

Annual Report

From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice

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Abbreviations:

BISP Benazir Income Support Program

FGDs Focus Group Discussions

ILO International Labor Organization

KP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

SOPs Standard Operating Procedures

TEVTA Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority

Executive Summary of the Project

The project From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of voice was designed to empower women economically, socially and politically as an essential step towards the project's long-term goal of poverty mitigation. The target population comprised homebased women workers including those in the formal workforce and the project aimed to build their skills so as to break the isolation of semi-skilled workers and improve the social and economic status of both categories, within the family and as members of a significantly productive workforce. Recognizing the pluralism and diversity of Pakistan's class/caste riven society and the multi-axial nature of change processes. The project was formally approved in 2019, the first tranche for project implementation activities was received on 23 November 2019 and work started in December 2019 with hiring of project staff and identification of judiciously chosen industrial target sites with envisaged populations of women in the informal/formal economy in Districts Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot.

The onset of the Covid 19 pandemic seriously disrupted both work plans and work patterns including a heavy reliance on online communication. The official lockdown from 23rd March-May 2020 resulted in staff working from home; relaxation of lockdown from June to July saw partial staff office presence with SOPs; August-December was the time for online activities including Baseline Surveys gradually building up to judiciously managed field activities with small groups from target communities and other stakeholders. This process was interrupted when two of our project staff went down with Covid resulting in a two week office lockdown from 11-22 January 2021, after which work picked up again.

It is also pertinent to mention that while Covid presents a major problem in project implementation, delays have also been caused by surveillance by intelligence agencies. This is time consuming and in the case of Sialkot, necessitated relocation of initially selected project sites due to their proximity to the border areas. Combined with Covid almost two months of project time was lost in identifying new target sites which are a much greater distance from markets and industries and will present problems in terms of mobility, access to banks/bank accounts, larger markets and technical training institutes.

However, 2020 was not lost in terms of work. In negotiating space with lockdowns, SOP observation and working on the assumption that the pandemic would either expend itself or be brought under control in the foreseeable future, field activities were either moved to later dates or modified and undertaken with limited numbers post lockdown. Activities that could be undertaken online or completed from home/office were brought forward and completed. These included the production and

dissemination of IEC material such as brochures based on socio-political rights, bags etc. Baseline surveys were modified and completed through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and telephonic interviews with selected stakeholders undertaken for information and future planning. This included accessing trainers from certified training institutes such as TEVTA, Sanatzar, Qasr-e-behbood and Chambers of Commerce from target sites etc.

Reliance on online communication (primarily Zoom and WhatsApp) helped develop not only our own skills but also showed that barring initial resistance, communities were quick to learn and take active part in such activities. The main problems here were (i) poor internet connections especially in district Sialkot and women's low ownership of personal telephones and dependency of male family members or focal persons etc. which was also a marker of normative gender-based inequality and discrimination.

Duration of the Project:

Project duration: 2019- 2022

Reporting duration: December 2019- November 2020

Introduction of the Project:

Title: 'From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice'

Project Sites: Selected Union Councils in Districts Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot

Direct beneficiaries:

- Women
- Youth – female and male allies

Indirect beneficiaries:

- Community Men
- Local duty bearers
- Labour union representatives (female and male)
- Local college students (female and male)
- School/college drop outs and unemployed youth (female and male)

The project “From the politics of vulnerability to the politics of voice”, aims to:

1. Make a significant contribution to breaking the social and economic isolation of women home-based workers and improving their status through capacity building activities comprising awareness of legal and social rights that will enable them to challenge patriarchal norms, address problems pertaining to their limited mobility and low access to the market and its trends particularly the low value placed on their economic contribution.
2. Build solidarities and establish grassroots women’s leadership as part of a rights initiative in contexts where they have low access to voice and mobility and provide skill development training to enhance their economic and political potential.
3. Build linkages with trade unions, informal worker’s collectives, the women’s movement etc., for engagement with social and political life and facilitate their transition to the formal economy.

