



RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES' COMMUNITY-BASED PARALEGAL MODEL AT A GLANCE

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

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Author: Ayesha Kabeer (Consultant)

Edited by: Fizza Khan (Programme Assistant)

Designed By: Abdul Qadir

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THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED PARALEGALS**

AYESHA KABEER, CONSULTANT
Legal Empowerment Project



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DLEC	District Legal Empowerment Committee
DPM	District Program Manager
FOSI	Foundation for Open Society Institute
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
LAO	Legal Aid Officer
LSO	Local Support Organization
NADRA	National Database & Registration Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRSP	National Rural Support Programme
RSPN	Rural Support Programmes Network
RSP	Rural Support Programme
SO	Social Organizer
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
VO	Village Organization

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The constitution of Pakistan emphasizes equal rights for all citizens and no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste and gender. In addition, the Government of Pakistan has made several international commitments to strengthen human rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).¹ The progress of Government of Pakistan to implement these commitments has been a great concern for the international community.

In the last few years, Government of Pakistan passed several laws which included the Honor Killing Law 2004, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2011, Acid Control and Crime Practice bill, Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, among others. However, awareness, implementation and monitoring of these laws is a big challenge, as a result of which many relevant cases remain unreported. According to the Gender Parity Report 2018 by PCSW, “in comparison with 7,313 cases in 2016, 7,678 cases of violence against women were reported in 2017, representing a 5% increase since 2016.”

In addition, 3,031 cases of assault and 11,017 cases of kidnapping/abduction were reported. Similar to 2016, when 2,938 cases of rape were reported in Punjab, rape was still the second highest reported offence in 2017, with a total of 3,378 cases reported, including those of gang rape (251) and custodial rape (44). 904 cases of domestic violence were reported, of which 402 cases were of murder in domestic violence, 141 cases of domestic attempted murder, and 361 cases of domestic violence as “beating.” Comparatively, 2016 figures revealed 539 cases of beating only. 222 cases of honor killings were reported in Punjab in 2016 and 2017. Women’s access to justice in Punjab has seen a nominal improvement since 2016. The increase in reported cases may be attributed to efficient redress mechanisms set up by the government, including helplines, 4 women police stations, social service institutions, and a one-stop shop Violence against Women Center in Multan.”²

The final beneficiaries of all treaties and laws would be communities and the general public, but they have limited knowledge about the laws and support mechanisms. This situation indicates the need for spreading extensive awareness among communities regarding human and legal rights, international commitments and newly passed laws. There is also a pressing need to motivate the police, lawyers and other stakeholders to play their due role for the effective implementation of human rights laws. The legal system in Pakistan does not provide justice easily so communities are made to wait for years and spend considerable resources to seek justice in cases that could have been resolved timely at the community level. There is a dire need to initiate community-based programs for the legal education and

¹<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/10-Dec-2014/civil-society-calls-for-early-formation-of-nchr>

²<https://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/PGPR-2018.pdf>

empowerment of communities. RSPN, with its established expertise in social mobilization and nationwide presence in 138 districts of Pakistan, is well-placed to partner with the Foundation to Promote Open Society (FPOS) to strengthen legal empowerment in rural communities.

RSPN, as the key manager of the project, contracted the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) to commence operations in two districts of southern Punjab, i.e. Bahawalpur and Rajanpur, for implementation. The project was designed to continue the legal empowerment project in eight rural union councils of the two districts of Punjab.

The two-year project focuses on developing the capacity of local support organizations (LSOs) on legal empowerment. To support the efforts of the LSOs, 40 paralegals (24 female and 16 male; 5 per LSO) were trained on community-based paralegal work. These paralegals were tasked to conduct 3,200 awareness sessions on legal issues with 48,000 community organization (CO) members, ensuring that 60% of the attendees are women. With the support of LSOs and VOs, paralegals will identify cases and provide advice or refer them to lawyers for legal services, as per need. In addition, under the proposed project, legal aid will be provided in selective cases for the poorest clients through legal consultants. To foster the linkages of LSOs with various stakeholders, District Legal Empowerment Forums will be formed to help LSOs garner stakeholder support to address legal issues in targeted union councils.

