provided the necessary information.
3. **Infrastructural Problems:** Participants highlighted the **sewerage and waste management issues** in Toba Tek Singh. They shared that one by one the sewerage system had broken down in almost all areas of Toba Tek Singh and the situation gets worse after rains. Heaps of garbage can be seen everywhere creating serious hazards for the people in the area. They emphasized sewerage systems to be repaired and enlarged to cater to the needs of a growing population including efficient management of street cleanliness and garbage removal. The CO Municipal Committee admitted to the situation shared by the participants and excused that Municipal Committee on grounds of shortage of staff and funds. There is a need to run mega projects to fulfill the needs of the growing population in Toba Tek Singh. **Public-private partnerships** or **awareness campaigns** on waste management can help MC and TTS residents to overcome these problems.
4. **Gender-Based Violence Cases:** A female advocate talked about GBV cases and shared that most of the cases she dealt with are domestic violence cases of extreme levels. She shared that violent cases are not considered a crime in our society and there is a need to **spread awareness** on GBV as a crime and ways/procedures to handle such cases. She also emphasized parents' role in this regard to shape the character of their children. DDO Social Welfare also shared the **services of Social Welfare** and **Dar-ul-Aman** to protect the victims of violence.

➤ **Challenges and Gaps in Area Support Network**

1. **Lack of Discipline and Understanding:** This is a major factor to be seen in all the districts. There is a major gap between councilors and communities as well as between the councilors and the government officials. Simorgh helped address this lag in the working and tried to facilitate the officials in every way possible.
2. **Lag of Co-ordination between CSOs and Government Officials:** It was widely seen that there is no coordination between CSOs and Government officials. CSOs resolve the cases by themselves and Government officials remain ignorant of the relevant issues of the community.
3. **Recurrent Issues:** In Kasur, it was seen that issues were the same in all ASN

meetings (which were brought up by the CSOs) and some newer and relevant issues needed to be addressed as well.

4. **Irresponsive Government Officials:** In some cases, it was observed that government officials do not pay heed to the cases which they encounter and it causes more hurdles in the way of different CSOs/CBOs workings.

#### Actions Taken

ASNs members in all three districts are not only reporting and facilitating on existing issues but also taking actions on issues in their respective areas. Reported actions are:

#### CNIC Registration

- Ms. Zakia Ali arranged NADRA mobile Van (MRV) in UC 236 and helped 130 Fe/male to get registered with NADRA.
- Ms. Aqeela TTS based councilor motivated 50 community women to get registered with NADRA subsequently 5 women from her area NADRA registration.
- Active female councilors of district Kasur Ms. Safia and Ms. Anwar organized NADRA mobile (MRV) in UC 11 and helped 6000 Fe/male community members to get registered with NADRA.
- WWHL identified 50 community women for CNIC registration and shared a request for a NADRA mobile van with a NADRA representative at the ASN Lahore.
- Fikr-e-Farda Welfare Organization (FFWO) handed over a list of 136 Fe/male community members for CNIC registration to a NADRA representative in ASN Kasur.
- Life Savers Ministry (LSF) also shared a list of **42 Fe/male brick kiln workers** for the MRV facility for CNIC registration in Phool Nagar, Kasur
- Society for Human Development (SHD) has identified 73 community members and forwarded the MRV requests to the NADRA department for CNIC registration.
- SHD involved Municipal Committee for the cleanliness of the streets and roads in the area of Christian colony and Mubarkabad to get rid of garbage heaps in the area

#### Humqadam Programme Lists

- Educational Welfare Society (EWS), Kasur submitted a list of **200 disabled persons** from UC Hussain Khanwala to DDO social welfare for monthly stipends under **Humqadam programme**.

#### Sehat Sahulat Programme

- Citizen Social Welfare Foundation (CSWF) aware and mobilize 500 community members to get their health cards in district Toba Tek Singh.

