



PUNJAB's **LEGAL EMPOWERMENT** INITIATIVES

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



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PUNJAB's
LEGAL EMPOWERMENT
INITIATIVES

OUR SOCIAL MOBILISATION OUTREACH*

440,720

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (51% WOMEN ONLY COs)

7.5 million

ORGANISED HOUSEHOLDS

7.7 million

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION MEMBERS (53.1% WOMEN MEMBERSHIP)

145

DISTRICTS WITH RSP PRESENCE

4,274

RURAL UNION COUNCILS WITH RSP PRESENCE

23,688

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS (65% WOMEN ONLY VOs) FEDERATED IN

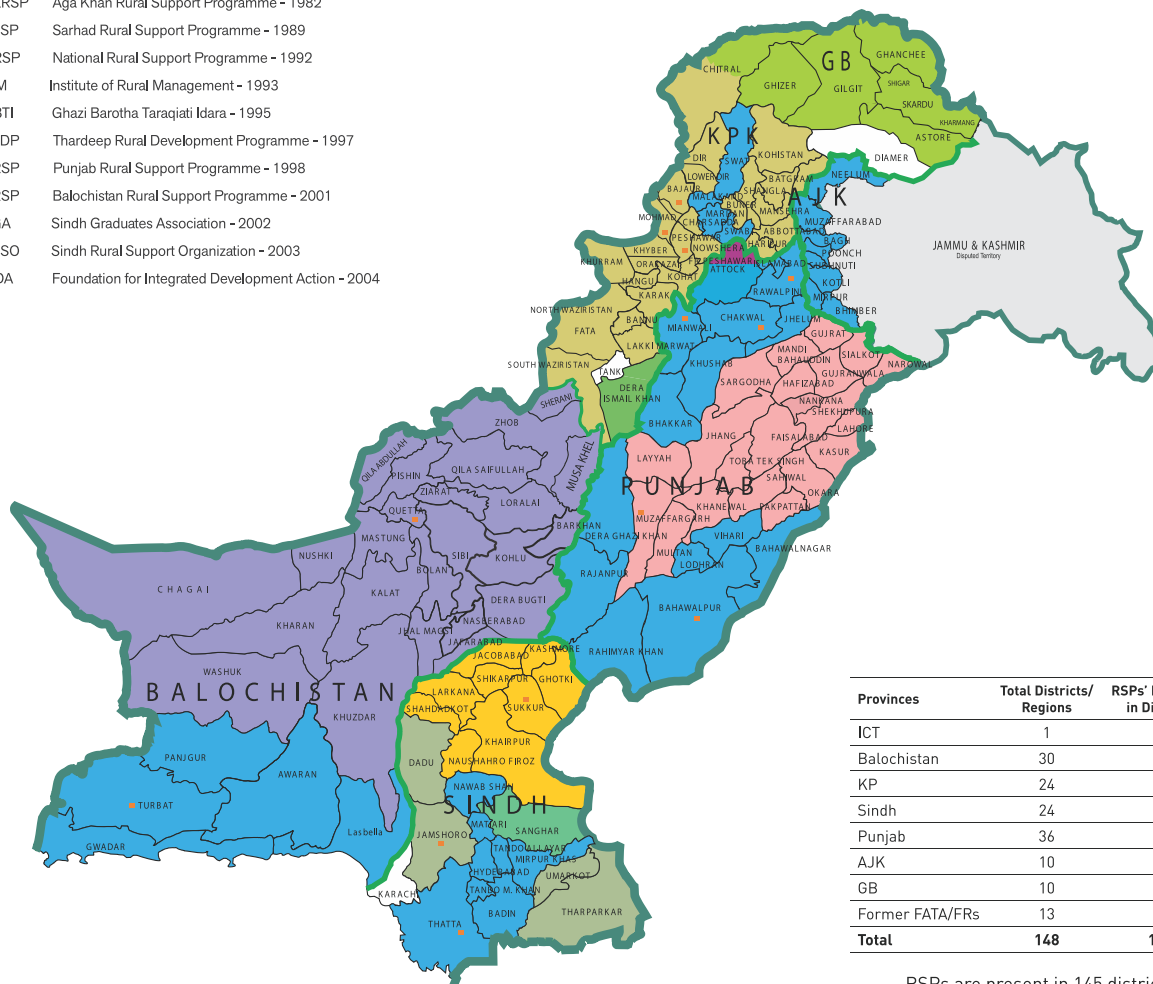
1,745

LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS (662 WOMEN ONLY LSOs)

*DATA AS OF JUNE, 2018

The Outreach of the Rural Support Programmes Across Pakistan

- AKRSP Aga Khan Rural Support Programme - 1982
- SRSP Sarhad Rural Support Programme - 1989
- NRSP National Rural Support Programme - 1992
- IRM Institute of Rural Management - 1993
- GBTI Ghazi Barotha Taragati Idara - 1995
- TRDP Thardeep Rural Development Programme - 1997
- PRSP Punjab Rural Support Programme - 1998
- BRSP Balochistan Rural Support Programme - 2001
- SGA Sindh Graduates Association - 2002
- SRSO Sindh Rural Support Organization - 2003
- FIDA Foundation for Integrated Development Action - 2004



Provinces	Total Districts/ Regions	RSPs' Presence in Districts
ICT	1	1
Balochistan	30	30
KP	24	23
Sindh	24	23
Punjab	36	36
AJK	10	10
GB	10	9
Former FATA/FRs	13	13
Total	148	145

RSPs are present in 145 districts.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) extends its deepest gratitude to colleagues and consultants for documenting these success stories. RSPN appreciates the instrumental role of project staff working on “Strengthening Legal Empowerment in Rural Communities through Community-Based Paralegals” and Local Support Organizations-LSOs for overall facilitation, dedication and passion during overall project particularly in qualitative research study for production of these success stories.

We also extend our gratitude to the higher management and focal person of National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) for their support to head of paralegals, community based paralegals and project staff whenever they needed it.

We would like to especially acknowledge the support of Community Organizations-COs, Village Organizations-VOs, and Local Support Organizations-LSOs, for their valuable time to participate in qualitative research study. We are also thankful to Ms. Fizza Khan and Zainab Iqbal for their feedback in refinement of these success stories.

Lastly, we are grateful to Foundation to Promote Open Society-FPOS their continuous technical and financial support for the implementation of this initiatives and its wider benefits for the rural poor.

PREAMBLE

Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) recognize that many of the problems that rural communities face in their day to day life require knowledge of their rights, state law, access to institutions and the ability to access legal services. These include women and their knowledge about women protection laws, inheritance law, labor law, civil documentation, administrative justices and protection of children that actually what they are entitled to by law. Therefore, legal empowerment is crucial to strengthening rural communities specifically in the case of women by ensuring access to state institutions as required. The community based paralegal model is key to legally empower the poor and marginalized rural communities. The rural poor in Pakistan simply does not have access to state institutions, legal services and thereby justice. Through our community based paralegal model not only do individuals access benefits but the community as whole is made aware of their rights and services available to them to secure their lives, access justice and ensure their rights.

