



Reflect-Share-Act: The Aurat Akath

Way To Community Women Transformation





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Foreword

Women and young girls belonging to disadvantaged groups face multiple discrimination in their daily lives, which in the end significantly diminishes their motivation and opportunities for active engagement and participation in social and public life. Legal and social rights awareness enhances opportunities for their participation in social, public and political processes at local level.

In order to empower community women Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE) established 10 Aurat Akath centers in Lahore, Sheikhpura, and Nankana districts under its project Women's Voice and Leadership – Pakistan. Through regular awareness sessions the members of these centers were equipped with much-needed knowledge on women rights and issues of gender justice. The purpose of these centers was reflecting, collaborating, connecting with others, fostering self-expression and cultivating a critical consciousness.

WISE feels it important to document the experiences and stories of women members of these centers. The report in hand aims to capture the positive changes happened in the lives of the members of Aurat Akath centers. It is the outcome of a collaborative learning initiative which brought together representatives from the Aurat Akath centers to explore the value and impact of the women's center approach. The report provides evidence of transformation of women lives who received support offered by these centers and case studies of selective women in relation to how and why they took initiatives to address social and development issues at community level.

I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to Oxfam for the support and excellent collaboration under WVL-Pakistan project. Also appreciate team WISE for the hectic efforts to make this study happen. It is hoped that report would help advocate for increased support, inspire action to empower women and counter violence against women and girls at grass root level.

Bushra Khaliq
Executive Director
November 2023



Women's Voice and Leadership – Pakistan

Introduction: This project is part of Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Program by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Oxfam in Pakistan (OiP), which supports local and regional women's organizations and networks that are working to promote women's rights, and advance women's empowerment and gender equality in developing countries. This is done by supporting activities of partner organizations, building institutional capacity, and promoting networks and alliance-building as women's rights and feminist organizations are critical agents of change. The Program also responds to the globally recognized, significant gap in funding and support to women's rights organizations (WROs) and movements around the world.

Goal: To increase Pakistani women and girls' enjoyment of human rights and to advance gender equality in Pakistan by strengthening the individual and collective capacity of women's rights organizations (WROs), women's rights activists, and networks/alliances within the women's movement in Pakistan.

Expected results: The expected outcomes for this project include:

- Improved management, programming and sustainability of local women's rights organizations in Pakistan, particularly those representing vulnerable and marginalized women and girls.
- Enhanced delivery of campaigns & programming by WROs to advance gender equality in Pakistan.
- Increased effectiveness of national and sub-national women's rights platforms, networks, and alliances to effect gender-sensitive policy change and implementation in Pakistan



Bridging communities with purposeful collaboration – Global Affairs Canada and Oxfam at WISE

Aurat Akath Centers

Empowering women in decision-making processes at grassroots level is important. Aurat Akath Centers were established with specific aim to provide information, advice, support and education to members, leading to women's self-development and collective building of skills, knowledge and confidence to challenge discrimination.

Aurat Akath centers are sort of collectives of women and young girls who are active citizens, and struggling to achieve gender equality, and most importantly for their next generation. Established in 2021, these centers comprise 250 members, spread across 10 union councils in three districts of Lahore, Sheikhpura, and Nankana Sahib. Each center consists of 25 members with minimum secondary level education. The members of every center regularly used to meet on monthly basis to discuss their issues and thus learnt their legal and social rights under the leadership of trained focal persons. The focal persons empowered these women on pro-women laws equipping them with necessary knowledge and skills to counter gender-based violence at the grassroots level.

Aurat Akath centers are a mixture of all ages group. However, the majority of the members (48%) are young and between the age of 15>35 years, followed by 44% as middle age group of 36>55. While members over 55 years are just 8%. With regard to marital status majority of the members (69%) are married, followed by 21% as unmarried, 10% widows and divorced. This combination of mixed age groups besides facilitating intergenerational and mutual learning provided the members an opportunity.

Under the supervision of the focal persons these Aurat Akath centers served community women and girls providing them with legal and life skills training related to women's empowerment, gender equality along with recreational activities. Besides countering gender-based violence, the members here connect



With a promise to empower women – A meeting of Aurat Akath



Activity at different centers of Aurat Akath

with others, share experiences, foster self-expression and cultivate critical consciousness.