***Immediate Outcome 1320: 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 and male allies including councilors on provincial local government systems, planning and budgets***

1321.2: Baseline meeting with councilors to undertake problems and needs identification

#### **Progress:**

The two remaining FGDs have been conducted this year in district Kasur with the community women of

Hardosahari and Hussain Khanwala. This component of the baseline survey was delayed due to the sudden Corona outbreak in Pakistan in mid-March, 2020. The FGDs had been conducted in the second quarter and the comparative analysis report of FGDs was shared in the six-monthly report.

1321.3: Technical trainings and refreshers on Local Government Systems and Development Plans and Budgets to women and male allies including councilors

**Progress:**

Simorgh conducted Local Government training workshops in all three districts Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh in March 2021. A total of 24 training sessions have been conducted to train 521 female and male community members, including councilors on provincial local government system, development planning and budgets. These trainings were conducted by the trainers; trained by the FEMPOWER lead partner Shirkat Gah in October 2020. However, it was not always smooth sailing as Simorgh had to replace trainers for district Kasur trainings as trainers excused themselves from conducting these training sessions. Miss Zobia and Mr. Jawad Shah later were selected as trainers for district Kasur trainings. Before holding training sessions with the community, trainers presented live demonstrations of their training module to the project team physically and through Zoom, This enabled Simorgh to oversee and assess the level of their preparation etc. All trainers designed their training sessions according to the training module shared by Mr. Zahid Islam. These trainings helped workshop participants to increase their understanding of:

- The Punjab Local Government Act PLGA-2019
- The Punjab Village Panchayats & Neighborhood Councils Act-2019
- Role and Responsibilities of local representatives
- Planning and Budgeting
- Structure and functioning of local government institutions
- Understanding of local electoral system
- Differences of Local Government System-2013 and existing laws PLGA-2019

Breakdown of training session and participants is given below:

District	Female	Male	Total
Lahore	97	84	181
Kasur	94	71	165
Toba Tek Singh	91	68	159
<b>Grand Total</b>	282	223	505

**Methodology Used:**

The overall training methodology followed by the trainer was same as training agenda. Trainers involved the participants' attention in the training through discussions and groups work.

- Pre-Test
- Brain Storming

- Group work
- Follow-up after each session
- Participants Post Test

### **Identification of Issues by Participants**

A majority of training participants were ex-councilors who actively participated in training sessions and shared their valuable experiences and identified flaws in this system. A sample of their observations and comments is given below:

- Only an effective local government system can ensure community development
- The number of seats for female candidates should be increased under the new law
- Women councilors do not have any authority or funds to perform their mandate
- National and provincial governments are more powerful to influence the functioning of local government
- Numerous community issues are increasing due to the non-functioning of local governments
- The majority of councilors are unaware of their roles and responsibilities under the new local government law and they cannot perform to their fullest
- Unavailability of budget to local government representatives (especially to the male/female councilors) undermine their authority
- The Increase in inflation and the crime rate is due to the non-functioning of local governments
- Corruption in the local government system
- Lack of proper planning and budgeting processes
- Uneducated elected councilors
- Lack of coordination and facilitation at local level structures

### **Participants' Feedbacks/Suggestions**

A majority of trainee participants seemed satisfied with the knowledge shared in the workshop. The project team also recorded their feedback after the training workshops for future corrections. Most of the male and female councilors shared that it was the first time they were trained on the local government system, structure, budgeting and responsibilities of councilors in local bodies. They provided the following feedback and suggestions to the project team:

- Local government structures need to be given the freedom to develop and ensure public participation in the true spirit
- Government should devolve political, administrative, financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the local government
- Youth should be trained in local government bodies so as to increase their participation in local affairs.
- Seats for women candidates should be increased to enhance their participation
- Seats should be reserved for youth candidates for the representation of their issues
- Seats for laborers and farmers should be increased according to their population
- Capacity development and training programmes should be continued so that local government representatives are able to deliver according to the people's choice and requirements.
- Most of the participants after training seemed determined to work for the development of their constituencies
- Participants of all most all training workshops were satisfied with the communication skills and

knowledge shared by the trainers

**Challenges Faced:**

Local government training workshops have been carried out under their own set of challenges. Despite limited time and pressurized conditions, the project team managed to conduct 24 training workshops within 15 days. These training workshops both a learning experience for the project team and a means to identify potential project stakeholders. The project team faced the following challenges in conducting the training workshops:

- Identification and mobilization of councilors in all districts (especially in Toba Tek Singh)
- Irresponsible and non-cooperative behavior of a few CSO partners in the mobilization of potential candidates and logistical arrangements
- Refusal of selected master trainers to conduct training workshops in district Kasur
- A large number of training participants were uneducated and it was difficult to train and involve them in the group work
- Participation of more than 20 participants in a few workshops caused difficulty for project team to maintain Corona SOPs
- Audio-visual documentation of the training sessions following the rigid time limit was also challenging for the project team
- Non-serious participants in a few training workshops undermined the training environment and impacted negatively on the training discussion
- A majority of the participants did not arrive on time and it seemed as common practice that caused a delay in starting the training sessions and disturbed those who arrived on time

***Output 1322: Technical assistance provided for the operationalization of Women Councilors Caucuses to women councilors in 10 districts***

Activity 1322.1: Facilitation of women to draft and launch Standard Operating Procedures of Women's Forums

**Progress:**

**Zoom Meetings with Women Councilors**

This activity was not included in this specific reporting period. Where Corona spread and lockdown impeded the political participation of women, it also provided them a chance to connect with their communities in this time of need by involving them in relief-related activities. Women councilors in a few project sites participated in this work and identified deserving community women for relief. Also, several councilors met during the baseline survey, approached the Simorgh team to apprise us of their eagerness to start working the project. In preparation for work in the field, the Simorgh team initiated small **Zoom meetings** with ex-women councilors, and began a dialogue or conversation with women councilors to provide them with a chance to discuss their issues and ideas especially on how to deal with the mindset of men who usually think women know nothing.

Five meetings were undertaken for this purpose in the second quarter of Year 2. These comprised, three Zoom meetings with women councilors of district Lahore and one each with women councilors of districts Kasur and Toba-Tek Singh. Women councilors shared their issues and challenges and together

decided to raise their voices to make women's representation more effective.

### **Pertinent Shared Issues**

Participants of these discussion meetings or conversations shared their experiences of working in a patriarchal setup and the many challenges they faced from their male colleagues. These include:

- Male dominance and bias against women councilors in council meetings leads to behaviour that sidelines their presence and participation.
- The unavailability of development funds keeps women councilors powerless and ineffective as public representatives.
- Women councilors run election campaigns and mobilize party voters at the grassroots level, but party leaders do not acknowledge their work when distributing election tickets. This seriously undermines their position with the community and male peers and minimizes female representation in local government.
- Reserved seats for women candidates had weakened their position in councils as they left them open to taunts by male peers of not being directly elected community representatives.
- Raised concerns over fewer women quota seats in the new PLGA 2019 law

### **Suggestions/Action Plans**

Women councilors of district Lahore were consistent in their determination to run this Forum to improve women's representation at the local government level. These women also shared their suggestions for future action plans to actively participate in other project activities aimed to achieve political empowerment. These actions are:

- Demand to increase women's representation in the Heads Cabinet mentioned in the PLGA 2019
- Proposed to design strategies for advocacy to increase women's representation
- A meeting with the District Election Commission was suggested to get clarity on local government elections
- Women councilors should start their doing their 'homework' for the coming elections
- Approach the Election Commission to provide constituency maps and previous voter lists, help women councilors run an election campaign
- Trainings on the Punjab Local government Act 2019 and election campaigns to be undertaken.