Community-based paralegals are local community members handpicked by the project teams. Individuals chosen are known to local villagers, trusted in their vicinities, possess basic literacy and are members of their respective community organizations. The community based paralegals are trained on legal empowerment, fundamental rights, human rights, women's rights, gender, child rights, labor law, civil documentation and administrative justice that they can raise awareness in their respective communities and help people for remedy and redress of individual and communal issues. Paralegals works under the supervision of head of paralegals with extended support of legal aid officers for further legal assistance. Paralegals use six general methods to help in resolving the identified legal issues in rural communities during awareness raising sessions and legal aid clinics 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/conflict resolution.

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. In doing so, this community based paralegals approach unlocks the potential of the RSPs' development work by clearing away blockages experienced by individuals that prevent economic and social development. It improves accountability mechanisms at all levels, including governance and state institutions and creates a sense security among the rural poor and vulnerable groups.

The legal system in Pakistan is not known for its efficient, swift and fair practices; the poor are especially vulnerable to system breakdowns and may have to wait for years and spend significant resources to get their matters settled by courts. There is a dire need to initiate community-based programs for the legal education and empowerment of communities. RSPN, with its established expertise in social mobilization and national outreach 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 South 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. In this regards, to support the efforts of the LSOs, 40 paralegals (24 females and 16 males 5 per LSO) trained on community-based paralegal work. In span of one year these paralegals conducted 1938 awareness raising sessions sensitizing 38455 rural communities' members (Men 14521 and Women 23934). Furthermore, total 1380 issues identified (of various nature including but not limited to women rights, family laws, breach of contract, administrative justice, civil documentation and provision of free legal aid) while 483 resolved while 897 are in process of follow ups and resolution in month of August 2018. In meantime, legal aid officers conducted 282 legal aid clinics approached 4230 rural community members and delivered legal advices to 560 people Women and Men. Additionally, 20 women and 01 man was provided free legal aid for complicated cases to enable access to justice.

ABOUT RSPN

Rural Support Programme Network is the largest development network in Pakistan, with an outreach over 48.9 Million rural people. It consists of 11 Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) that espouse a common approach to Community Driven Development-CDD, Social mobilization. RSPN is a strategic platform for RSPs with expertise in policy advocacy, grant management, communication, renewable energy and social sector (health, education, and sanitation) programming and implementation.

RSPN and RSPs have adopted a three-tiered social mobilization structure, at first tier rural households living in proximity are organized into Community Organizations-COs 440,720 in total with 51% women led at the neighborhood level which amount to 7.5 Million with membership of 7.7 Million (53.1% women), covering population of 48.9 Million. At the second tier, the COs are federated at Village level into Village Organizations 23,688-VOs in total with 65% women led while in third tier VO's are federated at union council level into Local Support Organizations-LSOs. There are total 1745-LSOs (662 women) across Pakistan, and in several areas these communities have started federate even further into LSO network at the district level. The update is till June, 2018 for outreach October, 2018.

ABOUT FPOS

Foundation to Promote Open Society-FPOS works to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to participation of all people. The organizations seek to strengthen rule of law, respect of human rights, minorities, and a diversity of opinion; democratically elected government, and civil society that help to keep government power in check.

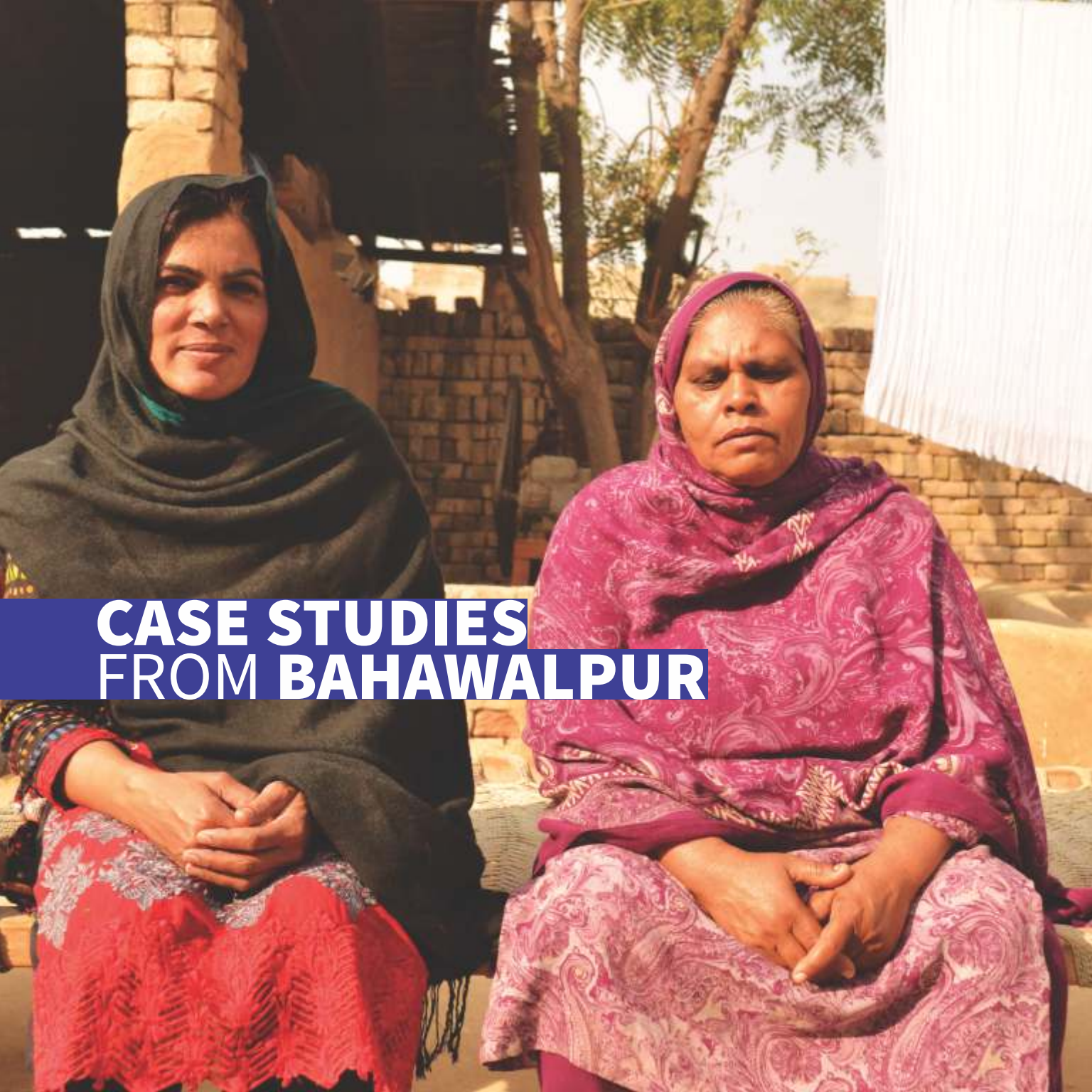
FPOS helps to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. FPOS implements initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. FPOS builds alliances across boarder and continent on issues such as corruption, and freedom of information. Working in every part of world, the FPOS place higher priority on practicing and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities.

ABOUT THE SUCCESS STORIES

These success stories provide a glimpse into lives of the rural poor specially women and other vulnerable groups. They describe how “Strengthening Legal Empowerment in Rural Communities through Community-Based Paralegals” project initiatives positively impacted individual lives. The project benefits in these stories documented in two dimensions, in terms of benefits for individuals' community members and improvement at community level. These success stories are taken from two districts of project interventions i.e Bahawalpur and Rajanpur. In respect to the privacy of women the names and places in have been changed in success stories.

PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS OUTLINE





CASE STUDIES FROM BAHAWALPUR

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Shakeela Bibi, married for 20 years and living with her husband and five children: three daughters and two sons, in the village 24/BC in District Bahawalpur, led a distressed marital life. Her husband, Muhammad Saeed, was known to be a rude man and habitually behaved disrespectfully towards women, including Shakeela. He rarely provided her with household expenses and the couple would regularly argue over trivial issues. Routine squabbles eventually turned into physical abuse; he would slap and batter her with a viciousness that caught her off guard every time. Shakeela did odd jobs in people's homes to manage expenses but her husband's obstinacy led to their children eventually leaving school under the financial burden of uniforms, books and tuition fee. Saeed did not respond to the situation. The constancy of the situation worried Shakeela – she wanted to get out of the misery but was unable to find a solution.

Shakeela is a member of her local community and village organizations. Paralegal Yasmeen was her next-door neighbor, whose awareness sessions to the community Shakeela often attended.

Shakeela therefore knew about the nature of Yasmeen's work and her association with the local support organization, and was certain of Yasmeen's aptitude for helping people out of difficult situations given the number of trainings she had received from the legal empowerment project team. Desperate to find a way out of her distress, Shakeela decided to consult Yasmeen.

She met the paralegal to narrate her problem. Yasmeen listened and consoled Shakeela, reassuring her of all possible support and facilitation to arrive at a solution. Yasmeen discussed Shakeela's circumstances with the project team and conveyed to Shakeela all possible solutions to her problem. Shakeela opted for mediation, as she felt that it was the most amicable path.

The local *numberdaar* of the village was a respectable figure in the area and his word held weightage. Yasmeen, with Shakeela's approval, discussed the issue with the *numberdaar*.¹ She gave him all the details and requested help in resolving Shakeela's problem. The *numberdaar* agreed to help and, along with the paralegal

¹Community leader

Yasmeen, tried to reach out to Shakeela's husband and in-laws. A meeting was scheduled with the couple and their families to discuss the problem.

In these meetings, Yasmeen shared domestic violence laws and their implications, explaining to her audience that exercise of physical abuse can result in imprisonment and a monetary fine. She also shared with both parties how a number of issues had been settled out of court through the project. She urged the families to look into the matter and help the couple solve their problem. The couple discussed their issues and grievances with mediation from the *numberdaar*, and the families facilitated the discussion in the presence of Yasmeen.

The mediation sittings took three months, during which Saeed was also educated on his wife's legal right to physical wellbeing and financial maintenance. The paralegal, the project's legal aid officer² and numberdaar brought him to the realization that his current conduct could lead him to face serious legal consequences that would be devastating for the whole family as the law ensures the wife's rights and obliges the husband to abide by them. Upon learning about

the law and its possible consequences and realizing the torment that he had put his wife and children through, Saeed agreed to provide Shakeela with monthly living expenses. He also promised not to physically or mentally abuse her in the future. Eventually, in the presence of two witnesses, a written reconciliation agreement was drafted by the legal aid officer and the paralegal. This included terms and conditions from both parties who, along with witnesses, signed the agreement.

The couple now lives harmoniously and Shakeela is satisfied with the resolution of her problem. The mediation draft is in her custody and her husband, Saeed, acknowledges the value of their agreement. She appreciates that Saeed finances household expenses and treats her respectfully. She said that her husband has realized that he cannot continue to mistreat her in light of her right to take him to court on charges of domestic violence. Shakeela admitted that she feels more confident and at peace with a written agreement in place. Paralegal Yasmeen still follows up with Shakeela from time to time to make sure that the problem does not resurface.

²Lawyer by profession, to help a district field team with legal technicalities



PANCHAYAT MEDIATION

Umeera Bibi is a mother of five, working as a peasant to earn a living in the village of Kho Ambwala, Jimrani Kohna Union Council of District Bahawalpur. Her husband, Muhammad Rafiq, was a lazy man, spending his days smoking, playing cards and accumulating debt. He was a typical traditional patriarch, passing orders, fighting with his wife over the taste of the food she made and beating up their children. Every other day he would pick a fight and torture his wife both physically and emotionally. The daily arguments and issues became too much for Musarrat to bear. She wanted her husband to work and earn a living instead of lounging around and making unreasonable demands. She had been married for 12 years and was now thoroughly fed up of the situation.

Meanwhile, Umeera got a chance to attend a community awareness session on women's rights and domestic violence. After the session, she approached the paralegal and local support organization (CO) president with her concerns. She expressly told them that in case her husband did not mend his ways, she had made up her mind to separate from him. Umeera was clear

about her refusal to tolerate his bad temper and violence. She sought the team's help in a final effort to save her marriage before she decided to leave him. At her request, paralegal Sitara went to meet Rafiq along with her husband and the LSO president for support. They shared with him how his attitude affected his wife and led her to want to leave him and file a case of domestic violence against him in case his behavior did not change. They also educated him on the laws against domestic violence and the implications of their violation.

At Muhammad Rafiq's request and Umeera's agreement, a *panchayat*³ meeting was called to settle the issue through mediation. Rafiq was evidently afraid of legal consequences. After hearing out Umeera, paralegal Sitara and other community leaders, he prepared an apology. He announced his willingness to fulfill all of his wife's conditions and address her complaints. Umeera demanded a separate room, a water motor and household expenses. She also declared the unacceptability of domestic violence. The entire *panchayat* of 35 members, including the families of both parties, the paralegal and LSO members

³A council of village elders that makes decisions according to traditions

along with village elders, unanimously deemed Umeera's concerns and complaints valid and acknowledged her need to be facilitated. Rafiq acceded to all of her terms and apologized for his conduct. He promised that his past behavior will not be repeated in the future. Umeera accepted his apology with the warning that if he went back on his word, she will go directly to court. The mediation was facilitated by the paralegal and LSO president along with other community members. The couple reconciled over a positive note.

“

I have lived a difficult life. Finally, over a decade after marriage, I am now living blissfully, thanks to the paralegal's support. Without Sitara, I would still be living the same harsh life.

The change in Umeera's life gave her confidence. She revealed that her husband was intimidated by the legal consequences of his previous habits and behavior. At one point after the mediation, the couple got into an argument and Umeera threatened to leave. Helpless to stop her and afraid of arrest, Rafiq locked himself in a room and attempted to hang himself from the ceiling

fan. Umeera broke the door down and managed to stop him in time. Paralegal Sitara then sat him down and reassured him of his own rights and of the fairness of the law.

Muhammad Rafiq has now found a job as a driver. He strives to keep Umeera happy by providing her legal rights and fulfilling her needs while she also takes care of him. Umeera is content with the balance that the couple has struck in life.

“

This only happened because I realized that my legal rights protect me. My husband's legal rights have given him confidence too. Had I remained unaware of the law, I would have continued the same traumatic lifestyle.



