

**SIMORGH**

Women's Resource and Publication Centre

**Annual Report 2022**

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## **Year in Review**

The year 2022 has been extremely productive for Simorgh. With the relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions towards the end of 2019, in-person project activities and field visits were resumed in full swing, with the necessary Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) in place.

2022 saw the completion of our three-year project “From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice”. Our other projects – (I) FEMPOWER for women’s political empowerment, and (II) the action cum research project on the women’s movement and its backlash, are due for completion by the end of 2023.

## **In-house Matters**

### **Annual Board Meeting**

Simorgh’s Annual Board meeting was held on the 29th of December, 2022. Agenda items included: (i) project progress reports by project teams, (ii) financial and administrative matters, including staff changes, and (iii) the presentation of the Annual Audits Report. Board Members critically assessed the work being done and gave valuable advice regarding ongoing and future activities. The meeting concluded on a note of appreciation for project teams and the administrative and financial staff by Board Members.

### **Staff Changes**

the past reporting year:

- Rimsha Munir resigned as Researcher on March 31st, 2022.
- Nisha Ghani was hired as a Project Assistant from April 1st, 2022.
- Amad Tahir was hired as a Legal Editor for the socio-legal journal “Bayan” from July 1st, 2022. He replaced Mehak Zark Bari who had resigned in April, 2022.

- Mahnoor Jalal was hired as a Social Sciences Editor August 10th, 2022, in place of Enum Naseer who had relocated to Canada
- Mahnoor Jalal resigned as Social Sciences Editor November 14th, 2022 and was replaced by Nisha Ghani who had already been providing unofficial editorial assistance with the journal

## Project Progress

### 1. From the Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice, undertaken with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands.

**Project Duration:** 2019- 2022

**Project Location:** 9 Union Councils in Districts Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot.

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

**Target Communities:** Women, Youth, Community Men, Local Duty Bearers, labor union representatives (female and male), local college students (female and male), school/college dropouts and unemployed youth (female and male).

#### **Introduction:**

Designed primarily as a skill and capacity-based training program, 'From The Politics of Vulnerability to the Politics of Voice' aims to empower women and adolescents as agents of socio-economic growth and development. Through community engagement and development of equitable income generation opportunities, the project is a step towards increasing women's visibility and involvement on various social and cultural levels. In doing so, the project helps them identify, analyze and adapt accordingly to social, cultural, and administrative problems within the institutions of family, community and state surrounding women; fostering spaces which allow for inclusivity and effective resource provision.

## **Objectives:**

Through participant-led, need-based activities, the project aims to accomplish the following goals:

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 understand / patriarchal dynamics/, 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 linkages and strengthen 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 local government departments, 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.

## **Project Activities:**

In the reporting year 2022, the following activities were undertaken within the project.

### **Financial and In kind Assistance: (25th April-29th April)**

Visits were conducted to each of the three districts for the disbursement of in-kind materials to a **total of 24 students (3 computer students, 8 Advanced Beautician and 2 beautician students and 11 tailoring students)**

### **Financial Literacy Training (21st – 24<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> and 15th-18th March 2022)**

Financial Literacy Trainings were conducted by Resource Person Ms. Dure Shehwar, and facilitated by the program team, and was aimed to nurture and enhance key competencies and mindsets related to budgeting, savings, investments, debt management,

and financial negotiation. Moreover, the participants were engaged in a stimulating brainstorming session to assess their level of familiarity and expertise on the subject. The activity was conducted with our **101 women entrepreneurs**.

### **Digital Literacy Training (28th March)**

Circle Women, an organization, approached Simorgh with a proposal for a digital literacy program for skilled and semi-skilled women and girls, complete with certification. This training proved highly advantageous for the students, leading to a positive impact on their businesses. The program enabled many women to establish their online social media presence, increasing their outreach and earnings. A number of participants gained marketing skills, started their own online businesses, and began earning through freelance work. To expand the outreach, the training included participants from nearby communities in addition to the Centre students. The trainers were keen to provide similar training to women in Sialkot. However, due to the unavailability of Android mobile phones for all beneficiaries, the training was postponed.