### **Action Taken**

In this regard, assisted by Ms. Anila Baig, ex-district councilor of PTI, Simorgh took an initiative on behalf of the councilors of district Lahore and presented a recommendation letter to the Member of the Local Government Committee, Punjab, Mr, Ijaz Chaudhary with the following demands:

- i. Fair and equal representation of women in Local Bodies
- ii. Increase of women's quota to 33%
- iii. Budgetary allocations for women councilors at 10% of the total local body allocation
- iv. Fixed allocation of women seats in Village Panchayats
- v. Ensure 2% of women's representation in the 5% resident representation of the Common Assembly
- vi. Setting up of separate women's offices in Local Body offices
- vii. Increase in the number of reserved seats for Labour, Kisan and non-Muslim minorities from one to two to viz 1 female and 1 male representation.

### **Challenges**

- There were two main challenges in conducting Zoom meetings with female councilors in Kasur and Toba Tek Singh; i) Unavailability of smart phones, ii) participant unfamiliarity and subsequent unease with Zoom or other means of virtual communication.
- Women councilors of district Lahore started to lose interest in Zoom meetings and began to insist on physical onsite meetings to make the forum into a more serious and workable entities keep the nature of the forums more workable.

A drop in Covid positivity rates enabled Simorgh to operationalize this demand in the last quarter of the project year. As a consequence, two Forum meetings were conducted with councilors of districts Lahore and Kasur. These meetings aimed to provide women councilors and community leaders an opportunity to amplify their voices for promoting the rights of women, girls and other marginalized groups of their areas as well as to create space for their aimed agendas to promote their representation at the local level.

### **Women's Political Forum, Kasur – 2.03.2021**

This meeting was held at Safia Saeed's (woman councilor) Dera in District Kasur. The main purpose of this gathering was the formation of a committee of the Women's Political Forum in Kasur and appointing people for different tasks and activities. 13 women participated, including 10 councilors and 3 community activists who belonged to different areas of district Kasur – some women were from district council structures while a few participants were social activists from the community, working on different social issues.

#### Formation of Forum Committee and Division of Responsibilities

While talking about forum functioning participants decided to form a committee to make the forum functional. Participants decided that Ms. Safia will be the Chairperson of the committee. Along with her Ms. Nasreen Shakut will be the general secretary of the committee. It was further decided that Ms. Safia will be the chairperson of the action committee. Along with her, Ms. Nasreen Shaukat will be the general secretary of the committee. With this, Ms. Anwar and Ms. Parveen will coordinate in replacement as they are quite active among women and capable enough to handle meetings.

#### Identification of Issues

- Participants highlighted the increasing unemployment issue in district Kasur and blamed the sitting government and its policies for its increase.
- Inadequate health care services for women are discussed as no one pays attention to the women/patients in DHQ until they have a strong reference.
- Participants also shared concerns over an increase in domestic violence cases in their communities due to unemployment and drug addiction.
- The problem of solid waste management was also shared as one of the major issues in the district.

#### Community Development Plans

Continuing discussion on existing issues, participants decided to select a few to work on to achieve the expected results. Selected issues and action plans are:

##### **i. Community Skill Centre**

- Participants put forward a plan to curb the issue of unemployment in their communities by setting up skill training centres; they felt these centres would help community women to improve their skills and enable them to earn their own living.

- It was decided that these skill centers would be set up after accessing community's need for specific skills and focusing on the community's contribution to ensure the sustainability.
- ii. Domestic Violence and Child Abuse**
  - Participants decided that records of domestic violence and child abuse cases in their respective areas would be maintained and used to arrange awareness drives.
- iii. Waste Disposal**
  - The issue of waste disposal can only be solved if local communities take responsibility as active citizens and make the department responsible for this service accountable.
  - It was mutually decided that participants will check with the municipal committee about waste removal methods and push them for waste removal.