ROAD PAVEMENT

Shafia Begum is the president of a local village organization (VO) and a member of the local community organization (CO) and local support organization (LSO) in District Bahawalpur. As a member of all three tiers of local organization, Shafia has been an active participant in their meetings and relevant activities. For quite some time, she and her neighborhood had been facing the infrastructural problem of an unpaved road that caused a lot of inconvenience and immobility. The sand blew over agricultural lands, damaging crop quality. In the rainy season, people could not step out of the house. Rainwater made it impossible for neighbors to visit each other in times of need. Mosque-goers would have their clothes muddied. Pavement of the road had been approved, but no action was being taken to implement the order.

Residents tried to reach out to local ministers of the Provincial (MPA) and National (MNA) Assemblies through the VO and CO a few times, requesting allocation of budget for pavement of the road, but their requests went unheard. Shafia begum, as the VO president, received a number of applications requesting urgent resolution of the problem in light of the neighborhood's mobility

challenges. Shafia tried to tackle the problem on her own in every way possible: she convinced people encroaching on the road to clear the way, sent numerous applications to the MPA and MNA and mobilized community elders to demand their right to infrastructure. However, the broken road continued to be a nuisance for the locality.

Through LSO meetings, Shafia Begum was aware of the legal empowerment project and the services paralegals offered. She decided to discuss the issue with the local paralegal, Uzma. She detailed previous efforts to reach out to the local MPA and MNA and their futility, and requested legal support. Uzma listened intently to the issue and promised to help Shafia. The paralegal shared this issue with the LSO president, who guided them through the application process. In light of his advice, Shafia and Paralegal Uzma called on the UC⁴ Councilor to request his support to resolve the problem. As a result of the meeting, an application was sent to the MNA. This application detailed the nature of and consequential issues arising from the problem. It shared how the lack of a properly paved road had deprived the locality's children of

⁴Union Council

their right to education. After dispatching the application, both the paralegal and UC Councilor regularly followed up with the MPA on its status. Rigorous coordination with the MPA on the application and pressure from the local community eventually resulted in the approval of a budget of one million Rupees for the pavement of the road.

“

Previously, people would directly dispatch their request to the authorities and no one listened to them. Now, however, with the help of Paralegal Uzma, guidance of the LSO president and support of the UC Councilor, the issue has been resolved.

Within six months, the road was prepared. Local residents were relieved. They can now commute with considerable ease and their children go to school on time. Shafia is satisfied with the timely resolution of the problem.

“

Now we know whom to approach to resolve our issues. Previously, we were clueless. I used to get a number of requests from local residents to do something about the road but everything I tried failed. With the help of the paralegal and guidance of the LSO, we managed to get the road paved.

Not only that, we are now more sensitized towards other problems as well, including child marriage and domestic violence.

Lack of awareness of legal rights in this community became the cause of injustice, deprivation and exploitation. The problem could have been resolved in the first attempt but the administration took advantage of the ignorance of the community and neglected the matter. Empowering the community and enabling it to discuss its rights evidently has a significant impact on its wellbeing. When the community discussed its problem in the context of rights and deprivation and considered a legal resolution, the administration immediately approved the budget for the road that had been available under financial provision since pavement was approved, even at the time of initial contact.



SECOND MARRIAGE DISPUTE

Rabia Bibi lives in Kothi Jalalabad, District Bahawalpur, and is married to her first cousin, Tehseen. Tehseen is a tailor by profession and runs his own business in Hyderabad. Rabia lived with her in-laws because Tehseen 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 Tehseen liked a girl whom he later started an affair with. Rabia's married life slowly changed with her husband's behavior. Tehseen started arguing with her over trivial issues, even on the phone. He would neglect her and, when she complained of his changing attitude, threatened her with second marriage. The arguments sometimes led to domestic violence. Rabia knew about his affair but tried to make her marriage work regardless until one day, after another episode of physical abuse, Tehseen expelled his pregnant wife from the house. Rabia returned to her parents' house. Her family tried to negotiate with her in-laws but since Rabia had no father or brother to support her and came from relative poverty, they paid no heed and attempted to hush the issue. Neither Tehseen nor his family visited Rabia during her pregnancy. A few months later, she delivered a

baby boy but no one bothered to visit him either. Then Rabia came to know that Tehseen 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). Rabia'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, Rabia's mother approached the paralegal, Irshad Bibi, and other team members with her daughter's issue and requested help in seeking khula from the court. The team then visited Rabia 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 Tehseen 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 Rabia's approval, the team approached Tehseen and his family. They informed them that Rabia and her mother had reached out for support, and shared all possible options to resolve the issue. Tehseen 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 Rabia to file a case of maintenance, dower, dowry and second marriage without permission on her husband. This came as a shock to Tehseen and his family. They had not expected this reaction from Rabia.

Upon discovering that the case had gone into litigation, Tehseen became anxious. He apologized to Rabia, touching her feet and agreeing to give her equal rights. He had not been ready for legal implications and was surprised by Rabia's stance. He requested the team to allow the couple to settle the issue out of court through mediation. Rabia 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, Tehseen promised to provide equal rights to both his wives. Rabia 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. Tehseen, with the support of his father, acceded to all these conditions. He transferred the house to Rabia'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. Rabia is satisfied with the resolution and lives in harmony with her son and her husband's second wife, while Tehseen 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.



MEDICAL TREATMENT BY THE STATE

Nasreen Bibi is a widow with three children. She is their only caretaker and was the sole breadwinner of her family, working in people's houses for a living, until she fell ill. She contracted jaundice but could not afford timely treatment. Later, she was diagnosed with Hepatitis B, while doctors continued to prescribe ineffective medicines. Even after spending the entire personal donation of the UC Councilor of approximately 20,000 rupees, Nasreen was unable to recover. Her disease grew and she was almost bedridden. Her children pulled out of school and the family subsisted on their neighbors' generosity. They were on the verge of starvation.

A local teacher taught Nasreen's children free of charge out of kindness. The children of the local paralegal also took tuitions from the same person. The teacher was aware of the nature of paralegal Yasmeen's work and her connection with the local support organization (LSO). She was also familiar with Nasreen's misery, illness and weak financial condition to afford appropriate treatment. Out of sympathy, she shared Nasreen's problem with Yasmeen. A few days later, the teacher introduced them to each

other and informed Nasreen of Yasmeen's work and services. Nasreen shared the matter of her illness and poor financial situation with her. Yasmeen noted the necessary information and promised Nasreen support for her medical treatment. She discussed the case with the project team and it was decided that the case will be presented to the representative of the local Bait-ul-Maal office in the upcoming stakeholder meeting.

During their next periodic meeting with representatives of the stakeholders, Yasmeen shared Nasreen's problem along with all the requisite details with the representative of Bait-ul-Maal. The official guided her through the application process of requesting financial support. Yasmeen noted his instructions. She then obtained the required information from Nasreen and submitted the financial support form for her. After due diligence, the form was approved to cover the financial cost of Nasreen's medical treatment. Nasreen no longer had to pay her medical bill from her own pocket. The news came as a relief to the poor widow.

With the help of the paralegal, Nasreen is getting her treatment financed through Bait-ul-Maal. The process for the approval of her application took three months but now she is gradually recovering and looking forward to eventually being able to earn her own living again. She sees a ray of hope now.

“

I was miserable for nearly six months: no treatment helped me and my children were starving. I had no resources to continue the medical treatment but with Paralegal Yasmeen's help and Bait-ul-Maal's support, I am recovering now. Yasmeen helped me to not only secure finances for my medical treatment but also acquire two livestock animals from another project to contribute to my financial resources.