Building on these 10 Aurat Akath (Women Reflect Centers) and part of further consolidation, in 2023 three (3) district level Aurat Akath have been evolved, each comprising 09-12 members. These district level structures, besides promoting the second level women leadership, are meant to address specific instances of violence against women, providing support and resources to victims and their families through referral mechanism. These shall also liaison with Public and Private departments for fixing local municipal issues, facilitating implementation of the Aurat Akath action plans, and other need-based initiatives.



Exploring progress and challenges – the annual review and reflect meeting

Capacity Stengthening

Very active members were designated as focal persons of Aurat Akath Centers to continue engaging with different public and private forums. The focal persons were duly equipped with knowledge and skills on gender equality through capacity strengthening training workshops. A training manual was specially developed for the focal persons to deliver the acquired knowledge to the members to create awareness on women rights. These focal persons are supposed to organize monthly planning and review meeting and create liason with public sector departments for social and development Issues.



The effort bears fruit indeed – A few glimpses of various seminars, workshops, and visits

The focal persons were trained as community leaders through capacity strengthening workshops to resolve the issues of women in their areas and build their strong association with communities. The topics of the workshop were included; psycho-social well-being, pro-women laws, available support mechanisms, gender & protection, community mobilization, leadership skills and record keeping. They were motivated to continue their work and input voluntarily.



Focal Persons

Rani Shamim
Pind Jatri
Nankana Sahib



Kalsoom Gulzar Jafferi
Ali Chowk, Badami Bagh
Lahore



Asia Naz
Badami Bagh
Lahore



Nasreen Bibi
Colony Shoukatabad
Nankana Sahib



Shakeela Bibi
Kot Lakhpat
Lahore



Lubna Shehzadi
Youngsun Abad
Nankana Sahib



Azra Parveen
Chungi Amar Sadhu
Lahore



Shehla Gillani
Wandala Dyal Shah
Sheikhupura



Robina Kausar
Larex Colony
Sheikhupura



Nabeela Bano
Mustafabad
Sheikhupura



Sustainability

Towards the end of the project in 2023 all the 10 centers decided to organize themselves at district level and formed their 3 District Level Aurat Akaths, one each in Lahore, Sheikhpura and Nankana sahib. Each district level structure comprises 9-12 members. The Aurat Akath centers experience was so worthwhile for the members that focal persons of these three district level centers resolved to continue these centers even after ending of WVL project. Their plan is to keep these centers functional with community self-help and regular support of WISE. The new district level structures will work together for countering gender base violence and development issues in their localities and districts.



The Aurat Akath at one of the centers



WISE and Global Affairs Canada Team

Way to Transformation Stories of Aurat Akath Members

Rida resolves longstanding water supply issue in Badami Bagh

Rida Riaz, (30) member of Aurat Akath, Ali Chowk, Badami Bagh, stood as a beacon of hope for her community when it faced dire water supply and sanitary issues. Leading from the front she mobilized the local women and brought their problems to the notice of Water and Sanity Authority (WASA) Office. Along with community members they presented a compelling case through a formal application to the Authority. Their collective efforts bore fruit, as the authorities swiftly addressed and resolved the longstanding water supply issue, proving that community unity and resolute advocates like Rida can bring about transformative change.



A view of monthly meeting



After successfully resolving the issue – Rida Riaz, with Focal Person Kalsoom Jafferi and Sahar Bibi



A member of Aurat Akath inquiring about her right to inheritance during the monthly meeting

Muqaddas asserts her right to inheritance

After getting awareness about women right to inheritance from the Aurat Akath center Muqaddas, (35) a poor resident of Badami Bagh, Lahore decides to claim her lawful right in her parent's property and moves the court to secure her right from her brothers, who never bothered to give her the due share.

“One day, a friend of mine told me about the Aurat Akath, and asked me to join the meetings. At first, I was

hesitant to attend, but curiosity pushed me to go and attend the meeting. There was a discussion going on the women inheritance rights. I was wondered to know about my entitlement in my father's property. I always assumed that my two brothers were to inherit everything”, tells Muqaddas, a mother of three children.