1.1.1 Project Objectives

The purpose of this project is to strengthen RSP-fostered local support organizations for the legal empowerment of rural communities.

Objective: to empower the rural women and men to resolve their own legal issues and to hold authorities accountable with the support of community-based paralegals.

In order to meet the overall goal, the project focuses on certain key aspects:

- Capacity-building of RSPs and project staff
- Capacity-building of LSOs on legal empowerment
- Capacity-building of community-based paralegals
- Awareness-raising on rights and laws in rural communities, especially for women
- Empowerment of rural communities to resolve their own legal issues

1.1.2 Why RSPs for Legal Empowerment Project

RSPs recognize that many of the problems that community members are faced with require knowledge of the law and the ability to use it in order to get over certain hurdles in life. These may be women knowing what inheritance they are entitled to by law, a mediator helping a woman to negotiate a settlement with her brother, or ordinary people being able to negotiate out-of-court settlements with, for instance, their electricity company over correct billing. A number of LSOs use legal support informally, as set out in Documentation of Alternative Dispute Resolution through Local Support Organizations (RSPN, April 2014).

RSPN has been moving towards formalizing its integration of legal services into RSPs' work. RSPs believe that, with their strong community knowledge and trust, managerial strength and capacity for replication, they are ideally placed to be the forefront of the delivery of high quality basic legal services in rural Pakistan.

RSPs adopted a model of integrating legal services into their broader work with communities. The model RSPs have developed combines community-based volunteer paralegals, already embedded in and committed to helping their communities, backstopped and supported by social organizer and lawyers. Together, the teams help resolve communities' problems through legal and procedural information, referral, assistance, mediation, negotiation and, in rare cases, litigation.

It builds off the healthcare model, in which frontline health workers help people with their basic problems, referring cases to doctors for more complex medical issues, and draws on international comparative experience from Open Society Foundations which has provided technical support throughout. In doing so, this approach unlocks the potential of the RSPs' development work by clearing away blockages experienced by individuals that prevent economic and social development, and which may encourage disaffection. It improves the accountability of local government services, increases confidence among the most vulnerable on using those services and demonstrates that the odds are not always stacked against them.

1.1.2.1 Aims

The effort seeks to accomplish the following:

- Empower those, particularly women, who were otherwise unable to access just solutions to their problems, to find solutions with which they are satisfied
- Change the way justice decisions are made by local power holders, jirgas, etc.
- Act as a safety valve to prevent escalation of disputes
- Increase interaction with and accountability of the state and improve how government agencies are operating

1.1.3 Purpose of the Document

This document is intended as a guide to develop and maintain paralegal programs that help people with limited resources or lack of access to legal services. The document is created based on RSPN's initial experience of establishing a community-based paralegal program in two districts of southern Punjab, Pakistan. The book distills lessons learnt from southern Punjab and intends to provide practical advice and hands-on tools for use in the field, and also be of interest to anyone concerned with justice and the legal empowerment of the poor and women.

This document encompasses the paralegal model as conceived and implemented under the “Strengthening Legal Empowerment through Community-based Paralegals” project implemented by RSPN and NRSP. In order to make the model functional, a lot of brainstorming, review of literature and best practices and study of various paralegal models running in similar contexts was done to develop one comprehensive and contextually tailored paralegal model for southern Punjab in Pakistan. It will not only

serve as an institutional memory for RSPN and NRSP but will also be a tool for prospective projects and institutions to replicate the same in their respective communities and contexts. In addition, showcasing the project through this detailed record is also expected to prove to be a guiding tool on project management related matters.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

A participatory qualitative approach was adopted to gather information about the project, initiation and recruitment of paralegal initiatives and their various implementation stages. A thorough document review was also done, including project proposal, progress report(s), progress update ledgers and reporting templates, to acquire a preliminary understanding of the project.

In-depth qualitative information was gathered through focus group discussions and key in-depth interviews with team members, i.e. capacity-building officers, district program managers, social organizers and legal aid officers, along with community-based paralegals, local support organization (LSO) and village organization (VO) representatives and project beneficiaries. Field visits were also conducted to meet beneficiaries to gain hands-on experience and understanding of the project. In order to obtain an in-depth account of the paralegal program and its impact on the lives of local people in southern Punjab, both male and female paralegals were met and their respective communities visited.