Although Nasreen still needs monetary support and her circumstances are not pleasant, the hope of recovery has given her something to look forward to.



INHERITANCE DISPUTE

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, Zahida, 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 Zahida. The paralegal listened to her problem attentively and informed her that in order to transfer legal shares, a family registration certificate (FRC) is required. Zahida 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. Zahida 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.

Paralegal Zahida says that since the resolution of her problem, Zeba has accumulated even more knowledge of legal rights than herself and is proactively involved in spreading awareness of them in her community. Zeba is now an activist and the president of her local village organization (VO). She has developed a good understanding of legal procedures and voluntarily accompanies clients when the paralegal is occupied otherwise.



7 NIKAH REGISTRATION

Muhammad Aqib, a resident of Bahawalpur district, was recently married and lives in a joint family. He is a poor laborer and works at a petrol pump at the wage of 8,000 rupees per month. He came to know about the legal empowerment project in an awareness session where he met the paralegal and found out about the services offered.

It had been a year since Aqib was married and he had remained unable to get his nikahnama registered. Exhausted from his own directionless efforts to resolve the problem, he decided to discuss the issue with the paralegal. At the end of the next awareness session organized in his vicinity, he shared his distress over the registration of his nikahnama with Paralegal Zahida. He informed her that the relevant staff was non-cooperative and did not clearly guide him through the process. He complained of the lack of advice. Aqib also mentioned that his workplace was distant from the Union Council office and he could not take time off from work every other day to follow up on the issue. He shared that he wanted to apply for a new computerized national identity card (CNIC) and domicile for his wife but that in order to do so, it was essential to prove the change in her marital status, which was only possible through a

registered nikahnama. This would allow her to replace her maiden surname with her husband's on her CNIC and domicile, and only after getting her domicile would she be eligible for local jobs, as she belonged to a different area. He mentioned that with a meagre salary of 8,000 rupees, it was difficult for the family to run the house, and that the first step towards his wife's contribution to the household income had become a major challenge for him.

“
I needed someone to guide me but I couldn't find anyone. I was on the verge of telling my wife to give up her wish of working.”

Aqib requested Paralegal Zahida's help. Zahida informed Aqib of the entire procedure step by step but Aqib, intimidated by his previous failures, urged the paralegal to accompany him. He did not want to miss the opportunity of resolving his problem again simply due to a lack of clarity on some procedural step. Zahida accompanied him and successfully got his nikahnama registered. She also accompanied Aqib and his wife through the process of changing his wife's surname and marital status on her new CNIC and domicile. After due diligence, Aqib received an updated

CNIC and domicile for his wife easily.

Aqib's problem seems minor but it directly impacted his wife. It deprived her of her right to apply for a job. The paralegal served Aqib empathetically. She accompanied him to the relevant offices until his issue was resolved. Aqib is pleased that his matter was handled with full responsibility and subsequently resolved.

“

Zahida did not only help me but also supported the financial empowerment of my wife. Now my wife is applying for jobs and hopes to find work soon.

Aqib was extremely grateful to the paralegal for the services rendered to him for the resolution of his problem.



FAULTY WAPDA METER

Zareena 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 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, Zareena 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 Zareena 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, Zareena looked for ways to have it reduced. During this time, the overcharged electricity bills accumulated to 13,000 rupees.

One day, Zareena got a chance to attend an awareness session facilitated by the local support organization (LSO) and conducted by the local

paralegal, Zahida, in her community. Through the session, she learnt about paralegals and the services they offered. Eventually, she shared her problem with Paralegal Zahida. Zahida 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 stakeholders' meeting with the project team. Zahida then discussed the matter with the WAPDA representative at the meeting, and he requested for Zareena to visit the local WAPDA office. At the paralegal's advice, Zareena 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 Zareena, she was offered the concession to pay it in instalments of 1,000 rupees a month. The WAPDA representative also sent a team to Zareena'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, Zareena 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.



INCORRECT DOCUMENTATION

Khadim Ali works as a peasant in Union Council Jalalpur. He has been living in the area for a long time. After his father passed away, his property had to be distributed among his many heirs, one of which was Khadim. Due to incorrect entry of his father's name on his computerized national identity card (CNIC) however, he could not lay claim to his share of the property. Khadim had previously shared this dilemma with a friend, but the advice wasted three years without making any headway.

Khadim came to know about the project in an awareness session held in his area. At the end of the session, he requested some of the paralegal's time during which he shared the details of his problem. In order to get his father's name changed from "Shareef Ahmad" to the correct version, "Muhammad Shareef", Khadim had become a shuttlecock between National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) officials and courts. He found himself helplessly trapped in the situation. He had no updates on his inheritance and the matter of his CNIC had persisted on one pretext or another, seemingly without any hope of resolution. Khadim requested confidentiality for his case, given the sensitive circumstances surrounding the distribution of his deceased

father's property. Paralegal Irshad assured him of her trustworthiness and that the details of his case will remain secret until resolution.

Irshad informed Khadim of the complete process to resolve the matter of incorrect entry on his CNIC. He had already wasted three years in vain and did not want to miss this chance of rectifying the documentation error, so Khadim requested the paralegal's company through the process. Irshad thus accompanied him to the local NADRA office and discussed the matter with the staff officer in charge. The officer assured them that the problem will be solved quickly. A token was issued to Khadim Hussain to initiate the process of issuance of a new CNIC with the correct details.

Khadim is satisfied with the resolution of his problem and has laid claim to his rightful inheritance. He is thankful for the services of the paralegal.

“

Although my problem was not a big one, my whole life was stuck because of it. I was ineligible to claim my property inheritance because of the difference in my father's name on the papers. I could not even get proper guidance as no one is interested in the issues of the poor and helpless. No one can imagine my helplessness. But I never

“

knew that my problem could be resolved outside the court. I feel that I found out about the paralegal as a result of some good deed of mine. But the best part about the whole situation is that

I feel empowered now. I have the required information on how to solve a similar problem, and that is a matter of pride for me. Things do not stop here though. Now I attend awareness sessions regularly. I understand that the purpose of my life is to help others. I am capable of delivering the same information that I learnt from my experience and these sessions to anyone in need. I am extremely grateful for paralegals and their efforts for the poor and vulnerable.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SECOND MARRIAGE

Shameem Mai is married mother of three, who previously worked as a schoolteacher. Her married life was not pleasant. Her husband, Muhammad Hanif, was an alcoholic and would savagely beat her periodically. Physical, verbal and emotional abuse was routine. He would often batter and throw her out of the house. Shameem, 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 Hanif's outrage. Once, simply out of animosity after a routine argument, Hanif cut off Shameem's long hair – a symbol of beauty and feminine pride – while she was asleep. When Shameem 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 Shameem 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, Shameem'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. Hanif made a hysterectomy seem necessary to prevent Shameem from abandoning her children. The doctor was convinced and operated on her.

Shameem'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, Hanif came home and started beating Shameem over a trivial issue. The argument heated up and he threw her out of the house. He told Shameem 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.

