



Community-Based Paralegals Ensuring Rule of Law and Access to Justice



**STRENGTHENING LEGAL EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES
THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED PARALEGALS**

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FOREWORD

In October 2015, Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), in collaboration with Open Society Foundations (OSF), launched a project, 'Strengthening Legal Empowerment at RSPs: Capacity-Building of Paralegals'. A total of 8 union councils (UC) in the districts Bahawalpur and Rajanpur were targeted to build the capacity of the staff of rural support programmes (RSP) and community members, including both women and men, to work as paralegals in their local communities. After having completed the one-year pilot phase (October 2015 to April 2017), the project will continue until May 2019. Paralegals, as the epitome of this project, are of paramount importance.

As the primary change agents in rural communities and a bridge between legal advisory systems and the layman, the paralegals' function remains pivotal in empowering communities. In order to gauge the effectiveness and impact of this project, a midterm review of paralegal work was necessary to implement any corrective measures required. Data was collected from both targeted districts, with a focus on the direct impact of paralegal work on the lives of local people, as well as on various aspects of community empowerment. To measure their success, a qualitative assessment of paralegal work was planned through a series of interviews of the staff and beneficiaries of the project, and focus group discussions with paralegals themselves as a source of self-reflection.

Beneficiaries were identified in consultation with RSPN staff members for the purpose of data collection and case studies. Most of the data was gathered through meeting sessions held in the villages that beneficiaries resided in. Owing to local cultural barriers and prevalent gender disparities in the targeted region, collecting data from beneficiaries proved to be a challenge. Some beneficiaries were reluctant to share information, some deterred by family members from giving an interview, and others attempted to withhold certain aspects of their cases. These issues point to the local power structures and gender constraints, that are gradually growing weak.

Data collection guides and questionnaires were administered by a trained legal aid and evaluation expert team comprising of a legal aid lawyer, legal aid project management specialist and an evaluation expert. The scope of the questionnaire encompassed four main elements including consciousness of rights, legal knowledge, willingness to act and acquisition of remedy. To gauge the impact of the interventions made by paralegals, all these elements were probed in detail to assess the extent of the success of this initiative. Collected data reflected a positive change in the community where vulnerable groups, especially women, were not only conscious of their rights but also demonstrated willingness to utilize their knowledge to overcome minor challenges and resolve everyday problems. The case studies shared in the document are, in essence, a celebration of the emancipation of these community members from the shackles of ignorance and misery that they suffered owing to a lack of knowledge, resources, guidance and support. Targeted communities demonstrated commitment to take this initiative forward and help and support each other with all they have learnt.

This document is proof of the unfailing efforts of RSPN's district teams, especially the legal aid officers and paralegals, without whom this change may not have been possible. The extraordinary support of RSPN managers and lead trainers was unmistakably crucial for the field teams who looked to them for guidance to implement and take the initiative further at every step of the way. Much appreciation and gratitude is due for all those who were directly or indirectly involved in reaching out to communities and beneficiaries for information-sharing, follow-ups and data collection, without which this document would not have been conceivable.



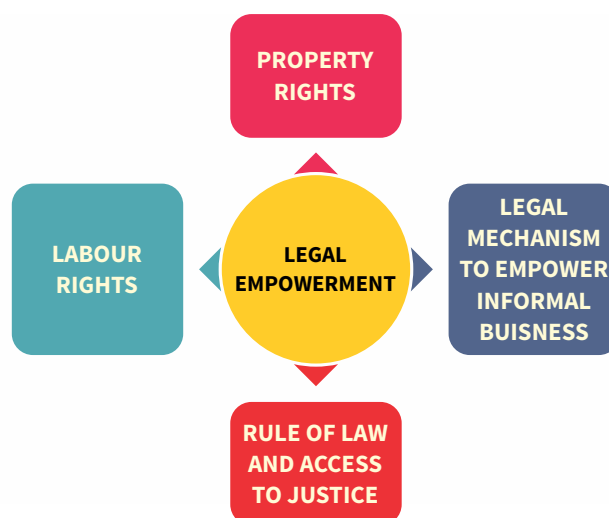
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INTRODUCTION

One of the four pillars of legal empowerment is access to justice and rule of law. This entails that “the poor may be unable to access the justice system due to a lack of formal identity or of knowledge about the system, illiteracy, or lack of legal services available to them. Laws that affect the poor are often unclear, contradictory, outdated or discriminatory in their impact. Access to formally documented legal identities and the existence of functioning mechanisms for implementing rights are key to providing access to justice for the poor.”¹



The United Nations Commission on Legal Empowerment estimated that 4 billion people live outside the protection of the law, mostly because of poverty and stigma.² For these people, the law is an abstraction or a threat, but not an aid to exercising their basic rights. “Legal empowerment” is about reversing that trend: about giving people the power to understand and use the law.³ Legal empowerment is the process through which the poor are protected and enabled to use the law to advance their rights and their interests in relation to the state and the market.⁴ Legal empowerment is about strengthening the capacity of all people to exercise their rights, either as individuals or as members of a community. It is about grassroots justice—about ensuring that law is not confined to books or courtrooms, but rather is available and meaningful to ordinary people.⁶

The World Justice Project has analyzed 113 countries and found that Pakistan ranks 97th on account of absence of corruption and 79th in terms of Open Government (whether basic laws and information on legal rights are publicized), and assesses the quality of information published by the government. It also measures whether requests for information held by a government agency are properly granted. The country ranks 113th out of 113 countries on account of order and security (measuring various threats to it including conventional crime, political violence, and violence as a means to redress personal grievances), 101st on protection of fundamental rights of citizens, 106th on provision of civil justice and 81st on provision of criminal justice.⁶

¹<http://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-four-pillars-of-legal-empowerment/>

²<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40803-016-0047-5#Fn1>

³<https://namati.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Evidence-Review2.pdf>

⁴<http://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-four-pillars-of-legal-empowerment/>

⁵<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/legal-empowerment>

⁶<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/159528-Rule-of-law-Pakistan-ranks-106th-out-of-113-countries>

Paralegals bridge the gap between the community and the justice system. They play a very important role in bridging the gap between the formal, and usually distant, justice delivery system and the communities that are supposed to benefit from it. In a nutshell, they 'informalize' the formal justice system for the benefit of communities they represent.

In light of the aforementioned description of legal empowerment and rule of law, RSPN initiated a legal empowerment project, Strengthening Legal Empowerment in Rural Communities through Community-based Paralegals – henceforth referred to simply as the Legal Empowerment Project (LEP) – in two districts of southern Punjab in 2016. The project reached out to the local communities and the poor and vulnerable through RSPs' district teams, local support organizations and community-based paralegals.