Tools used for the purpose of data collection encompassed various aspects of the model, including recruitment, selection, professional development, service delivery, reporting and coordination mechanisms and monitoring and feedback. Data was collected in both project districts, i.e. Bahawalpur and Rajanpur.

Beneficiary interviews detailing the process of resolving an issue through the paralegals' and, in some cases, LAOs' support were documented as success stories/case studies. Ten case studies were collected from each district through meetings held with both male and female beneficiaries. However, it was noted that female beneficiaries of the project vastly outnumbered the male beneficiaries.



2 WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-BASED PARALEGAL?

RSPN, through its implementing partner, NRSP, works by way of local partners in rural areas. These local partner organizations are established at the grassroots level to ensure inclusion of marginalized groups in the development process. In order to understand the structure and mechanism of paralegals' work in rural communities, it is pertinent to understand the structure of these grassroots organizations as they are an integral part of the paralegal model and its functioning.

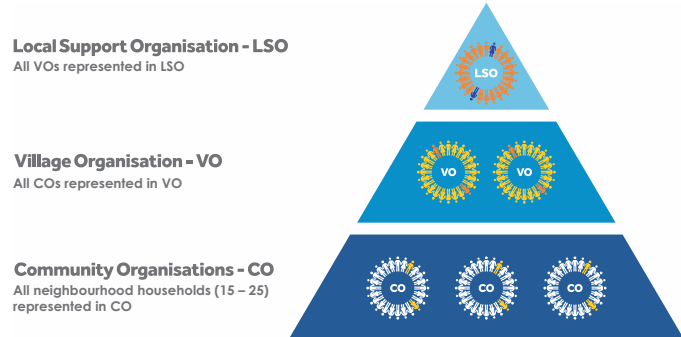


Figure 1: Three-Tiered Social Mobilisation Approach

Social mobilization is a crosscutting theme in the sensitization of community members regarding their legal rights. RSPN's work consists of the organization of communities in rural and peri-urban areas into three tiers. At the first tier, these communities are organized into community organizations (COs) at the neighborhood or mohallah level. These consist of membership from 15 households on average. COs ordinarily carry out activities such as household level development planning, trainings, savings and credit.

At the second tier, the COs federate at village level into a village organization (VO). Membership of the VO normally consists of two nominated members from each CO in the village. The VO works on development activities that affect the entire village, such as community infrastructure, and partnerships with local government and other agencies.

At the third tier, VOs federate at the union council level to form a local support organization (LSO). This apex organization consists of membership from all the VOs in the union council and is responsible for coordinating with its membership base to construct a development agenda for its members. It is also responsible for networking and developing linkages with external organizations such as the local government, donors, NGOs and the private sector for the purpose of achieving its development agenda.

There are currently 1,128 LSOs across Pakistan and in several areas these organized communities have started to federate even further into LSO networks at the district level, such as in Chitral and Ghizer. A total of 15 LSO networks have been established so far.

2.1 STRUCTURE AND MECHANISM

As mentioned before, RSPs' social mobilization of rural communities intends to integrate legal services into its broader work with communities. The national level program working in rural areas already functions through community organizations (COs) facilitated by village organizations (VOs) and local support organizations (LSOs).

VOs and LSOs facilitate the COs and other small institutions to pool their financial and human resources and to create linkages with different levels of government and with service providers. A number of COs in a village form village organizations and those VO form a local support organization (LSO) at the union council level. The World Bank and PPAF utilized the LSOs as a means of promoting civic rights awareness in Districts Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rajanpur, DG Khan, Khushab and Mianwali (Punjab) and Pangjur and Awaran (Balochistan). This year-long initiative (2010-2011) promoted good governance, beginning in the COs themselves.

In the project under discussion, community-based paralegals are community members who were already embedded in and committed to helping their communities through LSOs. These paralegals are further supported by social organizers and lawyers, and supervised by capacity-building officers under the umbrella of the Legal Empowerment Project. The efforts seek to empower vulnerable communities, particularly women, to access just solutions to their problems, strive to prevent upsurge of disputes, and enhance interaction with and support to government agencies.