### **Exposure Visits (31st May- 16th June 2022)**

Exposure Visits were led by the project team in collaboration with the District Coordinators/Focal Person and Center-In-Charges. **119** participants including 101 women entrepreneurs, District coordinators and focal persons from the three districts visited local businesses, microfinance institutions and marketplaces within or close to their district. With the assistance of the Focal Persons and Centre-In-Charges, the visit sites were shortlisted in accordance with relevance to each skill development course, as well as the student's socio-economic demands.

| <b>Visit Sites</b> |                |                   |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Lahore</b>      | <b>Sialkot</b> | <b>Faisalabad</b> |

|                  |                                      |                               |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Depilex Salon    | Rail Bazar                           | Faisalabad Cosmetic Bazaar    |
| Rano's Heirlooms | Sialkot Business and Commerce Centre | Habib Bank Ltd.               |
| Azam Market      | National Bank of Pakistan            | Reet Rivaj Salon              |
| Arfa Karim Tower | Depilex                              | First Women Bank              |
| Faysal Bank      | Beauty Products Market               | Printing Press, IT department |
|                  | Jinnah Bazaar                        |                               |
|                  | Gujranwala Market                    |                               |

### **One Day Open Mics Activity (17th-19th May 2022)**

The open mics activity was organized as a public forum, bridging the gap between local governmental and administrative bodies and the community, and benefitted almost **323 participants**. These sessions were aimed to **(i) involve community members in the decision-making and infrastructural development/urban development processes and (II) enable a more direct, hands-on understanding of their issues, in turn (iii) raising awareness and influencing change at a grassroots level**. The activity was led by the project team in collaboration with our Focal Persons and District Coordinators. Members from local governmental and administrative departments were invited to engage in dialogue with community members to address their queries and questions. These included Union Councilors, Chairmen, social workers and representatives from governmental departments including NADRA, Municipal Cooperation, LWMC, PHA and local duty bearers. Local buyers and middlemen were also invited to brief participants regarding the possibilities within their relevant businesses which could be explored.



The sessions focused on enabling participants to identify and assess prevalent issues within their localities, including **(I) access to fundamental utilities (II) infrastructural development and maintenance within their locality (III) sanitation and waste management and (IV) preservation of local public spaces**. Representatives were also asked to brief participants on different procedures to **(I) register within their local union council, (II) gain access to citizenship documents, and (III) avail relief facilities from various organizations**.

- **Baithaks (November 2021- May 2022)**

Baithaks not only raised awareness but also helped women develop leadership skills and confidence through self-expression and engagement with the community's civic life. They provided a platform for women to discuss issues with local government members and build links with worker collectives and the women's movement. Baithaks also bridged the gap between Union Counselors/Local government representatives and community members, enabling women to raise their voices and issues directly with local administrative bodies and officials. Additionally, Baithaks mitigated gender discrimination and improved women's visibility in civil society, providing spaces for women to voice their issues and contribute to public discussions.

- **NADRA Vans (4th Feb - 25th Nov 2022)**

Through the baseline surveys, distribution of COVID relief funds, and hurdles in bank account ownership, it was found that many women did not have various citizenship documents such as CNIC, B-forms, etc., which is an essential citizenship document. To address this, NADRA vans were scheduled to be set up in target locations, so that women could easily apply for their CNIC. As a result 1870 men and women were able to avail this service and obtain their CNIC. In District Lahore, the project team faced challenges while implementing this activity.

Due to Lahore's geographic location as an urban centre, there was a preconceived notion that women and girls would already have access to citizenship documents. Because of this

reason, it was difficult to gain the government departmental approval for these vans, and it took more time to execute all of the proposed activities.

- **Closing of Skill Development Training Centres and Disbursement of Centre Materials (27th-29th July 2022)**

After utilization of resource material for a year, the centre's logistics were worn out and many were disposed of. However, there was a high demand from the community and Centre-In-Charges to continue the Skill Development Training Course. To meet this demand, the leftover materials were distributed among those who wished to continue the skill development centre and run their own business and had submitted a strong business plan. A sustainability plan was created to distribute centre materials and furniture from the project run centres to centre-In-charges who wanted to continue running their own centres after the project concluded. These comprised the centres in:

**Lahore:** UC-227-Qainchi, UC 246 Youhanabad

**Sialkot:** UC- 40 Gondal, UC 10- Chak Mandhar, UC- 36 Chak Bhalanwala

**Faisalabad:** UC 206 – Baghbanpura

Furthermore, the residential homes rented by Simorgh to run these centres were maintained after completion of trainings etc., as centre locations to facilitate ease of access among communities, as these centres were known and considered safe spaces for women and young girls by the male family members.