RSPN is funded by Foundations to Promote Open Society (FPOS) and sub-contracted the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) to work in two districts of southern Punjab, i.e. Bahawalpur and Rajanpur. Eight union councils were targeted from which community members were trained as paralegals.



REACHING THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

RSPN, in collaboration with NRSP, utilized the existing three-tiered social mobilization structure to ensure paralegals reach communities at the grassroots level. Each community organization (CO) at the neighborhood level (15-20 households represented in each CO) is federated through its representative at the village level, a village organization (VO), which is further federated at the union council level into a local support organization (LSO). This ensures outreach to every household that is a member of a CO in the target areas, to create awareness about legal rights, and capacitate and empower individuals by providing legal assistance. The paralegals recruited and trained through this project are all members of COs and thus can work directly at the LSO level. All COs in the target districts are 8-9 years old.



Paralegals reach out to communities, especially women, through awareness-raising sessions where other pro bono services are also introduced, including facilitation and support for civil documentation, legal guidance for family issues, property law, consumer protection, women's rights, domestic violence, child harassment and those related to corruption or accountability. In order to ensure the rule of law, paralegal work has a three-pronged strategy:

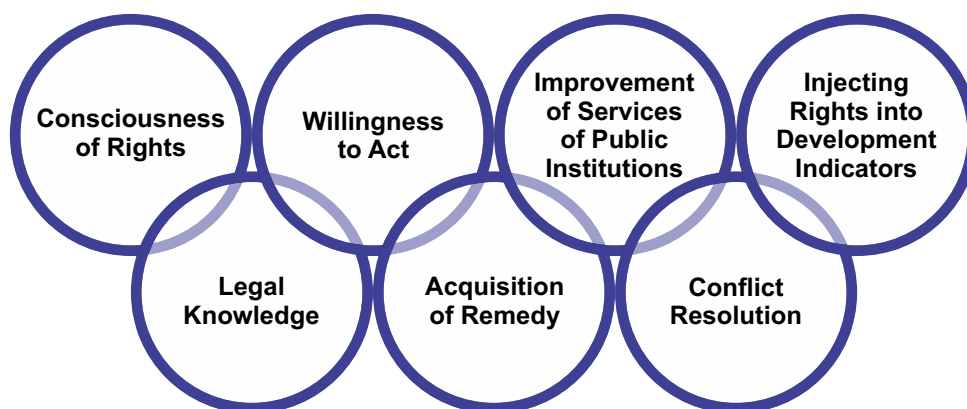
Legal literacy and awareness

Facilitation to resolve legal issues related to civic administration, family law, consumer protection, women's rights, corruption and fraud, among others

Facilitating rural communities to hold public institutions accountable for services, and working towards institutional change

While looking at the spectrum of the impact of paralegal work on communities and rule of law, it is noted that paralegals' influence is varied, ensuring strengthening of the rule of law and access to justice for poor and vulnerable communities, especially women.

The observed key strategies impacting the rule of law are defined below:



The role of paralegals in ensuring the rule of law is complex. Results overlap and expected change is not explicitly attributable. Owing to societal constraints and environmental factors, the result and change are to be seen through a prism that may help identify the social spectrum more vividly. For example, rights consciousness, legal knowledge and willingness to act are three hues of the same color; however, our social fabric is so closely interwoven that stand-alone rights consciousness may be a major step towards legal knowledge but is not in itself a tool to gain that knowledge. Similarly, in order to have willingness to act, legal knowledge alone does not suffice. Numerous societal pressures and constraints hold us back from taking action despite knowing the route to demand our legal rights.

The following description of the impact of the Legal Empowerment Project on the rule of law will help unfold the fine details of the social fabric, legal empowerment and its effect on the rule of law.

1. RIGHTS CONSCIOUSNESS

Paralegals, by raising awareness, reaching out to people in distress and providing them relief, spread a general consciousness of rights and responsibilities among the communities they serve. Awareness of the law and the support of paralegals, rooted in local organizations and institutions that work to provide those rights, help vulnerable groups to remain vigilant of possible violations of their rights. They become more cognizant of not only the possession of rights, but also the ability to avail them. Zunira of Bahawalpur District, for example, gained awareness of her legal rights and, at the same time, grew more cautious towards the possibility of a repeated violation of these rights that she understood the need to safeguard against. While sharing her story she mentioned, *“I feel empowered now because I know my rights and I know the process to safeguard them.”*

Zunira had been a victim of domestic violence for years at the hands of her husband. She endured verbal and physical abuse to save her marriage and, later, for the sake of her children. However, the trauma was never-ending. It was only when she was expelled from the house and isolated from her children that she started to consider solving this dilemma and realized her ignorance of the law. The paralegal in her area educated her about her legal rights. Her husband's second marriage without her permission proved to be the last nail, after which she finally took a legal step by sending a legal notice to him. He felt intimidated when he realized that Zunira was now legally empowered and fully conscious of her rights. Awareness of the law helped her amicably resolve the issue that had caused her agony for many years. Zunira's situation and the support provided to her by the project left her more cognizant of her rights and inculcated in her the willingness to raise her voice if and when needed.

District Bahawalpur

2. LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

An increase in legal knowledge, rights and responsibilities, along with the conviction to find a solution to a problem, is the first step towards empowerment. Legal aid and empowerment initiatives and paralegal work seem to be directly proportional to increased legal knowledge. Paralegals interact with communities and educate them about various legal issues and relevant laws and processes. The awareness and information that paralegals provide stimulate the community members' own curiosity towards their rights and generates a more proactive approach towards problems, as well as allowing them to make informed decisions for the resolution of a matter. In addition, paralegals also educate their clients about laws and legal procedures in the course of resolving cases. Clients are informed of all possible solutions to their problem. This legal knowledge not only helps the clients to take steps towards resolution but also makes them feel empowered with relevant information. This legal knowledge also influences other changes over time, including willingness of clients to take action and pursue remedies and other entitlements.

Case studies from the project demonstrate that it is predominantly women who benefit from legal knowledge, consequently becoming more legally empowered. Using information on relevant laws, they improve their circumstances, simultaneously extending support to others in similar situations. One such example was found in Bahawalpur, where the client received relevant information during a community awareness-raising session and later used that legal knowledge to claim her legal rights as a victim of domestic violence. She did not only strive to resolve her problems, but also started to work as a paralegal herself, eager to extend her services to countless others who may need them. Such examples of legal knowledge subsequently leading to legal empowerment and willingness to act are common on the field where paralegal programs operate.