Shameem 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, Yasmeen. Shameem shared her issue with Yasmeen, who contacted the legal aid officer (LAO)⁵ and shared the case. The LAO and Yasmeen

⁵Project lawyer

discussed the matter and shared all possible solutions with Shameem, along with the pros and cons of each. Shameem 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 Shameem's husband. The court sent a notice to Hanif, 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 Shameem. But Shameem did not want to reconcile while he remained with his second wife. She clearly told Hanif 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. Hanif's second wife verified this information. After a few out-of-court meetings, Hanif 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. Hanif divorced his second wife and promised never to torture Shameem again. He also guaranteed that she will not have any complaints about him from then onwards.

Shameem 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 her 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.

A few months later, however, Hanif reverted to his old habits, excusing his behavior by suspecting Shameem of being unfaithful. Her vast network of contacts, a majority of whom were male, that aided her work as a paralegal, bothered him. Eventually, Shameem quit the legal empowerment project. Rather than softening at her compromise, Hanif's physical abuse towards her became worse. He publicized his suspicions against her fidelity and garnered his neighbors' sympathies so that Shameem's entire neighborhood now helps Hanif keep an eye on her, reporting every activity and interaction of hers to her husband.

The legal empowerment team is trying to convince Shameem to stand up for her rights once again. Having formerly worked as a paralegal, she understands the need for the empowerment of women. The team has not given up on her. Shameem may yet change her fate.

A woman is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark shawl with intricate paisley and striped patterns in shades of purple, red, and green. She also wears a matching headscarf. Her expression is contemplative or somber as she looks down and to the right, with her right hand resting against her chin. She has a small nose ring and is wearing a gold-colored bangle on her right wrist. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with some minor texture and a small stain. The lighting is soft and directional, coming from the left.

CASE STUDIES FROM RAJANPUR

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Nimra Bibi lives with her husband, Athar Abbas, and four daughters in Union Council Tatarwala. She works on agricultural land as a peasant to earn her living, while Athar is a farmer. Her husband does not provide her with regular money to run the house. He had been good to her during the initial years of their marriage, but with the consecutive births of daughters, his behavior towards Nimra deteriorated. They argued often and he hurled taunts and verbal abuse at her, blaming her for producing daughters and no sons. At the birth of their fourth daughter, Athar physically abused Nimra and threw her out of the house, along with the newborn.

Battered, bruised and still weak from her delivery, Nimra made it to her parents' house. While there, she attended a meeting of the local village organization (VO) where Nimra discovered paralegals and learned about the nature of their work. She contacted the community-based paralegal closest to her parents' residence and shared her problem. The paralegal, Ruqiya, listened to Nimra's problem and shared all the possible solutions with her. Ruqiya assured Nimra that if mediation failed, she would still have the legal route available to claim her right. Nimra opted for mediation. Ruqiya tried to contact

Nimra's husband, but he kept dodging her. After three days of indefatigable attempts, Ruqiya finally got hold of Athar and explained the situation to him. She informed him about the legal implications of domestic violence. She also told him that he was legally bound to provide Nimra with all the necessities of life and that if he failed to do so, Nimra reserved the right to claim maintenance through court. Ruqiya requested Athar to meet to discuss the issue in Nimra's presence. Intimidated by the possible consequences of his actions, Athar showed up on the scheduled day and time. The meeting was held at the office of the local support organization (LSO). Family members of both Athar and Nimra also attended the mediation meeting. The issue was discussed in detail by all parties. Ruqiya also sensitized Athar, as well as other participants, on the blessing of raising daughters, and educated him about the gender of the baby biologically being defined by the father. Eventually, family elders persuaded Athar to apologize and to respectfully take Nimra back home, along with his newborn daughter.

It took Nimra a week to resolve her problem and return home after involving the paralegal. Even though no written agreement was signed and the

mediation remained strictly verbal, both parties amicably came to a mutually acceptable solution. Nimra's brother-in-law guaranteed that Athar will not mentally or physically abuse her again and will responsibly bear the household expenses. Nimra is now content with her husband.

“

Previously, I would always feel stressed, but the situation is better now. My husband is pleasant and provides me with the necessities. I was not aware that such matters could be solved simply through discussion.



BISP FRAUD

Shahida Mai lives with her husband and nine children, seven of whom still go to school. The family lives in a small mud house and their livelihood depends on Shahida's husband, who runs a grocery shop. Due to their poor financial condition, Shahida Mai and her family are facilitated by the government under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

A BISP beneficiary for many years, Shahida had been receiving financial aid from the BISP office in Rajanpur by receipt, through the postman. On 26th October, 2017, the postman, Sajid, held the routine disbursement of the previous two months' BISP installment, amounting to 9,670 rupees, at his house in Mohalla Qazian, Union Council Hajipur Shareef. Shahida Mai, accompanied by her neighbor and fellow BISP beneficiary, Nasim Mai, visited his house to collect their due amount. Sajid was unavailable so his wife served them. She handed 9,000 rupees to each of the women, instead of the due grant. When Shahida asked about the remaining 670 rupees, the postman's wife denied any remaining balance, claimed that that was the service charge, misbehaved and told both women to leave. The

situation, worsened by the reaction of Sajid's wife, both surprised and disturbed Shahida.

Shahida had a fair idea about the work of paralegals and the services they offered through a community awareness session that she had attended some time before the BISP episode. Shahida, along with Naseem, decided to complain about the denial of their right by the postman and his family. Both women visited the office of the local support organization (LSO) to request a meeting with Paralegal Samina for advice. They met Samina and narrated the entire sequence of events to her. Shahida and Naseem asked her to advise them on whether and how to claim their right to the remaining amount of the BISP grant.

Samina provided the two beneficiaries with the contact number of the Assistant Director (AD) of BISP, Rajanpur. She told them that she herself or someone from the project team will also coordinate with the AD to ensure smooth facilitation.⁶ Shahida called AD, BISP and shared the problem in detail with him. He requested to meet the complainants in person at the LSO

⁶ The project, on principle, ensures smooth communication with all stakeholders and, in such cases, coordinates with them for timely and prompt response clients.

office. They agreed. The Assistant Director of BISP met with them, noted all the specifics of the events and assured them of their indemnity. He then took up the matter with BISP and, after due diligence, took action against the postman. Sajid initially denied the allegations, until complainants presented their receipts. He was then stripped of his charge as BISP's installment distributor and barred from further disbursement.

Two days later, the AD, BISP requested another meeting with the beneficiaries. He brought the postman along with himself. Sajid reimbursed the remaining amount to the beneficiaries and also presented a written statement of his confession.

As a result of Shahida Mai's prompt complaint, 2,200 BISP beneficiaries were saved from the postman's corruption, that could have amounted to over 147,400 rupees. The affected beneficiaries were pleased; they had faced the same problem in the past but remained unable to find a solution. This incident, however, demonstrated to them the method to secure their legal rights by identifying violations and navigating authorities for redress.



EMBEZZLEMENT BY HUSBAND

Zubiada lives with her husband in UC Tatarwala. The couple does not have any children. Pathani ran a small grocery business in her village – their only source of income. Her husband, Ghulam Akbar, helped her with necessary purchases from the main city market. Sometimes, Pathani noted that Ghulam would quote a higher amount on his purchases. She realized that he kept the surplus for his own use. The couple argued over the matter a few times but Ghulam refused to mend his ways and continued the malpractice. The situation became worse when, one day after a fight over the same issue, he expelled Pathani from the house. Her parents having passed away many years ago, she sought refuge with her siblings. Old, without any source of income and flitting from one sibling's house to another, Pathani felt like a burden on her married brothers and sisters.