- **Hiring of External Evaluator for Evaluation Report (July, 2022)**

Ms. Sameena Shah was hired as an External M&E Consultant to conduct and report an external evaluation of the overall project, which included visits to project target locations and interviews with District Coordinator, Focal Persons and Centre-Incharges and Students.

- **M&E Study (15th July to 17th August 2022)**

The project team conducted an internal evaluation study to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the project intervention. The evaluation assessed the project's relevance, effectiveness, implementation, management, impact, and sustainability through a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Primary data was collected from project target groups and key informants identified by the program team. The evaluation was conducted collaboratively with the community representatives and project researchers, following a participatory inquiry approach guided by project staff. Data was divided into two categories: **(I) Qualitative Data viz. In-depth Case Studies with 101 women entrepreneurs and General Interviews, with 300 General Students (who had not received financial assistance) based on quantitative data.**

- Compilation of Annual Report, including project activities, year by year progress, outcomes and outputs, as well as our internal M&E findings to strengthen prospective research, project design and implementation.

## 2. FEMPOWER PAKISTAN (Feminist Leadership for Accountability and Political Rights)

**Project Sites:** Districts Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh

### **Introduction:**

The project Fempower commenced its operations in 2019 as part of a larger consortium comprising Osama Asghar Khan, Simorgh- Women's Resource and Publication Centre, and ShirkatGah; funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). This project mainly aims to promote the political empowerment of women in political spaces. With the components of education, awareness and advocacy, the Simorgh team played a vital role in fulfilling different targets of this projects; giving women vital education about their rights, engage more and more women in political domains, facilitating women in gaining access to governmental bodies and enabling women to take more space and take ownership of their community work.

### **Objectives:**

The Project aims to:

1. **Increase public visibility:** reinforce demand of citizens esp. women & CSOs for gender equality & inclusive democracy at various levels through awareness raising, capacity building, networking & evidence based advocacy;
2. **Amplify Voices:** Provide women, youth, transgender community & other vulnerable groups with opportunities for self-expression & engagement in public debates around gender and equality/equity issues.
3. **Facilitate/enable women's access to leadership & access to rights/services:** Strengthen rights-seeking behavior among women & enable them (esp. women councilors) to assume leadership roles;
4. Sensitize duty-bearers and media personnel about women's rights and political empowerment.

## **Year 2022 in review:**

The year 2022 brought various challenges for project Fempower such as; i) constant delay in Local Government Elections, ii) Economic situations of the country and subsequently communities and iii) Political Instability of the governmental bodies. However, with persistent team efforts and critically analyzing the situations, team Simorgh executed the project quite efficiently throughout the year; by conducting various trainings and keeping all the partner organizations embedded in all field activities. The activities resulted in raising awareness, knowledge building and training of all the partner organizations in various aspects which gave women and all vulnerable groups encountered in the communities a platform - a voice. Overall, this year contained many achievements and fulfilled project goals as a result of consistent efforts put throughout the year.

## **Project Activities:**

### **Advocacy Campaign Actions:**

Simorgh facilitated all partner CBOs in conducting different Advocacy Campaign Actions under various themes in target populations. These actions consisted of raising awareness and mobilizing communities on the issues of; i) Voter Registration, ii) Nikkah Registration, iii) Gender-based Violence Laws Awareness, iv) Environmental Protection Actions, v) Self-Defense Training of Women, vi) Drug Prevention, vii) Information sharing sessions with vulnerable groups such as Transgender community, brick-kiln workers, disabled/differently-abled persons and viii) Family Planning. These actions resulted in engaging a large number of people from the communities and mobilization on different issues containing door to door campaigns as well.

### **Trainings on Gender-Based Violence/Health/Digital Rights:**

Team Simorgh conducted a total of 18 training sessions on three main themes of i) Family Laws and Gender-based Violence Laws, ii) Sexual and Reproductive Health and iii) Cyber Security and Digital Rights with different communities in all three districts with experts

from respective fields. These activities resulted in enhancing people's knowledge and dissemination of useful information within the communities especially women and youth.