Within the project structure, each team member has a role that ultimately culminates to ensure effective functioning of community-based paralegals and extend efficient support to local community members to resolve their problems.

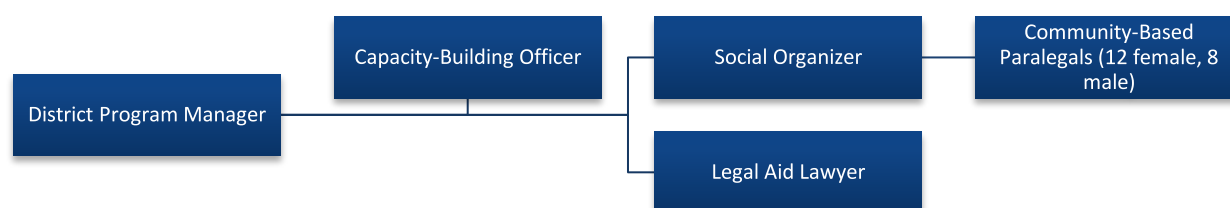


Figure 2: Hierarchy of Core District Project Team

Community-based paralegals are members of the same communities and are thus known to local villagers, community members and members of their respective community organizations (COs). They work with the social organizer (SO) and legal aid officer (LAO). The SO, a district head of paralegals, has a supervisory role towards paralegals, ensuring that each paralegal follows the work plan, delivers sessions in the required manner and achieves monthly targets. Moreover, weekly and monthly updates from paralegals, record management from the field and data entry to MIS are also managed by SOs, who represent the project team in various field meetings, including those at LSO, VO and CO levels.

The legal aid officer – a lawyer by profession – extends support to paralegals in cases requiring legal guidance or advice, holds legal aid clinics to provide legal information to community members and, when necessary, refers local clients to relevant legal service providers (e.g. DLEC). Both the SO and LAO report to the capacity-building officer (CBO), designated for the professional development and capacity-building of paralegals, the SO and the LAO. In addition, the CBO is responsible for the overall technical supervision of the district staff of the project and facilitate them in overcoming challenges.

The District Program Manager (DPM) has a supervisory role, mainly responsible for levelling the field for core team members to implement the project smoothly. The DPM also collaborates and coordinates with stakeholders in bi-monthly meetings. The district's monthly progress reports of the project are also managed by the DPM.

2.2 RECRUITMENT OF PARALEGALS: ELIGIBILITY CRITERION, IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION

District offices of NRSP already work in communities through LSOs. At the onset of the project, these LSOs were oriented on the project, its objectives and activities. Community-based paralegals were selected with the support of LSOs in the union council, provided the following profile:

- Academic qualification: matriculation; ability to read and write comprehensively
- Between 25 to 45 years of age
- Trusted and well-respected in the community
- Motivated to work for his/her community members
- Good repute in the area
- Active CO/VO/LSO member

The project was started in districts where NRSP had a strong presence for several years and the social mobilization process was at a mature stage. The rationale was that, given the sensitivity attached with imparting awareness of legal rights, the project should begin from areas where people, and especially women, already trust RSPs and would thus be comfortable in sharing their legal issues.

Initially, meetings were held with various LSOs in the two targeted districts of Bahawalpur and Rajanpur to select those that would actively support the project. Eight (8) local support organizations in eight (8) union councils were finalized for the execution of the Legal Empowerment Project. Subsequently, the district project staff held an orientation workshop in each LSO, specifically targeting its executive and general body members, to introduce the project and its objectives, activities and potential impact on the lives of community members.

Thereafter, a total of 8 male and 12 female community members fulfilling the eligibility criteria were identified by LSOs in each district. It was advertised by word of mouth in local communities that selected personnel would be required to engage in volunteer work to facilitate their fellow community members in resolving their own legal problems. A written test followed by an interview was conducted for interested candidates nominated by LSOs to serve as paralegals. Successful candidates were formally offered the volunteer post. A written agreement stating the responsibilities and expected code of conduct of paralegals was signed with their consent. Signing of this declaration was the first step towards volunteer work aimed to secure the rule of law of the state through awareness-raising and facilitation of the less privileged regarding their rights, laws and legal procedures.