### **Women's Political Forum, Lahore – 4.03.2021**

This was the first physical meeting of the Women Political Forum Lahore after the COVID lockdown. 14 participants comprising 4 social workers and 10 councilors attended the meeting. The meeting aimed to functionalise the forum to enable women ex-councilors political/social workers to identify the issues of their areas, develop their plans for required action.

#### Formalization of District Political Forum

- Participants were keen to form a committee to formalize the functioning of the forum. It was decided with everyone's agreement that Ms. Sameera would take the position of Chairperson WPFC – Lahore and Ms. Shameem will be the Vice President. With them, four other members, Ms. Saba, Ms. Zakia Ali, Ms. Noreen Javed, and Ms. Mehwish, would coordinate in different agendas. All of them would develop agendas and activity plans and further coordinate with the members of WPF Lahore.
- Forum members agreed that assigning these responsibilities will enhance their confidence in arranging meetings and developing a proper activity plan and schedules.

#### Setting-up Agendas for Effective Representation of Women Leaders

- The meeting involved a detailed and in-depth discussion on the need for a women's political forum in Lahore and the methods and approach which can be used to make it work effectively.
- It was decided that all members should make action plans on issues in their communities similar to the way one of them had shared an issue of violence.
- Forum members also decided to undertake these tasks in the form of groups of two to three members to keep their work effective.

#### Issues Highlighted and Discussed

- A wide variety of administrative and social problems that must be managed and solved were discussed. All members stated garbage disposal and removal as one of the most relevant issues of Lahore and blamed bad governance for this.
- Participants talked about municipal solid-waste, creating unsanitary conditions in their areas, and these conditions in turn leading to environmental pollution and outbreak of different diseases. With this, many participants blamed LWMC, PHA, and WASA to be responsible for the mismanagement of solid waste in Lahore. The task on solid-waste management presented by forum members seemed complex and challenging.
- Participants also talked about increasing violence cases in their areas and highlighted issues related to child abuse and Gender-based violence cases one by one. They also shared their experiences in handling such issues with families of victims and the non-cooperative behavior of

police to report these cases.

### Community Development Plans

#### **i. Waste Disposal:**

- Members decided that WPF should play a vital role in making the citizens aware of their social responsibility of keeping the areas clean. Also, citizens should be informed about the hazards of improper waste disposal in their areas. However, forum members find this task difficult, but remained enthusiastic to work over it.
- They also include rehabilitation of community parks and greenbelts in their plan as solid waste heaps in parks and greenbelts are also a reason of increasing environmental pollution.
- Aware general public of the hazards of improper solid waste disposal and garbage burning.

#### **ii. Violence against Women and Children:**

- Forum members also decided to address violence cases in their areas through increasing community awareness of child abuse and violence against women in their areas.
- Record keeping of violence cases in their areas and documentation for the facilitation process.
- Reporting on Police Noncooperation: to be shared in ASN meetings or exposure visits in respective departments.

### Feedbacks/Suggestions

- Forum members seemed satisfied with the overall initiative and determined to work for the betterment their communities
- Miss Zakia suggested to provide forum members with membership cards to increase the effectiveness of the forum

### Follow-Ups and Action Taken

It was decided that monthly follow-ups of will be carried out with the forum members over their plans to guide and assist them in achieving desired results. Councilors shared following actions taken by them:

- Tree plantation in different areas (Gulshan Iqbal Park and Greenbelts) of Iqbal Town
- Assisting communities in addressing **Gender-Based Violence** cases
- Follow-up with municipal committee office for regular garbage collection and proper disposal – identified the scandal of not providing salaries to the municipal committee staff, this resulted in another action plan of conducting an advocacy campaign for the rights of municipal staff

### Challenges

- The third spike of the COVID has disrupted the social, political activities of the forum members and slowed down their progress towards development plans. They are avoiding public activities to follow SOPs however, focusing on their plans they are working on alternative ways towards the solutions.
- Members of WPF, Kasur seemed to be less interested in taking up the development plans as on follow-ups Ms. Safia, forum Chairperson did not respond to phone calls and messages. While other members reported that they are only working on CNIC registration of community members and undertake actions after Ms. Safia's instruction.