3. WILLINGNESS TO ACT

Legal literacy does not only make people aware of the laws protecting their rights, but also helps them understand the implications of violation. Paralegals, to help a client resolve her/his issues, share all possible solutions along with their implications. The client then chooses the most suitable measure for his/her problem and demonstrates readiness to pursue it. This kind of disposition was witnessed in a number of clients, who not only showed their awareness of legal issues but also their readiness to act to protect their rights in the future. Nearly all the clients interviewed for case studies expressed their eagerness to act in the future, not only for themselves but for others as well, if and when required.

Allah Ditta, a tailor by profession, shared ownership of 9 acres of land with his brothers. As both his brothers lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates, Allah Ditta would look after the land and manage the agricultural revenue it generated. He noticed theft of irrigation water and involved the panchayat, but the problem, resulting in decreasing yields of crop. At his request, a local paralegal guided Allah Ditta, who reported the issue to the local police. After a few initial hiccups, the issue was resolved and Allah Ditta succeeded in restoring his due share of irrigation water for his family land.

District Rajanpur

A client from Rajanpur stated after the resolution of his case, *“Previously, I would think that the police is a superior department, so we would behave like slaves before them. Now I know that it is their duty to support and help us. We do not need to pay them for their services. I feel more confident now and hope that the lessons will stay with me for future reference.”*

Another client from Bahawalpur stated: “...the best part about the whole situation [of resolving the case through the paralegal] is that I feel empowered now. I have the required information on how to solve a similar problem, and this is a matter of pride for me. Things do not stop here though. Now I attend awareness sessions regularly... I am capable of delivering the same information that I learnt from my experience and these [awareness-raising] sessions to anyone in need. I am extremely grateful for paralegals and their efforts for the poor and vulnerable.”

Usman Ali, an old resident of Jalalpur Tehsil, was facing an issue related to his national identity card: the name of his father was incorrect on it, resulting in challenges in the transfer of his inherited property. For three years, he strived within his limited capacity to rectify the problem. However, numerous visits to National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) offices and courts remained fruitless. It was only after sharing his problem with the local paralegal that Usman was finally able to resolve it. The paralegal facilitated and accompanied him to the local NADRA office for correction. The three-year-old problem was resolved in a few weeks, to Usman's relief.

District Bahawalpur

4. ACQUISITION OF REMEDY

Paralegals facilitate and provide support to clients for the resolution of their problems. Many a time, people are aware of the possible solutions, but their voice does not reach the authorities. Once people are conscious of their rights and talk about their issues in the context of the responsibilities of the authorities, it becomes easier to reach resolution. Awareness of rights and a sense of entitlement ease the acquisition of a remedy. A number of case studies demonstrate that as soon as people start to claim their rights, it becomes easier for them to reach the logical conclusion of seeking a remedy to their problems.

In Bahawalpur, for example, a community was facing an infrastructural issue where the absence of a road caused immense inconvenience to the people living in its vicinity. In spite of numerous requests to the local Minister of Provincial Assembly, their appeal went unnoticed. However, once community members claimed their right with the help of their local support organization, they were able to convey their grievance through the Union Councilor to the area's Minister of National Assembly via an application drawing attention towards the inconvenience that was keeping local children from their right to education. The application resulted in the approval of costs for the pavement of the road, and the residents had the infrastructure in place within months. The problem could have been resolved in the first attempt but the administration neglected the matter. When it realized, however, that the community was discussing its problem in the context of its rights and deprivation, the administration immediately approved the budget available for infrastructural development. Empowering a community and enabling it to discuss its rights thus has a significant impact on the community.

5. IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICES OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

It is observed that once a community becomes aware of its rights and the state's responsibility towards it, it also becomes more cognizant of its service delivery of institutions. Community monitoring or the sense of accountability comes more readily to it which, as a result, brings institutional change. Subsequently, service delivery and implementation of processes improve. Legal empowerment leading to change at the institutional level is a major consequence that has been witnessed as an impact of the paralegal program. Some cases reported approaching agencies regarding weak service delivery; the practice was consequently investigated in detail and the issue resolved through mitigation.

In a case reported in Rajanpur, the client, a beneficiary of the Benazir Income Support Programme, was denied the full due amount by the postman in charge of disbursement. The issue was reported to the Assistant Director, BISP-Rajanpur by the local support organization. Consequently, after a detailed inquiry into the matter, the affectees were reimbursed their remaining amounts, while 2,200 more beneficiaries were saved from embezzlement.

Similarly, in another case in the same district a First Information Report (FIR) was mistakenly filed against the employee of a shop instead of its owner. The employee was charged with electricity theft for the shop. The local paralegal helped resolve the issue by facilitating him in the process, which included visiting the local police station. Finally, upon completion of an investigation, the FIR was reverted. It is envisaged that such issues help institutions to change weak practices by holding the right persons accountable and encouraging transparency at all levels.

In addition, numerous cases concerning the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) were facilitated where community members including men, women and a transgender were provided with support in connecting them with relevant personnel at NADRA office(s) to resolve their issues. These cases did not only benefit the clients but also helped strengthen the institution to improve service delivery and become more client-centered.

Atif Shah, a transgender, has been serving as a monk at a shrine in Rajanpur for the last 30 years. Wishing to go on pilgrimage, he inquired about the process and discovered that possession of a national identity card (CNIC) is mandatory. He had separated from his family in Karachi three decades earlier and could not provide their details. Atif approached the paralegal for help in obtaining a CNIC. The paralegal guided him and connected him with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) office in Rajanpur. Atif was not satisfied with this support as he suffered mistreatment for being a transgender.

“Although it is challenging for me to obtain a CNIC since I only have certificates from the health and social welfare departments of my transgender identity and no other supporting family documents, I am still confident that with the support of paralegals I will be able to obtain an identity card and go on pilgrimage.”

The paralegal then accompanied him on his following visits to the Rajanpur and Multan NADRA offices. There, Atif was advised to submit to a Guru (traditional head of transgender community) to be able to support his identity for a CNIC. Gurus, however, don't support independent transgender persons who don't live within their compound and follow their protocols. NADRA Islamabad was then approached for further guidance on procuring a CNIC for Atif without having to submit to a Guru.

Sometimes, rural communities present challenging cases such as this one. They seem impossible, but with persistent efforts, eventually reach resolution. The legal empowerment team is still pursuing Atif Shah's case and does not plan to give up until he is formally registered as a citizen of the state.

6. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Quite a number of cases reported to paralegals recorded a positive impact on dispute resolution. The most common legal empowerment strategies employed in these interventions were mediation and legal literacy through community-based paralegals. Issues range from family disputes and domestic violence to women's rights and inheritance. Paralegals, in such cases, provide all possible options to the client, including formal litigation, mediation involving local and traditional institutions, service delivery institutions and local legislative representatives.

One important example is that of a peasant woman from Rajanpur who was being pressured by her brother to withdraw from her due share of property inheritance. The paralegal facilitated her through the mediation process, at her request. The issue was settled amicably and she withheld her share of the property.

Similarly, a case of domestic violence and the violation of women's rights was reported to a paralegal in Bahawalpur. On the client's demand, the case was filed in court but later, at her husband's request, the parties settled outside of court.

7. INJECTING RIGHTS INTO DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

Under the umbrella of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16,⁷ the Legal Empowerment Project is observed to have helped achieve several development indicators in areas like education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5) and economic growth and empowerment (SDG 8). A number of cases related to civil documentation, including legal identity, such as computerized national identity card (CNIC), passport, B-form/child registration certificate (CRC) and domicile, directly or indirectly related to or supported development themes. Quite a few selected case studies demonstrate that legal empowerment facilitated by paralegals has contributed to the health and education indicators at the household level.

A destitute widow from Bahawalpur was diagnosed with Hepatitis and was unable to support her healthcare expenses. The paralegal informed her about Bayt-ul-Maal and helped her apply for financial support. After due process, the widow received medical expenses from the department, enabling her to continue her treatment.

In another case, a woman from Bahawalpur was stuck with a case of property inheritance. The paralegal provided her with relevant information to acquire required documentation from NADRA that eventually helped her distribute the inherited property. Her own share also helped her improve her living conditions.

There are other examples from the Legal Empowerment Project where people improved their circumstances on various fronts as a result of the paralegals' efforts for community empowerment.

⁷Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

8. GENDER EQUALITY

Women's rights have been a key focus of the project. Most of the beneficiaries of this project have been, women whom after being made aware of their rights and the legal processes to claim them, raised their voices for their due rights through paralegals and project lawyers. Legal aid clinics, conducted by the legal aid officer – a lawyer by profession – of the Legal Empowerment Project, receive complaints on a wide range of issues from domestic violence cases and second marriages without permission to corruption and deceit and property issues.

The project is not focused solely on women's rights, however, and strives to ensure gender equality by supporting men, transgender persons and minorities in the communities to safeguard their rights. Cases where men were blackmailed from the brides' families to transfer property possession to the brides, and others of similar nature, have been registered and catered by legal aid centers.

9. FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMBATING IMPUNITY

Legal empowerment not only helps individuals acquire their rights but, at a macro level, also fosters institutional and individual accountability through both formal and informal means. Holding people and institutions accountable for transgressions in an objective manner is one of the impacts of this project.

Case studies of clients refer to instances where clients chose informal mechanisms of conflict resolution and paralegals were made part of the panchayat's deliberations. The presence of paralegals indirectly ensured objectivity and neutrality in the verdicts. The culture of one-sided rulings was challenged and that of fulfillment of responsibility developed.

Likewise, in several instances, individuals were held accountable for the misuse of power both at domestic and institutional levels. The tendency to exploit power relationships, either through misconduct, corruption or leveraging social stature, has resulted in the registration of a number of cases where the less powerful or underprivileged members of community reached out for support. The Legal Empowerment Project ensured that the defendants were held liable to either justify or rectify their deeds amicably. The message of accountability is being proclaimed loudly by using means both formal, that is legal, and informal, such as through a panchayat.



ANECDOTES FROM THE FIELD

1. SECOND MARRIAGE – RIGHTS CONSCIOUSNESS

Anila Bibi lives in Kothi Jalalabad, District Bahawalpur, and is married to her first cousin, Junaid. Junaid is a tailor by profession and runs his own business in Hyderabad. Anila lived with her in-laws because Junaid could not afford to keep her with him but visited her once a month. The first few months of her married life were quite pleasant. She was happy with her husband until they attended the wedding of a distant relative. There, her husband Junaid liked a girl whom he later started an affair with. Anila's married life slowly changed with her husband's behavior. Junaid started arguing with her over trivial issues, even on the phone. He would neglect her and, when she complained of his changing attitude, threaten her with second marriage. The arguments sometimes led to domestic violence. Anila knew about his affair but tried to make her marriage work regardless until one day, after another episode of physical abuse, Junaid expelled his pregnant wife from the house. Anila returned to her parents' house. Her family tried to negotiate with her in-laws but since Anila had no father or brother to support her and came from relative poverty, they paid no heed and attempted to hush the issue. Neither Junaid nor his family visited Anila during her pregnancy. A few months later, she delivered a baby boy but no one bothered to visit him either. Then Anila came to know that Junaid had married the woman he had been having an affair with and was keeping her with him in Hyderabad.

One day, an awareness session under the legal empowerment project was held in their vicinity with the support of the local support organization (LSO). Anila's mother attended the session which happened to be on the topic of second marriage. The project team, including the social organizer (SO), was also present. At the end of the session, Anila's mother

SECOND MARRIAGE

In 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan maintained the decision of a subordinate court wherein a husband was awarded imprisonment of one year for contracting a second marriage without due process of law. It was declared that the permission procedure is not against the injunction of Islam (PLD 2017 SC 187).

As per Section 6 (Polygamy) of Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961):

No man, during the subsistence of an existing marriage, shall, except with the previous permission in writing of the Arbitration Council, contract another marriage, nor shall any such marriage contracted without such permission be registered, under this Ordinance.

It is important to state that the law does not bar second marriage. However, there is a procedure of contracting a second marriage during the subsistence of an existing marriage. A large part of the population is unaware of this law and procedure, resulting in legal consequences. Awareness of the law is essential as ignorance is no excuse in court.

There are a number of cases where husbands contracted second marriage without any justification or permission from existing wives. Lack of awareness on the law among both men and women results in challenging life situations.

approached the paralegal, Rasheeda Bibi, and other team members with her daughter's issue and requested help in seeking khula from the court. The team then visited Anila herself. She told them about her husband's second marriage without her permission. Despite her disapproval, she requested the team to save her marriage for the sake of her son. She expressed her willingness to give her marriage a chance if Junaid agreed to strike a balance between both wives and provide them equal rights. She clearly mentioned that before pursuing the option of khula, she wanted to try to make her marriage work on the condition of equal rights.