2.3 PARALEGAL SERVICE MENU

Paralegals use six general methods to resolve their respective communities' legal issues and pursue justice: educating the community, navigating authorities for the provision of information, advice, documentation or accompaniment, referral including to various service providers as well as to the legal aid officer of the project, and mediation.



Figure 3 Paralegal Service Menu

Community education sessions are held to raise awareness about various citizen rights and duties, law, systems and procedures of government authorities, and justice issues to foster deliberation within the community and to give people a forum to gain knowledge but also to take the message back home so that rights can be claimed and attained. An effective community education session requires preparation: well-informed and prepared paralegals and a well-planned curriculum. Paralegals are equipped with honed communication skills to be able to disseminate information and respond to the queries of their audience effectively. While most awareness-raising sessions are conducted by paralegals, the legal aid lawyers also hold legal aid clinics to facilitate more complicated legal queries and educate community members on legal implications.

Paralegals often need to navigate authorities to be able to assist a client in dealing with an institution of authority or service provider associated with a government department, e.g. NADRA, WAPDA, Department of Education, local schools, police. Paralegals share information about the respective authority/service provider that the client is concerned about and the appropriate processes to be adopted to resolve an issue. Paralegals mostly refer such clients to a representative of the service provider who had been identified during the social mapping exercise prior to the commencement of the paralegal program. Paralegals also attempt to ensure that institutional representatives like teachers, police officers, health providers or government workers perform their jobs to the satisfaction of the clients.

In the case of complicated problems that exceed the capacity and scope of the paralegal program or that could be solved more effectively by another organization, it is the paralegals' responsibility to refer the client to the institution best positioned to resolve his/her problem. Due to the variety of people and institutions that they work with, paralegals become an accessible source of referrals.

Furthermore, when clients opt for legal action, paralegals note the basic details and do the basic fact-finding of the problem before referring the client to the legal aid officer for free legal aid. The legal aid officer then meets the client, carefully understands the problem in thorough detail and provides direct legal support. In cases where the nature of the legal problem exceeds the scope of the project, the legal aid officer refers the client to pro bono advocates for provision of free legal aid.

If a client chooses to take his/her case to community elders, the local panchayat or any other mediator, the paralegal provides support through mediation between both parties. Paralegals facilitate negotiation and, if mediation fails to remedy a serious concern, assist clients in seeking redress through other means. In either case, paralegals are obligated to share the legal implications and framework relating to the issue.

2.4 HOW PARALEGALS WORK

The project interventions have a set mechanism to achieve expected results from the legal empowerment of community members, especially women. The sequence of activities assigned to paralegals gradually takes the client towards emancipation and empowerment. Communities that are ignorant of their rights first need to be educated about basic legal rights and procedures affecting daily life. The importance of possessing a CNIC or B form and safeguarding rights through a nikahnama are some of the issues that paralegals address in these communities. These issues are formulated in a course where one step logically leads to the next. The process and a description of each step are detailed below.

Awareness sessions: A cascading approach is adopted to reach out to community members for awareness-raising and legal empowerment, as well as the sensitization of the community on various topics including civil documentation issues, family law, women's protection law, child protection law, consumer law, ombudsman's role and free legal aid through DLECs. Paralegals, during their monthly meetings with LSOs, share their work plan for the month, including sessions to be held in respective areas. With the support of LSOs, they spread the word about these sessions to ensure participation of community members. Sessions are held on a variety of topics including:

- CNIC/NADRA
- Birth registration: B form and birth certificate
- Death registration
- Nikah registration
- Child marriage
- Second marriage
- Family cases: divorce, khula, custody, dower and maintenance
- Domestic violence

Paralegals use information, education and communication (IEC) material to share this information with community members. Legal experts helped to develop this material, using simple language according to provincial laws. Pictorial representation also proves helpful in informing the less educated members of communities. Written information guides the paralegal to provide accurate facts about the topic to the audience and ensure uniformity of information across all target areas. The guidance material also eliminates chances of error.