After the meeting, Muqaddas decided to talk to her brothers seeking her share in the property. Initially they were dismissive, telling her not to bother with legal procedures and that they would give her a share without involving the courts. Muqaddas was relieved hoping her brothers would keep their promise. However, as the time passed, she smelled that her brothers were not serious.

Finally, Muqaddas realized that she needed to take action. She knew that she had a legal right to her share of the inheritance, and she was not going to let her brothers deny her that right. Ultimately, she filed a case in the court of law, and now pursuing it with determination. The hopeful Muqaddas has set an example for other women in her community.

Asia helps domestic violence victim to get justice

Asia Naz – focal person of Aurat Akath, Badami Bagh is a courageous woman. Trained by WISE as community activist, she was always determined to make a difference in the lives of women who were oppressed and mistreated. One day, she was approached by a young woman – N (26) of her locality who had been duped into a court marriage with a man who was already married.

N's dream of a happy marriage were shattered. Her husband had cheated her by concealing his first marriage. When she confronted him, the enraged husband beat her mercilessly and threw her two-year old daughter out of house. Luckily, she was saved by a passerby who took her to the nearby hospital.

After recovering from her injuries, N approached Asia. Deeply moved by N's story, Asia decided to help her out. She took N to the police station and filed an application against her husband, demanding justice for the suffering that N had endured. Due to Asia's persistence, the police took action and arrested N's husband. He was found guilty of domestic abuse. Meanwhile, Asia continued to support N, helping her rebuild her life and regain her confidence. N is feeling better now and confident to get justice.



Asia Naz, speaking about the domestic violence against women and pro-women laws in Punjab

Gender solidarity helps the lady secure her dowry back

K, a resident of Badami Bagh, Lahore was only 27 when her marriage fell apart. Her marital life was tumultuous, domestic quarrels and fights with her in-laws and husband. Eventually, she was divorced, left alone without her husband or his family. It was not easy for K, mother of a young toddler.

Adding to her troubles, her in-laws and husband refused to return her dowry. Living in a rented house after divorce, the poor K had no means to get her dowry back. Then she shared her plight with the Aurat Akath focal person-Kalsoom, who took up K's case. Kalsoom along with Asia-the focal person of another Aurat Akath in the nearby locality, visited the in-laws of K and asked them to return the dowry. The in-laws initially refused, but Kalsoom and Asia insisted, arguing that it was K's legal right to have her dowry back.

After much discussion and repeated negotiations, the in-laws finally relented, and K was able to get back her furniture and dowry items. With her belongings back, K felt she could start rebuilding her life again. She knew that she could always count on the support of the Aurat Akath and its members.



The pride marches on – Amina, after helping recover the new born

Distressed mother reunites with kidnaped newborn through Aurat Akath efforts

Amina, (28) an active member of Aurat Akath, Chungi Amar Sadhu, played a pivotal role in reuniting a distressed mother with her kidnaped newborn baby. When a woman reported the harrowing incident of her baby lifted from a maternity home, Amina, 26, swiftly sprang into action. She accompanied the distraught mother to the police station to file a formal complaint of child kidnaping. Amina along with local Aurat Akath members managed to push police to locate the missing baby. Due to her unwavering determination and follow-up, finally police was able recovered the baby. Reuniting the infant with her mother, exemplifies the crucial role of dedicated individuals like Amina in delivering justice and rekindling hope in their communities.

Sewerage issue resolved with community advocacy



Shakeela, inspecting the work in progress with other members of the community

Shakeela Bibi (37), focal person of Aurat Akath in Kot Lakhpat, displayed remarkable commitment to address a pressing community issue. Alongside her Aurat Akath members, she took the initiative to address the long-standing problem of sewerage pipeline maintenance in the Kot Lakhpat area by submitting a formal application to the office of the Local Council.

Despite facing initial challenges, she kept advocacy meeting with relevant officials. With multiple follow-up attempts, Shakeela's unwavering persistence eventually paid off. The Local Council finally responded to their plea and rectified the sewerage pipeline. The action highlights the transformative power of community advocacy and dedicated individuals like Shakeela in ensuring the betterment of their neighborhoods.