With Anila's approval, the team approached Junaid and his family. It informed them that Anila and her mother had reached out for support, and shared all possible options to resolve the issue. Junaid and his family, however, once again ignored attempts at reconciliation and did not respond positively to the project team. They clearly said that second marriage is a common phenomenon in their culture and that there is nothing wrong with that. This response prompted Anila to file a case of maintenance, dower, dowry and second marriage without permission on her husband. This came as a shock to Junaid and his family. They had not expected this reaction from Anila.

Upon discovering that the case had gone into litigation, Junaid became anxious. He apologized to Anila, touching her feet and agreeing to give her equal rights. He had not been ready for legal implications and was surprised by Anila's stance. He requested the team to allow the couple to settle the issue out of court through mediation. Anila insisted on calling a panchayat and demanded that the proceedings be documented. Both families, the paralegal and the project lawyer, along with LSO members and village elders attended the meeting. Before the entire council, Junaid promised to provide equal rights to both his wives. Anila presented her conditions to live with him, including a house in her name, provision of monthly expenses and a mobile phone for communication purposes, along with equal rights for both wives. Junaid, with the support of his father, acceded to all these conditions. He transferred the house to Anila's legal possession, had a separate portion constructed for her and shifted his second wife to it as well. Both wives now live together in the same house along with their in-laws. Anila is satisfied with the resolution and lives in harmony with her son and her husband's second wife, while Junaid visits both his wives once a month.

“It is only because of legal action that I have returned to my house. I suffered quite a lot, but I know my rights now.”

2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

Sania is married and a mother of three, who previously worked as a schoolteacher. Her married life was not pleasant. Her husband, Farhan, was an alcoholic and would savagely beat her every now and then. Physical, verbal and emotional abuse was routine. He would often batter and throw her out of the house. Sania, for the sake of her children and to save her marriage, tolerated his behavior without complaint. Her parents were old and sick, and her in-laws were sympathetic but their admonitions only fueled Farhan's outrage. Once, simply out of animosity after a routine argument, Farhan cut off Sania's long hair – a symbol of beauty and feminine pride – while she was asleep. When Sania woke up and discovered this, she quietly hid her shame from her family. She tried everything to make the marriage work but her husband refused to mend his ways.

Meanwhile, the local paralegal held community awareness sessions in the vicinity and Sania got a chance to attend some on the topics of child marriage and domestic violence. She was expecting her third child at the time. During her delivery, Sania's husband fabricated a story to convince the doctor to give her a

hysterectomy while she was still unconscious. He slandered her character, accusing her of having an affair with a male co-worker at school, and pleading with the doctor to save his marriage by rendering her incapable of bearing another child. Farhan made a hysterectomy seem necessary to prevent Sania from abandoning her children. The doctor was convinced and operated on her.

Sania's husband did not stop there however, but contracted a second marriage without informing her. The woman already had a son from a previous marriage. One day, Farhan came home and started beating Sania over a trivial issue. The argument heated up and he threw her out of the house. He told Sania that he will keep their children and mocked her about enduring the agony of being childless. He reminded her that even if she remarried, she could not bear children.

Sania was very upset. She went to her parents' house. Supported by her mother, she thought of contacting the local support organization (LSO). She visited the LSO office where she was introduced to the local paralegal, Kalsoom. Sania shared her issue with Kalsoom, who contacted the legal aid officer (LAO)⁸ and shared the case. The LAO and Kalsoom discussed the matter and shared all possible solutions with Sania, along with the pros and cons of each. Sania opted to file the case in court as she did not want it taken to the panchayat. She feared that her husband will not follow the decision of the panchayat and the abuse will worsen.

According to her decision, the LAO filed a case of domestic violence against Sania's husband. The court sent a notice to Farhan, which intimidated him. He realized that he was in hot water and his violence had legal repercussions. Terrified, he sent a message of reconciliation to Sania. But Sania did not want

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

According to recently released rankings of the Women, Peace and Security Index, Pakistan is the fourth worst country for women. Meanwhile, Thomson Reuters Foundation expert poll showed Pakistan as one of the world's three most dangerous countries for women.

Every day, at least 6 women are murdered or face a murder attempt, at least 8 are raped, another 11 assaulted, and 32 abducted for various reasons in Punjab, according to a report published by the Law and Order Wing of the Special Monitoring Unit (SMU).

Following the passage of the 18th Amendment in 2010, there has been an increase of women-related legislation in the country. The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (PPWVA), 2016, makes Punjab the third province of the country to pass a bill on domestic violence. The prime objective of the PPWVA is to provide justice and to protect women from all types of violence in a province where at least 57 women are subjected to criminal violence on a daily basis. For the first time in the history of the country, the PPWVA provides comprehensive protection to women against a range of crimes. As compared to the domestic violence laws in Sindh and Balochistan, the PPWVA does not criminalize the violence but focuses on protection after the violence has been committed.

The bill seeks to prevent violence against any person through a network of protection committees and officers, and prompt criminal trials for suspected abusers. The bill has defined domestic violence as "*all acts of gender-based or physical or psychological abuse committed by an accused against women, children or other vulnerable persons, with whom the respondent is or has been in a domestic relationship.*" Under the bill, any aggrieved or authorized person can file a petition in court, which will be responsible for fixing a date for the first hearing within seven days of receiving a complaint. In case of a breach of protection order, the respondent can face a fine, while in the case of a second violation, the penalty will be enhanced.

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⁸Project lawyer

to reconcile while he remained with his second wife. She clearly told Farhan that to keep her, he would have to divorce his other wife. He claimed that his second nikah had only been verbal, but there were both witnesses and documented evidence for it. Farhan's second wife verified this information. After a few out-of-court meetings, Farhan bought a stamp paper for an out-of-court settlement. In the presence of LSO members, the LAO and the paralegal, settlement conditions and a contract were drafted and signed. Farhan divorced his second wife and promised never to torture Sania again. He also guaranteed that she will not have any complaints about him from then onwards.

Sania left her case filed in court and refused to get it closed, as a safety net and to maintain pressure on her husband. She was happy with the mediation and settlement, and lived contentedly with her husband and three children. The resolution of her problem motivated Sania to start working as a paralegal herself.

“I wanted to help people in distress. I know how it feels not to have any support so I wanted to be there for those who have no one else to turn to.”

3. DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE (KHULA/DIVORCE) – WILLINGNESS TO ACT

Ambreen is a resident of the sparsely populated village Parabeg in the union council Garum Chashma, approximately 50 km away from the town of Chitral. Ambreen is a poor woman with an educated background. Ambreen was married to Shafiq Jan at the age of 14. The man claimed to be working as a sales officer with a monthly income of Rs. 25,000. He also presented himself as belonging to a well-off family. The reality, however, was contrary to this: the fancy picture of his accumulated wealth was a mere lie. Ambreen was unaware of this at the time of her wedding. She realized the true picture sometime after her marriage when she discovered that Shafiq was unemployed and a drug addict.

DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

On 18th March, 2015, an amendment, **The Punjab Family Courts (Amendment) Act, 2015**, was passed in Punjab, that brought certain changes to the procedure to shorten the period of trial.

Given the present status of prolonged litigation in family courts, with respect to adjudication of suits filed in matters pertaining to dissolution of marriage (including khula), dower, maintenance, restitution of conjugal rights, custody of children (and visitation rights of parents), guardianship, jactitation of marriage, dowry and personal property and belongings of the wife, the law has been amended in order to resolve family disputes in a more expeditious manner.

With the passage of time, Shafiq began to mistreat Ambreen with physical and emotional abuse. He would not cover her basic expenses or household costs. Ambreen tried to explain her painful circumstances to her parents but they did not heed her. She said, *“I informed my family about the cheating and misery I was facing at the hands of Shafiq, but instead of helping me, my parents asked me to help my husband abstain from drugs.”*

Shafiq's parents were fed up of him and eventually threw him and his wife Ambreen out of their house. Shafiq, in desperation, went to his brother, Habib, to plead for space to live. His brother let the couple stay in his house. Meanwhile, Shafiq and Ambreen were blessed with a daughter. The childbirth did not bring any change to Shafiq's attitude; he continued to inflict ill treatment and physical violence on Ambreen.

“When my daughter was born, my in-laws requested us to move back into their house. My life still seemed meaningless to me. Once it was late at night when Shafiq came home drunk and asked me for tea but there

was no tea at home, so I asked him to get some tea and milk. All I remember after that was being beaten up ferociously. I fell unconscious. I was hospitalized for days.”

The torture, both mental and emotional, affected Ambreen. She informed her parents about her suicidal thoughts and warned them that she will commit suicide if they did not let her return to their house. Her brother, Sulaiman, came to her rescue and brought her home. Sulaiman was already aware of the Legal Empowerment Project team's activities and contacted the community paralegal to discuss Ambreen's case.

The legal advisor met Ambreen and collected all the details of the case. They contacted Shafiq's brother, Habib who denied Shafiq's mistreatment of Ambreen and refuted all allegations. Ambreen's family decided to register a family case in court through the Legal Empowerment team.

Meanwhile, Ambreen's brother-in-law, Habib wrote an application to the Assistant Commissioner (AC) Chitral claiming that a NGO team had abducted his sister-in-law and requested legal action against the Legal Empowerment team. The Assistant Commissioner was a distant relative of Shafiq and thus took certain steps in his favor. He called the District Program Manager (DPM), SRSP-Chitral and the Legal Empowerment team to pursue the application. All the facts of the case were presented to him, who then advised the team to mediate the case instead of pursuing it in court. Ambreen, however, refused mediation and once again warned her family that she will commit suicide if sent back to her husband.

The AC ordered the Station House Officer (SHO) of Garam Chashma to force Ambreen's parents to return her to Shafiq. The SHO refused. Ambreen requested the Legal Empowerment team to file a case for dissolution of marriage and child custody.

During case trials, Habib threatened the Legal Empowerment team for getting involved in their family matter. The legal adviser contacted senior members of the District Bar Association Chitral for support. Despite the threats, the Legal Empowerment Project team remained determined and the three-year-long case was finally resolved by getting Ambreen divorced from Shafiq and custody of her child.

4. CHILD CUSTODY – LEGAL KNOWLEDGE

Ruqayya is a 24-year-old woman from Bara Banda stop, District Nowshera. This is a poor village with a few rich land-owners and influential persons who participate in dispute resolution. Ruqayya comes from a poor family. She has only received Islamic education. Ruqayya was wed-locked to Akbar, a stranger from Charsadda and the couple had a daughter. Ruqayya's marriage rapidly went towards failure because of her husband's and his family's bad attitude towards her. The issues ultimately led to divorce.

Ruqayya wanted custody of her daughter. She decided to meet the female community paralegal and shared the details of her problem. After a detailed discussion, the paralegal informed Ruqayya of all possible ways to resolve the issue. Ruqayya opted for litigation as the jirga had previously not worked for her. Ruqayya said, *“Now the only thing that I am looking forward to in my life is custody of my only child.”* She filed a child custody case with SRSP's Legal Empowerment Team (LEP) team.

To her dismay, before the team could take any step, Ruqayya's father, on getting to know about her meeting with the LEP team, got furious and forbade her from meeting the team again.

The paralegal shared, *“Ruqayya did not come to meet me again. I went to her house once but she said that her father did not support her. After a few days, I found out from a neighbor that her husband had abducted her daughter.”*

During the father-daughter tussle, Ruqayya's husband successfully managed to abduct his daughter. Ruqayya felt helpless and begged her brother to convince her father on seeking help from the LEP team. Her brother took a stand for her and succeeded in convincing their father. Ruqayya said, *“My father was not supportive as he thought it was like asking for more trouble. I asked my brother for help and he convinced our father that the LEP team will take the pro bono case and we will not have to pay anything. At this, he agreed.”*

The advisor shared, *“After a lot of convincing, her brother won her father's trust and they came to meet us again. I advised her to file a 491 CRPC application under which legal custody of the child is given within 24 hours. We used our resources and referred the case to the Charsadda court.”*

After filing a 491 CRPC application, Ruqayya's daughter was recovered immediately. The police went to Akbar's house on court orders and brought Ruqayya's daughter back to her. To further legitimize the case, the court summoned a hearing. The ultimate decision of the court was in favor of Ruqayya, and Akbar was ordered to pay Rs. 1,000 to her for child maintenance every month. The judge also stated that when their daughter reaches the age of majority, she will be in a position to decide which of her parents she wanted to live with.

Ruqayya shared, *“I am extremely thankful to the LEP team for genuinely addressing my issue. No matter how much I thank them, it will never be enough.”*

She also stated, *“I had no power to get my daughter back. I trusted the LEP team as they had already resolved many cases in the village and they were my last hope. I did not have enough money to file a case privately, especially as my father was not supportive at all.”*

The problem took one year to reach resolution because of the hesitation of Ruqayya father's. It could have been resolved sooner if Ruqayya had had the support of her family.

CHILD CUSTODY

In Pakistan, Guardian Courts are working under **Guardian and Wards Act, 1890 and Family Courts Act, 1964** to resolve the issues of custody of minors after divorce. The mother holds a superior right to custody of children over the father. In case of second marriage by the mother, if the minor is female, custody preference shall be given to the father. In all cases, however, the welfare of the minor remains of paramount significance before a Guardian Judge to decide a custody petition.