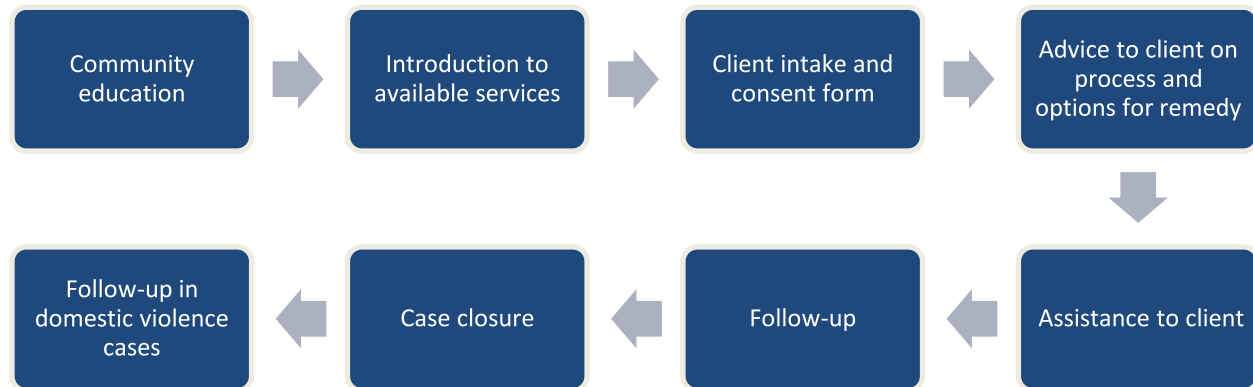
Introduction to available services: Paralegals also introduce community organization members to the project and the services offered through it during awareness-raising sessions. Usually community members, mostly women, approach the paralegal with their problems at the end of such a session. The paralegal tries to gauge whether the problem falls within the scope of the project and accordingly takes on or refers the client.

Client intake and consent: Before the formal intake of the client, the paralegal does the following.

- Gauge from the gist of the problem if the client would need to share the issue in confidentiality
- Decide a mutually convenient time and venue for a more private second meeting to ensure confidentiality
- Note the details of the problem thoroughly and assess whether the client is willing to resolve the matter through the project
- Formally take the client in by filling the intake form – this form encompasses all necessary details of the client, nature of the problem, fact finding, options/advice offered and appropriate course of action (it is mandatory for the paralegal to share all plausible options to resolve the issue and let the client decide the course of action)
- Get the consent form signed by the client, declaring that the client is willing to accept assistance/support from the project/paralegal through formal and informal means

Advice to client on process and options: Client intake is followed by advice from the paralegal regarding the problem. In cases of civil documentation issues, the paralegal provides procedural details and information to the client. In cases requiring intervention, the paralegal offers various plausible solutions to the client subject to the law. The client is also informed of all the pros and cons and other implications of each solution and then allowed to decide the subsequent course of action on her/his own. The paralegal in no way pushes the client towards any particular solution; the only job of the paralegal at this stage is to provide possible solutions to the client.

Assistance to client: Wherever required and/or requested, the paralegal also helps the client with further facilitation steps including documentation, i.e. drafting an application or filling a form, accompanying the client to the service provider or referring her/him to the focal person in the relevant institution or department. In case of a complex matter, the paralegal takes advice from the SO or LAO or refers the client to a more competent authority. At this stage, paralegals discuss every case in detail with the Legal Empowerment Project team before advising the client.



Follow-ups on issue: After facilitation, the paralegal periodically follows up with the client to ensure that the problem is resolved or smoothly on the way to resolution. ***This is more rigorously done for cases of gender-based and domestic violence.*** The paralegal gets in touch with the client in person or telephonically for updates regarding his/her problem. These follow-up interactions are meant to assure the client of support until the problem is resolved. It is also expected to instill the community's confidence and trust in paralegals, so that if ever the need arises, they can rely on them for help.

Case closure: Once the client assures the paralegal of the resolution of her/his problem and the lack of any related challenges, the paralegal updates the case status as resolved and the case is formally considered closed. Project reporting documents are accordingly updated as well.