Methodology:

Participatory, with gender equality/equity informed by the rights based approach as a cross cutting theme in all activities. Capacity building activities are ‘custom-made’ for both project teams and selected communities (direct/indirect beneficiaries) Simorgh builds the capacity of project teams and marginalized communities (Direct/ indirect beneficiaries) and advocates for policy change in order to create an enabling environment and empower individuals to exercise their socio-economic and political rights. The inter-sectoral/intersectional approach in the Baseline Survey was efficacious in highlighting important distinctions between factors that impede or encourage women’s economic participation and served to debunk the conventional cliché of ‘traditional social norms as impediment’. While traditional norms were a contributory factor, the main impediments to women’s economic participation/mobility were geographical location, distances or proximity to markets, banks, training institutions, availability or lack of affordable and safe transport and virtual absence women’s personal bank accounts in women’s names. For instance, in district Lahore where NADRA offices and local market places lie within a two-mile range of selected sites, more women have computerized national identity cards (CNICs) and mobile phone access than in district Sialkot where long distances and lack of public transport limit women’s mobility and access to larger markets and relevant offices and institutions. Another factor contributing to women’s low access to CNICs was lack of awareness regarding its uses. Most women, particularly unmarried women felt they

were of no use to them or had access to male family members' CNICs for simple matters.

Such information including recommendations by stakeholder representatives from TEVTA etc will be used to design and further develop future activities.

Sub-activity 1.1: Hiring and training of additional staff undertaken and completed.

Sub-activity 1.2: In-house capacity building for project staff were held via Zoom t covered following topics (i) Steps towards Women Entrepreneurial Skills: Effective business plans at the community level (ii) Business development plan for women entrepreneurs, (iii) Eligibility for small business loans for community women (Procedures/ Follow-ups) (iv) Strengthen/ Support community women as potential entrepreneurs.

Sub-activity 1.3 Identifying and establishing contact with district coordinators and local focal persons: Simorgh hired 3 District Coordinators and 5 Focal Persons from target locations of Districts Lahore, Sialkot and Faisalabad. For security reasons, the process was slower in Sialkot due to the proximity of the selected site to border areas. Identification of a new site acceptable to intelligence agencies took time including identification of new communities. Disadvantages included distance from larger markets, an industrial sector, banks, training institutes as well as dearth of semi-skilled women workers. Work has started at all sites and steps are being taken to bring Sialkot district communities at par with other selected sites

Sub-activity 1.6: MOUs signed with Focal Persons of target locations.

Approach:

This project approach is participant-led and need-based. Activities are built on women's everyday private/public struggles to build solidarities among women's communities and male allies and with the wider labour movement and the women's movement to enhance their understanding and amplify their voices, outreach, and to demonstrate the long term benefits of union style mobilization to secure worker rights and collective for income generation. Keeping cultural sensitivities in mind and building on existing patterns of socialisation, project activities will designed to (i) engage women (and men) as change agents in the process of knowledge production (ii) mitigate the private/public division of social space and build a conducive

environment for women in economic and public political life. While this approach to facilitate and maximize women's contribution to the informal economy and poverty mitigation, enhance women's access to voice, agency, and decision making and pave their way into public political spaces as well as into the formal economy is in place.

Outcome Based Progress

Outcome A: Increased economic empowerment, access to resources, conscious raising and enjoyment of rights by women, particularly the young marginalized communities.

Progress:

Phase 1 of the project 'From the politics of vulnerability to the politics of voice' has been completed with revised activities due to COVID-19. Given COVID-19 protection/prevention SOPs, activities designed for the field face to face exchange were undertaken and completed virtually through Zoom in this 12 months period.

These are as follows:

Sub-activity 1.8: Due to Covid 19, the methodology for Baseline Surveys was revised and in person to person interviews amalgamated with Focus Group Discussions through Zoom. Simorgh targeted 450 participants from target locations to identify gaps/constraints regarding female social-political entrepreneurship, mobility issues, current entrepreneurial practices, and local and cultural factors that impact women so as to upgrade their potentials.

Sub-activity 1.9: Baseline Data tabulated including critical analysis of local and cultural challenges to women's social and political entrepreneurship, mobility, current entrepreneurial practices provided useful insights to areas where concentrated work needs to be done and strategies developed for

maximum impact and effect. Insights based on these findings have been used to modify and develop future activities.

In response on location trainings by TEVTA etc trainers; develop linkages between community and trainings insets to access free trainings etc. Enable women to open bank accounts/ID cards including terms of micro finance loans school dropouts via Hunarmand program from women's families for family involvement and facilitation of women's mobility and economic independence. Building on cultural patterns and social arrangements that are family or kin group based. Pushing factor also for everyone woman involved with stipend to cover transport there will be at least two school dropout girls whose skills will be utilized by future entrepreneurs grow as a unit.