### **Open Mics:**

Simorgh facilitated arranging open-mics in the community to engage women and vulnerable groups in a conversation about their issues. These sessions were organized on diverse themes this time; i) Transphobia, ii) Issues of Disabled Persons, iii) Labour Rights of Women and their Decision Making, iv) Issues of Transgender Identity Crisis. These sessions proved as a way to record a diverse range of perspectives in raising a collective voice and it connected women and vulnerable communities to recognize the struggle they all encounter in life.

### **Area Support Network Meeting:**

Simorgh conducted Area Support Network meetings in all three districts quarterly in the year 2022. These meetings focused on highlighting new issues and facilitation of the concerns discussed in the meetings. Transgender activists also joined the ASN meetings in Lahore and Toba Tek Singh. Although participation of the government officials remained to be a challenge for the team, these meetings had the active participation of community women/ex-councilors, CSO representatives, lawyers and media persons. Overall, these meetings were productive in terms of facilitating ASN members on the raised issues or concerns.

### **Women Political Forum Meeting**

Simorgh organized regular meetings of active ex/councilors and female community organizers in all three districts and these meetings have proven to be an effective platform for community women to take encouragement from fellow women organizers and work towards efficient district developments plans. All the participants of Women Political Forums resolved major issues of their areas and were provided facilitation through ASN as well. This year, the number of women participants increased and the achievements have been positive especially in Lahore and Toba Tek Singh.

### **Community Women Exposure Visit**

Simorgh conducted a total of 6 exposure visits to different governmental bodies that enhanced the access and information of active community women. All the participants benefited from the information they received and many of them popularized that information in their community as well - by holding different sessions in their communities or helping any community member in getting access to the relevant department. The exposure visits were organized at i) Vocational Training Institutes, ii) Rescue 1122 offices, iii) Ombudsperson Punjab Office and iv) Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Maal Department.

### **Media Workshop - Training of Trainers**

Simorgh organized a training of Trainers for journalists regarding gender-sensitive reporting titled as “The Squint in the Eye”. Ms. Neelam Hussain, the Executive Coordinator of Simorgh was the trainer for 21 Journalists from all four provinces and 4 team members from Implementing Partner Organizations, (Shirkat Gah and Omer Asghar Khan Foundation). This workshop generated a productive debate and trained the professionals using the gender-lens of reporting. Simorgh then conducted replications in all three project districts with local media persons training 90 journalists from Lahore, Kasur and Toba Tek Singh.

### **CSO Capacity Building Workshop**

Team Simorgh conducted a four-day capacity building workshop with the representative from all the partner CBOs on three components of: i) Project Management (Proposal Writing, Monitoring and Evaluation), ii) Social Accountability and iii) Project Financial Management. 21 CSO partners joined the training including a Transgender participant. This training resulted in enhancing the knowledge and resource power of the local CBOs and they appreciated this step of our organization as well.

### **Councilors Orientation Session**

Under the component of local government, team Simorgh mobilized local union councilors in all three districts of Project FEMPOWER and conducted orientation sessions to understand the barriers they face in community work and generate a productive debate and liaison between male and female councilors. All the local councilors made development plans in their respective union councils which are under process and team Simorgh is monitoring and mentoring all the councilors alongside.

## **Training with Councilors**

As a need of the hour, as General Elections are approaching and all the local union councilors will be active in election campaigns, Simorgh undertook the initiative to conduct training sessions for the councilors in all three districts on three major themes; i) Political Participation and Patriarchal Structures, ii) Local Government Act, Democracy and Women Political Participation and iii) Gender-Sensitive Electoral Campaign. These training sessions helped all the councilors understand the importance of working with the female councilors and give them an equal voice and space in decision making. Along with this, the councilors made development plans in these training sessions as well which are being monitored by team Simorgh.

## **3. Socio-Legal Journal: Bayan**

With the collaboration of our new editors, the editorial team at Bayan has been working tirelessly and diligently for the writing and editing processes for the proposed volumes.