Helping young R out of deceitful marriage

Shakeela (45) the focal person of Aurat Akath Kot Lakpath, Lahore and a social worker in her area has been working tirelessly to empower women and bring justice to the marginalized. She had witnessed countless cases of gender-based violence and helped many women fight for their rights. One such case that Shakeela took on was that of R, a 18-year-old girl in her neighborhood who was recently married to a man whose true gender identity was concealed from her and her family.

Soon after marriage, R discovered that her husband was transgender and was horrified to learn that her in-laws deliberately concealed the sexual identity of the their son. Shakeela helped R to find a lawyer who filed a case against the so-called husband and the in-laws, who had not only cheated her, but also subjected her to mental and emotional trauma. Shakeela was determined to see it through to the end. She spent countless hours gathering evidence to make a strong case the husband. The case is in the court of law and R is emotionally stable now and hopeful for justice in her favor.

Standing up against cyberbullying paid off

The focal person Shakeela, has been running a Facebook page by "Aurat Akath" name for the last one year, where she used to share stories of strong and resilient women who had overcome various challenges and obstacles in their lives. However, her own life took an unexpected turn when she became the target of cyber harassment. A man named Z lived in Qatar, started sending her seductive messages, harassing her. Shakeela was not the one to back down from a challenge. She decided to take action against the harasser and filed a complaint with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Pakistan. The FIA promptly took action and forwarded her complaint to the authorities in Qatar.

Within a month, Z was expelled Qatar and forced to return to Pakistan. The police arrested him as soon as he landed, and sent to jail. Shakeela's decision of standing up against cyber harassment paid off. Her story encourages other women to stand up against cyberbullying and harassment, which means that even the feeble voices can make a difference, and that justice can prevail if we are willing to fight for it.

Shakeela's support exemplifies hope in the face of domestic violence

Shakeela stood as a steadfast ally for S, a woman enduring the harrowing ordeal of domestic violence at the hands of her husband and his abusive family. S's cry for help found a compassionate response in Shakeela, who took swift action by assisting her in filing a legal case of domestic violence against her husband. The involvement of the authorities prompted a turning point in the situation, as her husband, recognizing the gravity of his actions, came forward to make amends. He extended apology and promised to respect S's in future. S's bravery in seeking help and Shakeela's support exemplify the potential for transformation and hope in the face of domestic violence.

United we can combat Domestic Violence!

S N (30), resident of Chungi Amar Sadhu and a victim of chronic domestic violence got a sigh of relief after crucial intervention by the focal person and members of Aurat Akath, forcing her husband to stop domestic violence. The distressed Ms Naqvi had tried to leave her husband several times, but he always managed to bring her back home on the pretext of false promises. She finally talked to Azra – focal person of Aurat Akath, Chungi Amer Sadu seeking help. Azra along with other members of Aurat Akath decided to take action against S N's husband. They talked to a lawyer and sent a legal notice to the abusive husband, asking him to stop beating her wife otherwise a police case would be registered against him.

The legal notice had the desired effect. Realizing the seriousness of the matter that he could no longer get away with his abusive behavior, he was made to extend an apology, stop the violence and treat her wife with respect. Azra work did not stop there. She continued to advocate for women's rights and worked to create a safer and more just community for women. She knew that there was still a long way to go, but they were determined to keep fighting until every woman was free from domestic violence and oppression.



Azra Parveen, addressing the members at monthly meeting of the center

Proactive Azra takes initiative to restore power in neighborhood

Azra, (40) is focal person of Aurat Akath, Kot Lakhpat, Lahore. Being a trained activist, she could not afford to sit idle when her community suffered a power outage for three consecutive days due to a malfunctioning of the electric transformer. Mobilizing the fellow members of Aurat Akath, she visited the WAPDA office, submitted a complaint demanding prompt resolution to the power disruption in the area. Through effective advocacy with the authorities she successfully forced them for immediate action. As a result, the problem was swiftly rectified, restoring power to the neighborhood. Azra's proactive approach and collaboration with Aurat Akath members demonstrated her commitment to serve her community.