Sub-activity 1.11: 9-one-day meetings with stakeholders from selected were held via Zoom. The purpose of these meetings was to develop training manuals for women in different trades. Representatives from TEVTA, Chamber of Commerce, Technical and Vocation institute, Qasr-e-Behbood, Sanat Zar, Microfinance, the Education Department, labour unions and home-based workers attended these meetings.

This was a useful exercise in terms of information provision and recommendations. Future activities have been modified in the light of the above.

Sub-activity 1.15: Development of IEC material: 5 pamphlets how apply for ID cards, bank accounts, micro finance loans plus information on womens' rights including information on personal laws regarding labour on socio-political and economic empowerment were developed and disseminated among target communities at District Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot.

Sub-activity 1.17 :Collated research findings and Project updates have been placed on Simorgh's website and social network page.

Activities Based Progress:

In 2020, project activities as well as methodology and sampling techniques were revised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and Covid-19 prevention SOPs suspended face to face community activities resulting in curtailment of some activities and delay in others. Covid impact was mitigated through a shift to online communication through WhatsApp and Zoom. At one level this was and continues to be a major setback to the project, however, on the plus side, reliance on online communication has compelled community women to develop IT skills and engage in online communication.

During the reporting period, 90 virtual (through Zoom) FGDs were conducted with participants from nine union councils of the three-targeted districts. . Under the umbrella of this project. Both virtual and on site activities were facilitated by the District Coordinators and Focal Persons enabling project teams to execute the planned activities including FGDs. SOPs were strictly followed in all onsite activities. FGDs were arranged by the Focal Persons who also facilitated participant attendance. In all 450 respondents took part in these FGDs.

Respondents from selected sites included semi-skilled women workers, local government representatives/women Union Councilors, female school dropouts and housewives. The medium of communication comprised a mix of Punjabi and Urdu. The language used was simple and user friendly; this facilitated communication and mutual understanding as enabled confident and active participation in discussions etc.

Findings from Baseline Surveys, Stakeholders meetings and Covid impact have led to changes/modifications in areas of emphasis and activities planned prior to the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic. This include:

- i. Recognizing the centrality of family/kin group networks in people's lives particularly in rural areas and based on information provided by stakeholders regarding new possibilities for skill development such as TEVTA's Hunarmand Jawan Programme that offers free skill development trainings for unemployed youth, Simorgh will

cover transport costs of selected female/male school dropouts – mainly daughters and sons of potential women entrepreneurs to avail these trainings so as to help build family-based entrepreneurial units for greater efficacy and family/community acceptance. This will extend project outreach beyond stipulated numbers and transform a significant number of indirect beneficiaries from among school drop outs into direct beneficiaries.

- ii. Distances between selected site locations and training institutes is a major impediment to semi-skilled worker skill development trainings. This lack will be covered by the offer by TEVTA, Sanatzar and Qasr-e-Behbood to send certified their instructors for onsite skill development workshops in areas where women lack the means to directly access training institutes.
- iii. Baseline findings highlight the impediments to womens access to voice, choice and agency including low access to resources. Discounting variables based on geographical location and access to markets etc. these include:
 - Low CNIC registration due largely to women's (and men's) lack of awareness as to the uses and benefits of CNIC ownership. As a result unmarried women customarily wait for marriage before applying for CNICs. It is expected this will change with the operationalization of new marriage registration laws that makes CNIC ownership mandatory for the bride and groom. Be that as it may, this is an issue that needs to be address.
 - Virtual absence of women's personal bank accounts. Understandable given that women either lack a personal income or if they do, they do not necessarily have access and control over it.
 - Poor awareness of personal and civic rights and related laws viz. marriage, divorce, inheritance, labour rights etc. This factor contributes to their social and economic isolation as well as to lack of confidence and self-esteem and includes semi-skilled workers who fail to either recognise the value of their contribution to the household economy or present and sell their product.

Also keeping in mind women's different skills/education levels, future activities will be modified/enhanced and additional activities devised to address the above issues through more focused on:

- Facilitation of women's CNIC and personal bank account access through awareness and information dissemination backed up by relevant IEC material.
- Awareness/information on social and legal rights comprising personal laws, labour rights, importance and function of trade unions etc.
- Professional trainings: stitching, cutting, beautician skills, cooking, pickle making, computer
- Leadership trainings to develop business skills/start ups
- Online marketing/sales through social media
- Development of market linkages
- Development of connections between women in the informal economy with trade unions etc.