- Volume VI, titled “Seasons of Silence”, was completed and published in print and on Simorgh’s official website in August 2022.
- Presently, work is underway for the publication Volume VII; verification of cited sources and references, review, editing and proof-reading for short-listed papers, as well as correspondence with writers for edits and feedback. The volume is expected to be published at the end of March 2023.



#### **4. Our Stories - Our Voices - Our Right: Mitigating misogyny and GBV, undertaken with the support of the IDS department at the University of Sussex**

##### **Introduction:**

Younger generation feminists in Pakistan's women's movement, as a new entrant to the field of women's rights, have been celebrating International Women's Day since 2018 with celebratory-cum-protest marches for women's rights and against gender-based violence under the name of Aurat March (Women's March). Starting in Karachi, these marches have gained strength, spread, and visibility, resulting in a virulent and often violent backlash. This is not the first time that women have faced attacks for publicly protesting their rights. The movement's history includes the 12th February 1983 protest against sexist laws, which led to the police baton charge and arrest of older generation feminists. The current backlash differs from the older one in the degree of virulence and threatened and real violence offered to Aurat Marchers. The older generation's street protests also elicited public support and a degree of reluctant respect from detractors. It is necessary to locate the issue historically and examine the differences between older and younger generation activism as well as the nature and politics of the backlashes.

Our Stories- Our Voices - Our Right is aimed to function as an action-cum-research project which will (i) facilitate discourse around the backlash and critique faced by the women's movement in Pakistan, (ii) identify and analyze the socio-political and cultural factors, as well as political agendas propagating the violence, hate speech, and threat to life and agency being faced by these movements and collectives, and (iii) develop strategies to strengthen the movement and mitigate these challenges.

## **Target Groups:**

- i. (i) Women's groups in the movement, (ii) women and men from contending groups viz. journalists, lawyers, college and university students, NGOs and members of the Joint Action Committee for Citizen's Rights (JAC) Lahore etc.
- ii. Focus Group Discussions (activities and dialogues with women from: (i) the women's movement (ii) rural/urban working classes including women/men from labour unions (iii) from contending groups e.g. religious right and mainstream society.

## **Project Activities and Progress:**

- Hiring of project staff for research and project implementation.
- **Desk research and literature review** including newspaper articles, research papers, propaganda videos against AM and feminists, discourse and media shared (photographs and videos) by both AM and adversaries on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube, and in-depth analysis and necessary translations of the posters and placards presented.
- **Desk Research** and study of Haya March, a counter movement against AM, propagated by the religious political right; discourse and media shared (photographs and videos) on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube, and in-depth analysis and necessary translations of the posters and placards presented.

## **Data Collection:**

- A series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women from Aurat March to discuss backlash, slogans, past Aurat March experiences and their affiliation. Presently three one-day focus groups have been conducted with Aurat March's

Organizing Committee, Representatives from Aurat March chapters across Pakistan, and Sangat Theatre Group, a grassroots feminist social theater collective.

- Two one-day interviews were conducted with female representatives from right-wing religious party Jamat-E-Islami, and the religious educational-cum-research and publication collective, Al-Huda
- Interviews with male participants to gain an understanding of their views and perception of women's rights and the women's movement in Pakistan, including Aurat March and its activism. Presently, two interviews have been conducted.
- **Research based publication on above issues for knowledge building and public outreach:** Presently, five have been shortlisted and are working on their research papers.
- **Qualitative analysis and findings of the FGD and KII to be included in the publication:** Presently, the project team is developing mixed methods for data analysis, as well as strategies for outreach, inclusivity and diversity in data to reach the required data saturation for analysis.

**Networking:**

Simorgh has established close collaborations with various civil society organizations, academic institutions, and the women's movement in Pakistan. These partnerships are actively maintained throughout the year through our involvement in various activities such as participating in lectures, organizing information dissemination workshops, and conducting capacity-building trainings to encourage advocacy.

**Conclusion:**

Simorgh was able to achieve several targets for the year, including the introduction of a new project. Despite the changes in project staff, the transition has been seamless, and our activities have come to fruition. The challenges faced and lessons learnt in project and activity implementation faced during this year were mitigated successfully, provided Simorgh with a greater understanding of what to expect in the following year, and allowed the organization to grow.