***Immediate Outcome 1330: Enhanced capacity of grassroots women and local CSOs to engage in social accountability activities for improved gender responsive access to rights & services in 11 districts***

***Output 1331: Capacity built of grassroots women, allies and CSOs on social accountability, gender and human rights approach & government-instituted accountability and participation mechanism***

Activity 1331.3: Exposure visits of community women to government and private service providers

**Progress:**

Simorgh planned three exposure visits for the community women of in district Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh. Unfortunately, two exposure visits had to cancel after the announcement of smart lock down by the provincial government in the districts with the positively ratio of more than eight percent. The officials of the Social Welfare Department, Toba Tek Singh and Dar-ul-Aman, Kasur informed the Simorgh team a day before the activity was due, that under the the SOPs issued by the provincial government on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 that 50 percent of the staff would be working from the home and all public operations would be suspended until a significant drop in covid cases was registered.

Only one planned exposure visit had been carried out on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021 with District Social Welfare Office, Kot Khuwaja, Panagah. A total of 10 community women and councilors participated in the exposure visit facilitated by DDO Social Welfare Mr. Arif Siddiqui. He briefed participants on the role of Social Welfare Department; its services, plans and programmes. The discussion included:

**Understanding and Working Mechanism of Social Welfare Department:**

- DDO Mr. Arif highlighted the social welfare services provided by the department at district level and explained the department's working mechanism to the participants.
- He informed participants that the programmes run by the district level Social welfare department include: runs social welfare of women, children, elderly and disabled persons. They identify cases through hospitals, NGOs/Social welfare institutes (Old Age Homes, Dar-ul-Aman) and help desks.
- The Social Welfare Department has enough funds under its different programmes, but people do not reach out to these funds. He suggested that participants should identify and helping out the deserving people in their areas through these funds.

**Services Provided by Social Welfare Department:**

The following brief on government welfare projects was provided by Mr. Arif:

- **Ba-Himmat Khuwateen Program, Sehat Sahulat Program, Ehsas Kafalat Program and Ba-Himmat Bazurg Program.** These projects work like the Benazir Income Support scheme but in the case every city is divided into different zones for effective distribution. Lahore is divided into 5 zones or regions (based on tehsils) for the distribution of cards.
- **Pannah Gah** (shelter home) - provides shelter services to citizens (Fe/male) of Pakistan, where they can stay up to 7 days and get free residence, meals and clean drinking water in a hygienic and secure environment. Registration is by provision of CNICs and Pannah Gah residents are free to practice their religion. He further Mr. Arif an explanation of Panahgah rules and regulations was provided for participant convenience.
- Funds are available for the welfare of vulnerable groups under Bait-ul-Mall. The **Zakat Committee** of every UC is affiliated with the **Bait-ul-Mall** or referral of deserving people. Bait-ul-Mall funds cover wedding expenses, dowry and food rations. Locally elected representatives have the strongest hold on the departments for verification purposes and can approach **the Zakat Committee for help in** individual cases.

- The Social Welfare Department provides facilities for disabled persons after verification by the Social Medical Officer (SMO) who provides them a certificate to avail different social welfare services.

#### **Major Gaps in Government Projects and Solutions:**

- A woman councilor Ms. Sumeera raised the point that government departments do not involve local representatives (councilors) in developing databases for their projects, but hold councilors responsible for raising awareness regarding their projects and mobilizing people to avail them. She suggested that councilors should be involved in the planning of government schemes to address this gap.
- Participants were critical of the department for not advertising these programmes. They recommended that information related to new programmes and facilities available should be given to poor people so that they can benefit from them. They also suggested that concerned CSOs and community activists be involved in the advertisement campaign of newly introduced programs.
- Ms. Zakia raised the issue of the nonfunctioning health card. She the DDO that the Health Card has failed to provide her access to any health facility does not benefit her to gain any health facility; she also spoke of the uncooperative behaviour of government officials in this regard. Other participants shared similar 'bad experiences' with regard the Health Card.
- The DDO, Mr. Arif heard their complaints and accepted there gaps in planning and services and assured participants of his cooperation in all matters related to the Social Welfare Department. He ensured participants with his cooperation in anything related to social welfare department.