The most expected offshoot litigation of family disputes is child custody cases besides divorce, maintenance and recovery of dowry articles. It is also common for fathers to forcefully retain custody of minor children, while the mothers remain helpless. The recovery of minors becomes more critical when fathers conceal their whereabouts, in which case mothers have to file for recovery of children before the court and the courts hand over custody of minors to their mothers. The proceedings for recovery of detainee under **Section 491 CrPC** before the District & Session Judge or under **Article 199 Constitution of Pakistan, 1973** before High Court concerned are the same to some extent while forums differ.

5. INHERITANCE – WILLINGNESS TO ACT

Palwasha, a 70-year-old housewife from the poverty-struck village of Bara Banda stop, District Nowshera is married with five children. Palwasha is an uneducated woman. She is a heart patient and, given her family's meagre income, could not afford treatment. Her father died 40 years ago and her older brother refused to give her due share of inheritance.

Palwasha had been trying to acquire her rightful inheritance for the previous fifteen years, but the jirga kept failing her. Her brother conveniently continued to ignore the jirga's notices to attend the meeting. Everyone in the village belonged to the same social strata so no one could influence him for Palwasha's right of inheritance. Due to this inheritance issue, Palwasha hadn't met her brother for all these years. Palwasha's share in property was of 9 marla, which was not a big area for a landowner like her brother, but it could be a potential life-changer for a poor person like Palwasha who struggled to put food on the table.

Her neighbors advised her to take the matter to court but she opposed it: *“the culture of our village does not allow women to go to court. It is considered disrespectful and will dishonor my family's name. I would prefer for the matter to be peacefully resolved within the village.”*

It was only when Palwasha's husband became extremely ill and bedridden and there was no one in the family to provide sustenance or finance her husband's treatment that Palwasha asked her daughter to approach the LEP team that frequently attend the CO meetings. At her mother's insistence, Palwasha's daughter met the female community paralegal and discussed their problem with her.

After a detailed meeting with the LEP team, Palwasha shared the property documents with them. Once the details were verified, a meeting with the jirga committee was held with Palwasha's permission. It was decided that the matter was a long-drawn affair spread over fifteen years and the only way to resolve it was through court. Palwasha disagreed with this advice of the committee and requested to settle the matter through mediation.

The legal advisor of the Legal Empowerment Project called Palwasha's brother, Shahnawaz, and introduced himself as an advocate. He explained to Shahnawaz all possible implications of litigation. After listening to the details, Shahnawaz agreed to attend the jirga meeting for mediation. Both parties agreed that a local jirga needed to be arranged at Palwasha's house for the resolution of the case.

INHERITANCE

Depriving women of their lawful inheritance share is a common practice. The patriarchal set up of society leads to authorizing the male members of a family the freedom to handle financial and property matters, whereas women are neither permitted to take any role in the inheritance process nor are they updated about the legacy of their parents. This lack of knowledge and awareness ultimately leads to deprivation of legal rights. It is commonly observed that women, at times, deliberately surrender their rightful inheritance. The waiver of their right to inheritance helps them feel secure about having emotional support from their parental abode. Compensation of their vulnerability through love and affection of their parental family costs them their legal share from their parents' legacy.

The Criminal Law (3rd Amendment) Act, 2011, was promulgated to eradicate anti-women practices, including deprivation of the inheritance right. It is defined as **“An Act to prohibit certain practices leading to exploitation and discrimination against womenfolk...”** Section 498-A in Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, particularly prohibits the deprivation of women from inheriting property and specifies penal punishment for depriving a woman of her share of inheritance.

The jirga consisted of members of the community who were known to be fair and impartial in their decisions, such as the malik of the village, a local lawyer and member of the Bar Association, Palwasha's husband, her son Shahzeb, and the legal advisor on the LEP team. After a detailed discussion, her brother agreed to give her rightful share in the inheritance. It took three months to resolve the case as property documents had to be prepared by the tehsildar and patwari and finally, Palwasha received her share of inheritance totaling 1 kanal.

Palwasha stated, *“now that I have a piece of agricultural land, I plan to plant wheat and maize on it. It will help me earn a living for my family.”*

This is probably the biggest example of livelihood strengthening as a direct result of the LEP's intervention. Palwasha could have tried and failed for another fifteen years to get this small piece of land that was her right and may still not have had any means of income.

6. CIVIL DOCUMENTATION – ACQUISITION OF REMEDY

Zeba Bibi is a resident of Mari Sheikh Shajrah, District Bahawalpur. Zeba belongs to a poor family that earns its living through agriculture. Her husband used to work at Sadiq Public School, but developed heart problems and resigned, and remains unemployed. Zeba is the eldest among her siblings; she has three brothers and four sisters, including two stepsisters. The stepsisters are from her father's second wife and the entire family lived together harmoniously. Her father passed away a few years ago, leaving the power of attorney to Zeba as his eldest daughter.

Keeping in view the weak financial situation of all of her father's heirs, Zeba wanted to distribute the shares promptly but had been unable to do so for the past four years. Her stepmother filed a case against her for her share of the inheritance property. In the years since her father's demise, Zeba had spent approximately 50,000 rupees on the court case, but remained unable to resolve the problem. She could not understand the reason for the delay in distributing the shares, while her family was rapidly losing patience.

The local paralegal, Mariam, was Zeba's next-door neighbor. Zeba happened to attend an awareness session held in their vicinity. After the session, she shared her problem concerning property distribution and her failure to understand the root cause with Mariam. The paralegal listened to her

CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Provision of information and facilitation to acquire civil documents (i.e. registration of marriage, birth, death and divorce at union council and CNIC, B form from NADRA and funds from BISP) are some of the key services rendered by paralegals in the community. Data shows that most of the issues relate to lack of information and absence of civil documentation, which result in challenges in acquiring certain rights. **The National Database and Registration Authority Ordinance, 2000, and Benazir Income Support Program Act, 2010**, are laws dealing with matters pertaining to both organizations. Certain notifications also deal with the birth, death, marriage and divorce registration with union councils. Efforts are made to resolve issues pertaining to these services administratively, without going into litigation. A strong liaison with stakeholders is imperative for the provision of quality services. All reported case studies reflect how the absence of knowledge and accessibility become a nuisance for vulnerable communities. In such situations, paralegals guide clients by providing them relevant information and empowering them through facilitation in various ways. Civil documentation ultimately helps them attain their rights through legal knowledge, acquisition of remedy and willingness to act.

problem attentively and informed her that in order to transfer legal shares, a family registration certificate (FRC) is required. Mariam also told her that the document is issued by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).