3 Community-Based Paralegals: Support, Monitor and Report

3.1 CAPACITY-BUILDING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Community-based paralegals are the key actors of the project. It was thus imperative to build their capacity for efficient and effective delivery of their role. For this purpose, a comprehensive capacity development plan was developed to train paralegals on the various aspects of their role, including laws and procedures, holding sessions in the community, responding to queries, interviewing clients while ensuring respect and confidentiality, counseling skills, filling out intake forms, reporting and gathering success stories. Besides, this paralegals and staff also go through training on code of ethics of paralegals, gender sensitization, women's rights, consumer protection, child protection from sexual abuse and civil documentation. Trainings on various topics to be covered in community awareness sessions are also held to ensure coherence and uniformity in information delivery and handling queries. Quarterly capacity-building initiatives are planned for paralegals to keep them updated on new topics to be covered, offering support regarding challenges faced in the field, mutually developing new processes or templates to iron out programmatic issues and to keep the previous information fresh.

3.2 MENTORING & GUIDANCE

Other than formal trainings, professional development plans are also drawn up for each paralegal. Paralegals identify their own weaknesses that they feel can be improved with more training and/or mentoring. Based on these identified needs, a mentoring and professional development plan is tailored for each paralegal. The capacity-building officer of each district supports and oversees the professional development of paralegals and offers remedial measures for the challenges they point out such as documentation, facilitation skills, refresher sessions on laws or client intake forms. This is done through various means including prioritizing paralegals' training needs in upcoming training plans, offering on-job mentoring skills, field observations and provision of feedback and guidance for improvement.

3.3 SUPERVISION & FEEDBACK

A range of mechanisms for communicating with and monitoring paralegals is used.

- On-job mentoring and support
- Supervisory visits
- Refresher trainings and group meetings

Handholding and on-job mentoring approaches are used by the project team principally for supervision and feedback. The rigorous approach of monitoring drives paralegals to work efficiently and effectively. The project team supervises their interactions with the community and provides on-job feedback for improvement. The team typically focuses on the following work areas of paralegals.

- Quality of interactions with clients
- Frequency and effectiveness of interactions with authorities and institutions
- Respect for client confidentiality
- Engagement with community-level problems

In addition, during field visits, SOs also review reports, ledgers and formats prepared by paralegals. All record-keeping is done at the LSO office. Typically, the SO reviews the following during field visits.

- Completeness of ledger
- Completeness and organization of case files
- Correct use of templates and forms
- Suitability of strategies undertaken for cases

3.4 DOCUMENTATION & REPORTING

A smooth flow of reporting and documentation is imperative for programs involving a continuous flow of activities. Paralegals share weekly updates with their respective LSOs. In addition, a ledger on client data and management is also maintained by paralegals, including specifics of the intake of new clients, status updates of previous clients' issues, follow-ups and other relevant details. In addition, client intake and consent forms of every new client are duly filled and managed by paralegals.

SOs regularly review the weekly updates, paralegal ledgers and client intake forms. Weekly updates by paralegals feed into the monthly project reports.

A central MIS system is also in place to record and maintain client data of the targeted districts. It is regularly updated and reviewed by the project core team as part of the monitoring and progress review.

3.5 SUSTAINABILITY

Strengthening of local support organizations (LSOs), village organizations (VOs) and community organizations (COs) through capacity-building initiatives and involvement at different stages is a crosscutting theme of the project's interventions. LSO executive members' capacities on the concepts of legal empowerment, paralegals and fundamental rights are strengthened through regular mentoring sessions and weekly and monthly meetings. This helps develop LSO ownership of the Legal Empowerment Project, which reflects in various meetings, gatherings and on-ground initiatives including sensitization sessions for communities and the identification of issues, cases and grievances. Through this mobilization approach, the knowledge and lessons from the Legal Empowerment Project are expected to be translated into local support organizations' efforts towards providing sustainable legal empowerment in the targeted areas.