He appreciated the work and efforts of women councilors, and sharing the work they were doing. Participants were satisfied with the information shared by Mr. Arif and his cooperation regarding social welfare services.

#### **Participants' Feedback**

Participants shared that this exposure visit had helped them to understand the rules, regulations, procedures and services of Social Welfare Department about which they had no prior knowledge they didn't know before and expressed their determination to play their part actively in sharing this information with their communities and help them to avail the services and benefits provided by Social Welfare Department.

#### ***Output 1332: Technical Assistance provided for Social Accountability Action Plans to CSOs and community members, esp. women, to help women and girls access rights/services***

Activity 1332.1: Facilitation of CSOs to develop and implement Social Accountability Action Plans

#### **Progress:**

Simorgh couldn't conduct planned social accountability workshops in the second project year due to the unpredictable Covid scenario. However, it remained a part of discussion in all project introductory activities as a pathway towards women political empowerment.

#### **Social Accountability Action**

Realizing social accountability an important tool to get access towards citizen's basic rights; a CSO member Commission for Research and Human Development (CRHD) from district Lahore raised their voice against the unavailability of Sui Gas in the residential area of Misri Shah. Active community women

and CSO representatives gathered and planned an action to report complaint against the drastic low pressure and unavailability of gas in the residential area of Misri Shah. A group of women report this complaint to the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) Bahti Gate office. The complaint processed on a serious note and installation of new gas pipes in the area came into see. CSO, along with the community women strictly followed-up the whole procedure and ensure the supply of sui gas in the area. This action has benefitted the 300 households in the area.

### **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

During the second year, project partners remained concerned about the difficulties in project implementation because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Project partners agreed on periodic meetings for improved project management and implementation in this difficult time.

The major decisions taken this year include:

- Replacement of field activities by online communication through telephone, Zoom and other mediums easily accessible to Focal Persons, CBOs and telephonically to local women's communities.
- Response to the pandemic lockdowns and loss of livelihoods including health safety: partners would meet the immediate and urgent community/household needs through cash or kind relief provision to the most vulnerable families in the communities with whom they were working. While primarily a humanitarian response to people in need, relief provision was also seen as an expression of concern that would consolidate partner relations with concerned communities and build trust between them and keep channels of communication open between them at a time when field activities had been suspended.

Partners would redesign the work plan so that activities requiring desk research etc could be interchanged with field work that would be moved forward to the next quarters by when, it was hoped, it would be safe to undertake them. This entailed developing new ways and methodologies to engage stakeholders and maintain their interest and meet project overheads especially during the time when physical communication was not possible.

Decisions taken by Simorgh:

- Shift workshops on Local Government to the fourth quarter in response to the second wave of COVID-19

- Undertake activities at project sites with small gathering following the SOPs
- Backstop/monitor field activities through virtual means in the third quarter
- As the Simorgh FEMPOWER team had started off on a shoestring project team, 3 new team members were engaged primarily for project continuity and implementation with one of them to replace researcher Moosa Eleazar Sadiq who had left to pursue further studies.

**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

**Risk**

**COVID-19**

The risks and challenges faced by this project are centered around the COVID-19 pandemic with its threat of infection and a series of city lockdowns alongside SOP observation. This has impacted on project activities throughout the second year with two of our project staff going down with Corona in January 2021 resulting in a two weeks of quarantine for rest including office closure. Even at the time of writing this report we are in the middle of the third more vicious wave and intermittent lockdowns across the country particularly the Punjab and including the area where the Simorgh office is located. As if this were not bad enough, two of our field partners and their families have gone down with Covid. Not surprisingly this has impacted on activities planned for second year. Not only has it disrupted planned activities, caused delays in the submission of reports by resource persons/trainers and field partners, replaced on site discussions and lectures with online meetings and compelled us to modify field activities in the interests of Covid prevention, they have disturbed all project activities in terms of annual targets.