At the paralegal's advice, Zeba visited the NADRA office to obtain the FRC but could not understand the required procedure. Confused, she returned to the paralegal and complained that no one at NADRA helped her understand the process of obtaining a FRC. Zeba requested the paralegal and local support organization (LSO) president to accompany her to acquire the said form. Mariam accompanied her to the local NADRA office. She helped Zeba through the application process step by step for urgent issuance of the form, which cost her 3,000 rupees. Zeba got the form within three days. She breathed a sigh of relief as it allowed her to finally fulfil the responsibility her father had charged her with to distribute property shares to all his legal heirs.

Zeba and her family have received their legal property inheritance and are content now. Zeba is free of pressure and obligation. Her financial condition has also improved since she assumed legal possession of her share of property.

“The problem remained unresolved for four years, but with the paralegal's intervention, the matter was settled within three days. I am relieved and more confident now. I am aware of the process and willing to help others who are in distress as well.”

7. CONSUMER RIGHTS – INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Shireen Bibi lives in abject poverty in a small, one-room house without a boundary wall with her five children in Mari Sheikh Shajrah Union Council, District Bahawalpur. Her husband had abandoned them and remarried. Her oldest son and herself are the only breadwinners of the remaining family. Her son works a camel cart while she earns daily wages as a laborer.

Given the hot climate of the region, Shireen and her son patiently saved money over a few years to be able to afford electricity connection to their room. They finally received approval and had a meter fixed at home. A month later when they received the electricity bill, both Shireen and her son were shocked. It was exorbitant. Their relatively better off neighbors were paying up to 200 rupees a month, while their own dingy, cramped room only had a few lights and a fan for which they had been billed over 1,500 rupees. Anxious and unable to pay the large sum, Shireen looked for ways to have it reduced. During this time, the overcharged electricity bills accumulated to 13,000 rupees.

One day, Shireen got a chance to attend an awareness session facilitated by the local support organization (LSO) and conducted by the local paralegal, Safia, in her community. Through the session, she learnt about paralegals and the services they offered. Eventually, she shared her problem with Paralegal Safia. Safia further discussed it with the legal empowerment team and it was decided to present the issue to the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) representative during the

CONSUMER RIGHTS

Consumer rights are another common, yet important, issue faced routinely by many. Numerous cases are observed as resulting from defective products and services by manufacturers and service providers. As per Punjab Consumer Protection Act, 2005, WAPDA, SNGPL, PTCL and development authorities, private manufacturers and service providers can be held liable under consumer laws. Some departments are, however, excluded from the ambit of consumer laws because separate forums have been established for the redress of complaints relevant to them.

stakeholders' meeting with the project team. Safia then discussed the matter with the WAPDA representative at the meeting, and he requested for Shireen to visit the local WAPDA office. At the paralegal's advice, Shireen visited the WAPDA office and shared her issue with the relevant officials. After listening to her concerns, WAPDA officials reduced the billed amount to 8,000 rupees, citing official problems in case of a larger adjustment. As this was still too large a sum for Shireen, she was offered the concession to pay it in instalments of 1,000 rupees a month. The WAPDA representative also sent a team to Shireen's house to check the meter. The device was found to be faulty and was fixed to ensure that future meter readings are not exaggerated.

For the previous six months, Shireen had been struggling to resolve her billing problem and not only went unheard, but was threatened with severance of electricity. The instalment plan was a relief for her.

"I had been trying to resolve my billing problem for so long and the paralegal and project team talked with WAPDA and helped resolve it in a month. If their services were not available, I might have lost my hard-earned electricity connection. We are poor and easily ignored, and I did not know whom to speak to about my issue. But I understand the process now and can confidently talk about similar concerns."

8. CORRUPTION OF SERVICE PROVIDER – INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Parveen Mai from UC Hajipur Sharif lives with her spouse and nine children, seven of whom are school-going. The family's livelihood depends on the wages earned by her husband who runs a grocery shop. The family lives in a small mud house. Due to their poor financial condition, the family is facilitated by the government under the Benazir Income Support Programme.

A BISP beneficiary, the client had been receiving financial aid from the BISP office in Rajanpur by receipt through the postman. On 26th October 2017, the postman, Sajid, was on a routine disbursement of the previous two months' BISP installment amounting to Rs. 9,670 at his home Mohalla Qazian, UC Hajipur Shareef.

The amount collection process for the beneficiaries was the same; Parveen Mai, accompanied by Nasim Mai, her neighbor, visited the postman's house to collect their due amount. The postman's wife paid Rs. 9,000 to each beneficiary instead of the awarded amount. Parveen Mai asked about the remaining Rs. 670 but the postman's wife misbehaved with her, denied any remaining balance at their end and asked them to leave her house. The situation was both surprising and disturbing for Parveen.

Parveen had attended a community session held by the local paralegal in her vicinity. Through that session, Parveen Mai had a fair idea of the work of paralegals and the services they offer. Both Parveen and Naseem planned to complain about the denial of their right by the postman and his family. To meet the paralegal Samina Kanwal, both women visited the office of LSO Hajipur Shareef for advice. They met Samina and narrated the entire story of events to her. Parveen and Naseem asked Samina to advise them on whether and how to claim their right to the remaining amount.

Samina helped them navigate the relevant authority and provided them the contact number of the Assistant Director (AD) of BISP, Rajanpur. She told them that she herself or someone from the project team will coordinate with the concerned BISP official and share the issue to ensure smooth facilitation. Parveen Mai made a call to AD BISP and shared the issue in detail. The AD BISP told the complainants that he will meet them in person at the LSO office. Both ladies agreed. The AD BISP joined them at the LSO office, noted down all the specifics and assured them of their indemnity as soon as possible. He then took

the matter back to the office and, after due diligence, took action against the postman. The postman was stripped of his charge as the BISP installment distributor and barred from further disbursement by the AD BISP, Rajanpur.

Two days later, the AD BISP requested the beneficiaries to meet with him at the LSO office. He joined them along with the postman at the scheduled day and time. The postman reimbursed the remaining amount to the beneficiaries and also handed over a written statement of his confession.

As a result of the complaint, a total of 2,200 BISP beneficiaries got their money back, amounting approximately to PKR 147,400. The beneficiaries were happy as they had faced the same issue in the past but they were unable to find a solution for it. This incident demonstrated to them how to secure their legal rights by navigating authorities and proceeding with such matters.

Vision

Realising people's potential for social and economic development

Mission

Strengthen the Rural Support Programmes to foster institutions of the people



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