Transformative initiative to empower the women with disability



Robina Kausar, with one of the beneficiaries

Robina Kausar (55), the focal person of Aurat Akath, Larex Colony, Shahdara, spearheaded a transformative initiative to empower disabled individuals in her community. Alongside her committed Aurat Akath members, they undertook the task of assisting women with disability in obtaining their Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs). The team's unwavering support and advocacy guided these individuals through the process, with Robina's team even going the extra mile by providing wheelchairs for disabled women to ensure their comfort and accessibility during the application process. This remarkable initiative not only brought newfound hope and dignity to the disabled women but also underscored the compassionate and inclusive ethos championed by Robina and her Aurat Akath team.

Community mobilization helps restore power supply

Hamida Zulfiqar, a dedicated member of Aurat Akath from Larex Colony, Shahdra, took a proactive stance to address a crying issue that had been pestering her community. With unwavering determination, she rallied the concerned residents, and together, they made their way to the WAPDA office to submit a formal application for the replacement of a malfunctioning transformer. Although their initial plea seemed to have fallen on deaf ears, Hamida's persistent follow-up efforts bore fruit, as the authorities eventually took action to resolve the issue. The replacement of the transformer not only resolved the issue but also demonstrated the significant impact that community mobilization and dedicated individuals like Hamida can have in effecting positive change in their neighborhoods.



Hamida Zulfiqar and other members after resolving the issue

Grassroots initiative proves worthwhile to address the sewerage issue

Nabeela Bano, (50) the focal person of Aurat Akath in Mustafabad, Shahdara, showcased her unwavering commitment to enhancing the living conditions of her community. Recognizing the dire state of a dilapidated road and the associated issues with sewerage pipes, Nabeela, along with her dedicated Aurat Akath team, took proactive steps to address these pressing concerns. They submitted a formal application to the Local Council Office, highlighting the urgent need for road repair and sewerage pipeline maintenance. Their persistent follow-up efforts and advocacy did not go unnoticed, as the authorities responded by addressing the damaged sewerage pipeline, ultimately resolving a chronic sanitation issue. Nabeela's dedication and the collaborative spirit of her team exemplify the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives in addressing local challenges.



The choking sewage issue was fixed with efforts of Nabeela Bano

Nabeela's swift action helps save the child from molestation

Nabeela Bano (50) the focal person Aurat Akath, Mustafabad, Shahdara is a woman who embodies the values of compassion, bravery, and knowledge in safeguarding children. Her story is one of quick action and determination in fixing an issue that had the potential to ruin a child's life. Nabeela's action not only helped the child but also exposed the perpetrators who were her own neighbors.

Nabeela received information that a child in her neighborhood had gone missing. Along with parents of the child, she immediately went to the police station and reported the matter, providing them with all the necessary details, including the child's picture, which helped the police to quickly locate and apprehend the perpetrators, who attempted to molest the child.

The child was safely recovered unharmed. Thus, Nabeela's action saved a child from a terrible fate. She demonstrated the importance of being equipped with knowledge about safeguarding and taking swift action when necessary. Her bravery and determination have set an example for others to follow in protecting vulnerable children from harm.



A view of the meeting at Aurat Akath, Mustafabad, Shahdara

Transformative journey of a widow's empowerment and self-discovery

N T (43) a widow and mother of 3 children is resident Mustafabad, Shahdara. In the wake of her husband's passing, a grim chapter unfolded in N's life as her in-laws resorted to violence and forcibly evicted her from her husband's home, leaving her alone with her three children. Adding to her anguish, they callously sought to deny her children their rightful inheritance. In the face of such adversity, N's resilience shone through as she joined Aurat Akath as a member, embarking on a journey of empowerment and self-discovery. Through this association, she gained valuable awareness of pro-women laws and access to legal support. With unwavering determination, she successfully reclaimed her place in her husband's home, alongside her children. The fight for her children's inheritance continues in the court, a poignant testament to N's unwavering commitment to securing justice and a better future for her family.



The focal person and a member of Aurat Akath during a discussion

Anum helps domestic violence victim fights back

Anum (27) - a young member of Aurat Akath, Mustafabad, Shahdara and a teacher at local academy won appreciation after helping her colleague, M (29) mother of two, to get rid of domestic violence. M's husband and in-laws used to beat her on petty issues. They kicked her out of the house along with her children. Distressed M had no option but to go to her parents home. She shared her problem with Anum who told her about her legal rights and encouraged her to fight back.