**Mitigation Strategy:**

In the Covid 19 context, risk mitigation strategies comprised the replacement of onsite activities and meeting with virtual implementation. Online communication was used initially to conduct project activities. Later it seemed that absence from field had not only increased the issues related to implementation of activities but also caused budget related problems so, the project implementation strategy is a mix of physical and virtual set of project activities.

**Risk**

**Patriarchal Social System:**

The patriarchal system and the norms, perceptions and attitudes that it has given rise to in the Pakistani/South Asian context is a major challenge to project implementation as primarily men are in leadership roles and in control of resources and decision making. As such they are both unwilling and seemingly unable to let go of the entitled status and share power. This has been seen in almost all CSO related activities and local government training workshops. As such they are both unwilling and seemingly unable to let go of the entitled status and share power, it was observed that most of the women councilors in Toba Tek Singh and a few in Kasur and Lahore either need the permission of their husbands to attend workshops or were uncomfortable with the idea of doing so on their own; further in most cases In most of the cases women did not communicate directly with focal persons but through their husbands who acted as their spokespersons. It would appear that either the women did not own

mobile phones or did not have access to them. A lot of work needs to be done in this area for this project to get off the ground in real terms.

**Mitigation Strategy:**

To mitigate this risk, CSOs have to identify potential male allies at the community and related levels and to sensitize them regarding gender equality, so that they can contribute towards women's empowerment. Also lists of active female councilors have been updated to involve them directly in project activities rather than through their husbands or other male family members.

**Risk**

**Gender Discrimination:**

Most of the male ASN members in district Toba-Tek Singh had gender discriminatory attitudes women's issues and showed very little interest in the idea of women's political empowerment.

**Mitigation Strategy:**

Project team revised the number of ASN members and has retained only those who are serious about the work entailed. The gender sensitization workshop planned for ASN members could not be held initially due to Covid-19 constraints and later because of unavailability of time. However, the project team has planned to involve ASN members in discussions on gender based issues so that specific issues can be addressed.

**Risk**

***Patriarchal Behaviours***

The patriarchal behavior of a few CBO partners is a major challenge to project implementation as primarily men are in leadership roles and in control of resources and decision making. At a few project sites male participants tried to dominate the conversation and usurp the women's in leadership roles.

**Mitigation**

To mitigate this risk CSO partners were requested to nominate a female representative from their organizations to take part in project activities that are especially designed for female participants.

**Risk**

**Party Politics**

During workshops on during local Government and ASN and Women Political Forums meetings, it was observed that women councilors play power politics in the same way as their male counterparts such promoting themselves and putting down fellow women councilors and attempting to hijack project activities etc. Such behaviour is an indicator either of the extent to which women have internalized male mainstream norms and behaviour because they think that by such behaviour is a sign of their success in the world of politics.

**Mitigation**

The project team aim to deal with this situation by involving low profile councilors and encouraging them to take part in project activities and enhance their political involvement in community issues.

**Risk**

**Irresponsible Attitude of CSO Partners**

A major setback to the project was the irresponsible attitudes of the majority of CSOs. It is observed that CSO partners in participating project activities; Their main concern was with budgetary allocations for project activities by Simorgh and their major complaint was with the amount allocated for them in conducting project activities, conduct any activity was limited activity budget and administrative cost that is not being paid by the Simorgh. Most of the CSOs in Kasur, Toba Tek Singh and a few in Lahore have lost their interest in project activities.

**Mitigation**

This risk can be mitigated by identifying potential CSOs especially those are headed by women and limiting the number of CSOs to more focus on the project objectives rather on activity budget.