Together these activities will enhance women's voices, contribute significantly to the economic and social empowerment and poverty mitigation.

Activities shifted from year 1 to year 2: these are mainly activities planned for large groups of 100 or more participants.

Sub- activity 1.2: In-house capacity building for project staff: This activity was revised due to Covid- 19. One training were held on Zoom and – Covid permitting – the second residential training will be held in April 2021.

Sub-activity 1.5:3 one-day introductory meetings with 100 stakeholders to introduce project objectives, build future marketing linkages, self-employed mobility issues, self-employment.

Sub-activity 2.1: Selection/ registration of new entrepreneurs

Sub-activity 2.2: Development of 45 groups of community women, youth Girls

Sub-activity 2.3: Assistance in setting up 100 small entrepreneurs in 3 districts

Challenges & Its Impact on Project

Challenge	Impact
At the start of 2020, the outbreak of pandemic (COVID-19) created a challenging situation for the project.	Project implementation strategy had to be revised and most of the activities were planned and redesigned for virtual communication (Zoom meetings etc). Some on site community-based activities were redesigned and the number of participants was reduced so that proper SOPs could be observed.. .
Strict security protocols by security agencies in Sialkot District- the target area located near the border area between Pakistan and India.	The proximity of the selected Union Council at Head Marala, District Sialkot the border area created security concerns and constant surveillance that would make project implementation impossible at this site. Consequently, this site was given up and replaced by UC Gondal in Sialkot District.
Certification by Pakistan Center of Philanthropy (PCP) and Economic Affairs Division Authority (EADA).	An application along with supporting documents and project details was submitted for PCP certification, which has been awarded to Simorgh. Acknowledgement of receipt by PCP enabled implementation of project activities. The recent certification by the PCP comes as a positive step in so far as project continuity is concerned. It is also hoped that this will facilitate approval of our EAD application.
Challenges in implementation of Monitoring Activities and for Quality Assurance.	The starting date of this project coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and threw the project into a state of disarray. This resulted in loss of time as (i) many of the planned activities had to be

	<p>redesigned for virtual implementation and (ii) we had to break down the resistance from concerned communities to a new and unfamiliar mode of communication and (iii) for development of community skills in the use of new technologies.</p> <p>This process was facilitated by District Coordinators and local Focal Persons. In so far as this transition from onsite to virtual interaction has been successful, it has had a negative impact on monitoring the project in terms of quality control and assessment of on ground changes if any.</p>
Revision in Baseline Methodology and redesigning the baseline tools.	<p>For the baseline of this project, different tools were designed including household questionnaires and FGDs. But due to COVID-19, the strategy was changed and it was decided that data collection would be done only through online FGDs. So for getting bench marks as a baseline, FGDs were conducted through community focal persons and the district coordinators.</p>
Risk Analysis	
Risks	Mitigation Adopted
Resistance by male family members in the community who use the 'culture/tradition argument to prevent/limit women's participation. This constitutes a serious threat as women could be denied permission to take part in skill development workshops.	<p>The project team was well aware of the importance of respecting cultural norms in terms of dress, body language, and language-use including the reliance on the local mother tongue as a medium of communication. Keeping in mind the nuances of local idioms etc, a non-confrontational approach was used to mitigate envisaged</p>

	resistance by male and older female members.
Difficulty in communication due to resistance or lack of interest from among women and female elders resulting in poor attendance and participation levels by women due to the situation of COVID-19	Interest among women and female elders was generated through community-led discussions where women themselves identified problems and worked out their solution through active engagement.

Future plans

Post COVID findings led shift from socio economic rights to need based demands for income generation. Political rights on back burner due to uncertainty focus on economic empowerment.

Link poverty mitigation voice expression through awareness confidence building/leadership training and take steps to connect semiskilled workers to those in the formal economy especially labour unions etc.

Mid-term review, extended time frame plus additional activities on basis of baseline survey findings

Introduce dropout male student's skill development plan such as TEVTA's Hunarmand Jawan Programme that offers free skill development trainings for unemployed youth; Simorgh will cover transport costs of selected female/male school dropouts. This will extend project outreach beyond stipulated numbers and transform a significant number of indirect beneficiaries from among school dropouts into direct beneficiaries.

To reach the goals of intended outcomes in time, the Part Time Employment (PTE) to be shifted to (Full Time Employment) FTE.