She devised a strategy and advised M to return the children to her in-laws so making them realize her value. Acting upon the advice, M sent both the kids to her husband's house and refused to take responsibility of the children. After 3 days her husband came to take her back home because in-laws were unable to take care of the children. However, M refused to go back without certain conditions. So, her husband and in-laws agreed to accept her terms and promised that they would not beat her or use abusive language in future. M is thankful to Anum for the strategic tips to deal with the abusive husband.



Anum in discussion with her colleague, a domestic violence survivor

A hard marital life gets soft touch with community help

K, (35) a member of Aurat Akath, Wandala Dyal Shah, Shahdhra had always dreamt of a happy marriage, where she would be cherished and loved by her husband. But her dreams were shattered when she could not bear baby and her husband (Ali) threatened her with intention of 2nd marriage. At first, Komal tried to reason with her husband, explaining him having a child was not in her hands alone. But Ali refused to listen, and the more she tried to argue with him, the more he would get angry and violent. Komal felt trapped in her own house, unable to share her pain with anyone. She felt like she had no one to turn until she attended an Aurat Akath meeting in her area.

At the meetings, she met women who had gone through similar experiences and had found a way out. With the support of the other women, K gained the confidence to confront her husband. She approached the Focal Person, Shehla Gillani, who promised to help her. Shehla called in some influential people from the community and invited Ali for a meeting and told him that legally he could not contract 2nd marriage without the permission of K. They also made it clear that any form of violence against K was unacceptable. However, Ali did not budge and kept threatening K with a second marriage if she did not give birth to a child soon.

Finally, Shehla advised K to file a complaint with police against Ali for threatening her. On Shehla's persuasion the local police considered the complaint and warned Ali against 2nd marriage without K's consent and to stop hurling violence threats against K. Realising the gravity of the situation, Ali's positively changed his behavior towards K. Since then she feels safe in her own house and grateful for the support she had received from Shehla and Aurat Akath. Although her journey had been tough, K realized that her story was not hers alone. She wanted to help other women in her community who were facing similar issues.



Shehla Gillani, speaking at the monthly meeting



Members of Aurat Akath Wandala Dyal Shah, Shahdhra discussing their issues at the monthly meeting of the center

Empowering abuse survivor to reclaim her dignity

Shehla Gillani, (57) focal person Aurat Akath, Wandala Dyal Shah, district Sheikhpura took a courageous stand to support S K, a 23-year-old domestic violence survivor and mother of a 5-year old son, facing a harrowing ordeal of domestic abuse and financial exploitation at the hands of her husband. Struggling to endure the constant physical and emotional abuse, S left her husband's home and shifted to her mother's house. Faced with the distressing loss of her belongings and her son, she initially filed a case of domestic violence against her in-laws but found herself struggling due to limited resources and support. It was Shehla Gillani who stepped in as a source of strength and guidance, rallying support and taking the case to the chairman of the Union Council. Through their collaborative efforts, S was able to regain custody of her son and filed a divorce case. Shehla's support also led to the return of some of her belongings. This case serves as a testament to the critical role that individuals like Shehla play in empowering survivors of abuse and helping them reclaim their dignity and rights.



Shehla Gillani, with the domestic violence survivor, after helping recover her dowry

Protecting violence survivor from abusive marriage

Shehla Gillani, (57) focal person of Aurat Akath in Wandala Dyal Shah, played a pivotal role in aiding N, a 29-year-old mother of six kids, who endured a painful and abusive marriage. Nasreen's husband subjected her to relentless physical and emotional abuse. N turned to Shehla for help, who extended crucial support to help N take the final step of last resort to file divorce with the local council. After liberation from the tormenting marriage, and even after obtaining it, she kept facing threats from her husband. Fearing for her safety and that of her children, after consultation with Shehla, she filed a police case against her husband seeking protection. While the case is ongoing,

N's courage, Shehla's support and their collaborative efforts underline the critical importance of addressing domestic violence and protecting the rights and safety of survivors.