One day, Pathani attended a village organization (VO) meeting where she found out about the legal empowerment project, its services and the role of paralegals. Subsequently, she met with the paralegal, Ruqiya, and narrated her problem. Ruqiya listened attentively and shared all possible solutions to the problem with Pathani. Zubiada requested her to mediate with her

husband regarding the issue, as a result of which both parties were requested to meet at a neutral place – the local support organization (LSO) office.

Both Zubiada and her husband shared their sides of the story. A detailed discussion took place in which both parties argued their points while the paralegal acted as a mediator. Ruqiya also educated the couple on the law, their legal rights and the implications of violating either. Eventually, Ghulam confessed to having pocketed some amount of money while purchasing goods for the grocery store. He apologized for his misconduct and promised not to repeat it in the future. Ghulam took his wife back home with dignity.

Zubiada is content with the resolution. She is grateful to the paralegal and project team for helping the couple and sorting out their problem amicably.



PROPERTY ENCROACHMENT

Shagufta Mai is a poor peasant, working for daily wages on tobacco fields in Rajanpur that require regular cleaning. Her husband, a docile man, works as a laborer. They have four daughters, none of whom can contribute to household income yet. Shagufta had inherited a piece of agricultural property that she cultivated for a living. Her brother-in-law, Ghulam Sarwar, had been trying to coerce her to withdraw her right from five square feet of the property that he had already encroached on, which resulted in her losing part of the total yield, as well as some of her property. When Shagufta refused, a family dispute ensued.

In a village organization (VO) meeting, Shagufta learnt of the free legal services offered by the local paralegal. She shared her issue with the paralegal, Ruqiya, and requested mediation. At Shagufta's request, the paralegal sought an audience with the opposing party. A meeting was fixed at the local support organization (LSO) office. Both parties attended with their close relatives; Shagufta was also accompanied by two local councilors. The matter was discussed thoroughly, with the paralegal mediating between those gathered and ensuring that both the complainant and defendant were heard. Shagufta argued that

she had a legal share in the property and should not be denied it, while her brother-in-law asserted that the land was being cultivated as one piece, whose division will result in a loss of yield. After carefully listening to both ends of the argument and holding a detailed discussion thereafter, the relatives and councilors of both parties decided that Shagufta Mai should possess what is rightfully hers. They persuaded Ghulam to hand over Shagufta's share of the property. Ghulam also agreed not to coerce her to withdraw her legal claim anymore.

The issue was resolved amicably as a result of mediation by the local paralegal. Both parties were satisfied with the outcome. The mediation process also facilitated trust-building between the community and the project staff, which helped Shagufta Mai peacefully obtain her right.



PROPERTY ENCROACHMENT

Shakeera Mai, a 52-year-old resident of Hajipur Sharif, is a part of a six-member family that includes her son, Mohsin. Shakeera is an embroidery worker, while Mohsin is a veterinary assistant. It had been a few weeks since Shakeera lost her computerized national identity card (CNIC). She shared this with Mohsin and asked him to apply for a new CNIC for her. She wanted to go for Hajj and was aware that the CNIC is required for the application process. Mohsin knew about his mother's wish for Hajj but was ignorant of the process of acquiring a new CNIC in case of losing one.

Mohsin asked his friends and other acquaintances regarding the process to apply but each suggested something different. One friend of Mohsin's told him to register a First Information Report (FIR) for the lost CNIC, while another told him to bribe someone in the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to get a new CNIC. Mohsin was utterly confused about the process.

It had been a month since the CNIC was lost and Mohsin was still clueless about the process. Shakeera Mai, knowing about Mohsin's confusion and lack of knowledge, finally told him not to pursue the matter further if it is getting too complicated and stressful. Mohsin, however, was

steadfast. He wanted to help his mother fulfill her dream of performing Hajj. He continued to ask around about the actual procedure. Then a friend of his told Mohsin about the role and nature of work of the local paralegal, Aslam, and the services he offers. Mohsin's friend suggested to him to meet the paralegal. At this advice, Mohsin visited Aslam and shared the details of his problem.

After noting all the specifics, Paralegal Aslam informed Mohsin about the required process of applying for a new CNIC. Mohsin memorized the procedural details and followed the method as advised. Aslam also accompanied him to ensure a smooth experience.

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I followed each step as advised, without any hindrance. I went through the procedure smoothly. Without wasting time or money, I got a new CNIC for my mother in fifteen days' time. Now I know the process and can guide anyone facing the same issue.

Mohsin shared that it is important to know the processes to avoid getting stuck in the details, which adds to stress. He is glad that his problem has been resolved and that his mother can now apply for Hajj, all of which became possible due to



THEFT ALLEGATION

Rashid Ali is a college student and works part-time at a tailoring shop in the evenings to cover his daily expenses. He is single and lives with his parents. One day, he found out that a First Information Report (FIR) has been registered against him over a false accusation of electricity theft. This upset him, as he had not been involved in any such matter. Rashid, along with his brother, went to a lawyer to secure bail before arrest. Although granted, the case was still registered against him. He grew anxious and restless. He did not know how to get rid of this unexpected problem. Rashid discussed it with some of his acquaintances in an appeal for help, as a result of which one of his neighbors shared details about Mohammad Aslam, the local paralegal, the nature of his work and the services offered by the project through paralegals.

Rashid visited Aslam and shared all the details of his concerns with him. Rashid explained to him that he is simply an employee and not the owner of the shop that the electricity theft was alleged to benefit. He also implored Aslam not to let him be jailed under this false accusation. He wanted to get rid of the issue as soon as possible. Rashid told the paralegal that he had already tried to talk to the Station House Officer (SHO) of the police station, but that no police officer at the local station was willing to listen.

Rashid noted the specifics of Aslam's subsequent advice and visited the local police station, accompanied by the paralegal, to discuss his concern with the relevant official. Aslam detailed the facts for the SHO. The SHO listened to him carefully and sent an investigation team to the tailoring shop the next day. Meanwhile, Rashid and Aslam also got in touch with a Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) official for a team to be sent to the shop for verification of the allegations. At the paralegal's request, WAPDA sent some representatives to check the electricity meter of the tailoring shop that Rashid worked for. Within two days, the arrest warrant and FIR were canceled and the court cleared Rashid's denunciation. It took a total of four days to resolve the matter with the help and facilitation of the paralegal. Rashid was pleased with the result.

“

I was very upset and at a complete loss on how to rectify the situation. I did not want to be jailed for something I had not done. [Paralegal] Aslam helped and saved me from that fate. I am extremely grateful to him. Now I am aware of the process and can guide others facing a similar problem.



PANCHAYAT MEDIATION

Mohammad Atif earns his living as a tailor in Hajipur ShAtif. He has two brothers, both of whom work in the United Arab Emirates. The family owns nine acres of agricultural land which contributes to the household income. They had been facing water theft from their land for quite some time. Owing to the lack of required irrigation water, the yield crop had declined, resulting in reduced income. This created a stressful situation for Atif. The land was not being irrigated with ample water and had started to turn barren.