4 WAY FORWARD & RECOMMENDATIONS

The adopted paralegal model is in itself a unique model in that its paralegals do not only belong to the local communities but are also associated with the local organizations, i.e. community, village and local support organizations. Community leaders and influencers were fully involved in identifying the paralegals to ensure the success of the model. It is indeed heartwarming that in districts like Rajanpur and Bahawalpur, where development indices are low and knowledge on the rule of law is almost non-existent among communities, the paralegals have managed to leave a positive impact on the lives of community members. That a few clients have struggled not only to overcome and manage their circumstances but also to become paralegals after induction training is inspiring in itself. Women in rural communities are increasingly becoming well-informed about their rights and forms of legal support available to them. Information and awareness, as the first step towards implementation of the rule of law, are observed in the incubation phase. Observation and data also reflect that this kind of a community-based paralegal program can in fact help communities lacking access to the justice system resolve their legal issues. Although community-based paralegals perform some of the same tasks as lawyers, they also offer many distinct advantages, including,

- Focus on the justice needs of an entire community instead of only the client who hires them;
- Facilitation of the resolution of an issue much more quickly than lawyers and judges;
- Low cost in comparison to lawyers;
- Knowledge of the community they serve and its needs better than any lawyer.

In order to further strengthen the intervention, it is vital to focus on the following areas.

Documentation of protocols and legal aid & empowerment guiding principles: SOPs and protocols of the paralegal program need to be documented to ensure future institutionalization and sustainability. The documents will also serve as showcase tools for other projects and institutions that wish to replicate the model in their respective contexts. They will also ensure institutional memory. Absence of such documents makes the project heavily dependent on human resources, which would leave a gaping hole in their absence, impacting the progress and quality of the project. In addition, these documents will serve as a reference tool for paralegals.

Training on counseling, mediation & negotiation: A comprehensive training on counseling, mediation & negotiation needs to be held for LSO members and paralegals. Formal training on the subject would help paralegals work in a fairer and more neutral manner without being a cause of annoyance to any party. Furthermore, it is important for paralegals to understand and explain the legal framework in which mediation takes place. A settlement halfway between the positions of two parties does not necessarily satisfy the demands of law or justice. If mediation fails to produce a genuine remedy to a grave concern, the paralegal may assist a client in seeking redress through other means. In order to make paralegals understand all these subtleties and implications involved in mediation, it becomes important for them to have formalized training on the subject.

Safeguarding paralegal security: Given the nature of issues that paralegals address, it is vital to ensure that there are mechanisms in place for their safety. A proactive approach should be taken to train paralegals and the LSO executive body about the potential safety risks that paralegals might encounter in their work, particularly in relation to dispute mediation on sensitive issues. Such trainings should make clear to paralegals how to handle any potential threats (real or perceived), for example by informing local leaders. Involving local LSO executive members in these trainings is also crucial as these leaders would likely have the greatest influence over paralegals' safety during casework.

Code of ethics for paralegals: The code of ethics developed for paralegals needs to be reiterated in training sessions or refresher courses. While on-job supervision and mentoring is useful in managing behavioral gaps and issues observed in paralegals' handling of clients, it is important to reinforce the ethical values and behavioral pattern and tone required of them. Paralegals are the spine of the program and the slightest mistake on their part has the potential of becoming a major hindrance in achieving expected results. Assessment of paralegals has to incorporate this code of ethics and a zero tolerance policy has to be in place to ensure that paralegals do not assume the role of policing or threaten any party. It is possible for paralegals to feel overly empowered by their role and responsibilities and thus attempt to influence clients' decisions through coercion, which needs to be strictly discouraged.

Assessment and monitoring: Successful and effective implementation of the project is largely dependent on monitoring and accountability. Implementing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system enables the program to identify challenges and formulate new approaches to help increase its impact. The assessment mechanism need not be limited to the output level but also encompass the expected impact/results of the project. Paralegals are undoubtedly leaving a positive impression and paving the way for legal empowerment, however periodic checks and monitoring establishes an accountability system that increases the efficacy of the project and ensures quality results.

Vision

Realising people's potential for social and economic development

Mission

Strengthen the Rural Support Programmes to foster institutions of the people



RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

3rd Floor, IRM Complex, Plot # 7,
Sunrise Avenue, Park Road,
Near COMSATS University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Phone: 92-51-8491270-99
Email: info@rspn.org.pk
URL: www.rspn.org



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