Atif learnt about the project and paralegal services through a community awareness session. He decided to meet the local paralegal in his vicinity and share his problem. The paralegal shared all possible options for a resolution of the issue; Atif could either take the traditional route of convening a *panchayat* or enlist the intervention of the police. Atif decided to contact the police first. The paralegal thus advised him to register a First Information Report (FIR) against the water theft. Atif tried to execute this advice but the police officials asked him to pay to register a FIR. Atif, being a poor man, returned and shared the policemen's request for bribe with the paralegal. The paralegal advised him to visit the police station again and meet the Station House Officer

(SHO). He also told Atif that in case the SHO refuses to listen, Atif has the legal right to go to the District Police Officer. At this encouragement, Atif went to the police station a second time and met with the SHO. The SHO listened to the particulars of Atif's story attentively and summoned the defending party. A *panchayat* was called to settle the issue. Eventually, the defendants accepted the illegality of their theft of irrigation water and apologized. The perpetrators promised to stop stealing water immediately.

The resolution of Atif's problem helped his land get sufficient irrigation water to increase crop production. Atif was gradually able to recover his losses. Throughout the process, the paralegal remained in contact with Atif to ensure that his problem was resolved fairly and that the same issue did not arise again. Thanks to the paralegal's support, Atif now feels confident and empowered.

“Previously, I had assumed that the police is a superior department so we behaved like slaves before them. Now I know that it exists to support and help the citizens. We do not need to pay them for their services. I feel empowered now and hope that these lessons stay with me for future reference.”



MARRIAGE SCAM

Malik Hussain runs a grocery store in Hajipur Sharif. He also owns some agricultural land which contributes to his income. Malik had been facing a problem regarding his marriage. Five years ago, he had contracted nikah with a girl and the rukhsati was agreed for later. However, the bride's family kept delaying it and demanded that he transfer his agricultural land to his bride before rukhsati, for which Malik was not willing. He had filed a case in court to resolve this intertwined issue of marriage and property, but it had been two years and the problem persisted. Between case proceedings and lawyers' fees, Malik had already spent 70,000 rupees on this issue.

One day, Malik attended a community awareness session being held in his area. There he learnt about the LEP project and the services offered by the local paralegal. He requested the paralegal, Aslam, for help to resolve this issue. Malik revealed his stress concerning the seemingly permanent situation he was in. He wanted to settle down with a wife, but the bride's family was adamant in their demands. He was now considering second marriage. After listening to Malik, Paralegal Aslam contacted the legal aid officer (LAO)⁷ for guidance on handling this

problem. In light of the lawyer's advice, Aslam guided Malik through the complete process of remarrying legally.

Malik first submitted an application for second marriage to the chairman of the Arbitration (Masalhati) Council, at the local union council office. The court then summoned Malik's first wife, but received no response. This raised the probability of the case concluding in favor of the husband. The Council sent three notices to Malik's first wife, followed by a notice in the newspaper. All efforts remained futile. After due process, therefore, the Council awarded a permission letter for second marriage to Malik. The process took two months and, other than the fee, Malik spent nothing in the process. He remarried sometime later and now lives happily with his new wife.

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This is a small village. People are slowly becoming aware of their rights and the procedures to claim them. I knew nothing of the possible remedies to my problem but I understand how the system works now.

⁷ Project lawyer



WATTA SATTA DISPUTE

Kashmala and her husband work as peasants in Tehsil Jampur. Kashmala's marriage was a result of the traditional *watta satta*.⁸ Kashmala's brother, Sabir, is married to her sister-in-law and lives abroad for work. Kashmala has two sons while her brother has one.

Kashmala's sister-in-law, Asma, used to visit Kashmala's in-laws and would initiate an argument or make up an excuse to send Kashmala back to her mother's place every other day. This happened frequently and Kashmala used to remain upset over this situation. Her husband, Kala Khan, was the younger sibling and so had little say at home. He wanted to live peacefully with his wife, but his sister and mother proved to be traditional, problematic in-laws.

One day, Asma visited her parents' house again and claimed to have been expelled from Sabir's house by his parents. Hearing this, Kashmala's father-in-law – the patriarch – flared up and told Kashmala to return to her parents' home as well. Kashmala came back to her mother's house in utter despair. Her parents are poor people and knew nothing of rights or legal procedures. Kashmala tried to plead with her father-in-law a number of times but all in vain.

One day, while living at her parents' house, Kashmala attended a community awareness session where the paralegal spoke of legal rights. Kashmala

listened intently to the details on women's rights and decided to discuss her situation with the paralegal. She scheduled a meeting with Paralegal Ruqiya and met her accordingly. She narrated her problem and requested guidance towards resolution. After much consideration, Kashmala opted for mediation from among a number of possible solutions, as she wanted to resolve the issue cordially.

When Kala came to know about the paralegal, he also contacted Ruqiya and expressed his desire to keep his wife but that owing to family pressure, he is forced not to intervene. Ruqiya requested both families to meet to discuss the matter. She also talked to Kashmala's brother, Sabir, and his wife, Asma. After a detailed discussion mediated by the paralegal, it was mutually decided that both couples will separate their kitchens from their in-laws' and will run them independently. Both parties readily agreed to these terms.

Now Kashmala lives happily with her husband and the couple has a separate kitchen. Both families are content and satisfied with the decision. Kashmala revealed that her life had been miserable and she used to fear the end of her relationship with her husband, but the problem was resolved with the support of the paralegal and she is pleased with the result.

⁸ Barter marriage, where the sister of a girl's husband marries her brother.



10

PROPERTY SCAM

Fazila Bibi is a resident of District Rajanpur. Her husband, Shahid Hussain, is a milk seller and the family's sole breadwinner. The couple does not own agricultural land or have any alternative source of income. Both husband and wife patiently saved money over many years and eventually bought a commercial piece of land.

After some time, the couple discovered that a part of the land they had recently bought covered the road and was excluded from their ownership. This upset them because they had paid for the entire plot. Fazila and Shahid tried to reason with the selling party but found it unwilling to listen. The couple was extremely stressed at the situation. The land was the investment of all of their life savings.

Fazila's cousin, Ruqiya, worked as a paralegal with the Legal Empowerment Project. Fazila knew about the paralegals' scope of work and the services rendered by them. She decided to discuss the property matter with Ruqiya. After listening attentively to the problem, Ruqiya reassured Fazila that the couple had legal right to the entire piece of land. The paralegal shared two possible ways to solve the matter: one was through the court to legally acquire possession of the land, while the other was to resolve the

matter informally through the involvement of community leaders. Fazila opted for the latter. Paralegal Ruqiya further involved the Union Councilor. At the paralegal's request, the Councilor met with the defending party. He summoned both parties to a meeting to discuss the issue.

Both the couple that bought the land and the sellers attended the meeting. As a result of the discussion mediated by the paralegal, the defendants paid Shahid five lac rupees as compensation for the part of land that could not be occupied due to the road. Fazila and her husband, Shahid, have now built a shop on the plot that they rented out. This rental allows them to live in relative prosperity.

“We thought we had lost our hard-earned money as well as a part of the land we were told we would own. We felt hopeless. But now, we are content with the resolution and have realized that one can get his or her right if he or she has someone for guidance. We had [Paralegal] Ruqiya and the [Union] Councilor who supported us throughout the process.

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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