The focal person and the victim discussing the issue with the secretary of union council

Sajida – the bike rider smashes stereotypes

Sajida Nawaz (53), a member of Aurat Akath, Mustafabad, Shahdhra, drew inspiration from the incredible journey of Rabia Shaukat, a WISE myth-breaker scotty rider who resided in the neighborhood. She made the courageous decision to break societal myths by learning to ride a bike in the neighborhood where such a choice was met with resistance. Undeterred by the challenges, she mastered bike riding and now fearlessly drive her husband's motorcycle through the streets of Mustafabad. Not only did she smash stereotypes, but she also put her newfound skill to good use by addressing women's issues in her locality. Sajida regularly rides her bike to the union council office and other public offices, where she listens to the stories of local women and actively works towards solving their problems, further empowering and uplifting her community.



Sajida Nawaz – riding fearlessly on the streets of her town

Knowledge of Safeguarding paves way to justice for the abuse victim

S P, 37, resident of Youngsun Abad, district Nankana Sahib and a member of local Aurat Akath, faced the horrific experience of her life when her 10-year old son was raped by two boys of same neighborhood. The child was traumatized, making it even more devastating for S- a mother of three children.

S approached Lubna Shehzadi, focal person of Aurat Akath Younganabad for help. Lubna was well aware about the issue of safeguarding and legal mechanisms to address the cases of sexual abuse of children. She immediately took this matter to the influential numberdar of area, hoping for justice. However, Lubna soon realized that it was not easy to get justice through social dialogue as numberdar was favoring the rapists who belonged to well-off family. The family of the perpetrators tried to hush up S and Lubna, but they refused to be silenced and stood firm in their decision to seek justice for the child. They took the child to the hospital, got medical report and filed a police case. As a result, both the perpetrators were arrested and sent to jail. Lubna and S's courage and determination eventually paid off, and the rapists were punished for their heinous crime.



Lubna facilitating a survivor while visiting police station



A view of monthly meeting of Aurat Akath, Youngsun Abad

Nasreen's tireless efforts help establish dispensary in community

Nasreen Bibi, (50) the focal person of Aurat Akath, Shaukat Abad Colony, Nankana Sahib, bravely spoke up about the dire need for healthcare facilities in her community. The absence of health care centers had left the women of the colony to suffer without proper medical attention. Fueled by a determination to bring change, Nasreen, along with the members of Aurat Akath, worked tirelessly to draft and submit an application to the local government authority, urging them to establish a dispensary that would provide much-needed first aid services to the residents in her locality. Her unwavering commitment and 2-year persistent efforts



Nasreen outside the dispensary

paid off as, after considerable follow up the local govt. authority established a dispensary that would be a lifeline for the local community.

In a heartwarming gesture, Nasreen planted greenery in the dispensary premises, symbolizing not just the healthcare, but also the growth and well-being of the community.



A meeting in progress

From homemaker to a successful shopkeeper

This story shed light on the transformative journey of M B, a 35-year-old shopkeeper once a housewife, and currently a member of Aurat Akath in Colony Shaukat Abad, Nankana Sahib. M's story is a testament to the life-changing impact of joining Aurat Akath and participating in the organization's sessions.

Through these motivational and confidence-building gatherings, she found the inspiration and strength to take charge of her life, transitioning from being a homemaker to becoming a successful shopkeeper. The sessions provided her with valuable insights into her rights and untapped potential, empowering her to achieve independence and become a vital source of financial support for her family. M's journey reflects the profound difference that organizations like Aurat Akath can make in the lives of women, igniting their self-belief and enabling them to realize their aspirations.



At her grocery shop

Focal person helps K make informed decisions about her reproductive health

Rani Shamim (55), the Focal Person for Aurat Akath Pind Jatri, district Nankana Sahib, had always been passionate about her social work. K, a 30-year-old woman of her neighborhood approached Shamim for help to address pregnancy complications. K had been suffering from blood deficiency, causing miscarriage again and again. Her health was deteriorating rapidly, and she knew she couldn't go on like this.

Rani advised K to go for family planning in the face of poor health. K was hesitant at first, as her husband was against the idea of family planning. However, Rani spoke to K's husband and explained to him how family planning could save the life of her wife. She convinced K to avail contraceptive methods to stop further pregnancies. Rani made sure that K received proper medical care and counseling both before and after the procedure. She also arranged for regular follow-up appointments to monitor K's health and ensure that she was recovering well. With Rani's help, K's health was much improved and she started living a more fulfilling life.



The monthly meeting at Pind Jatri



A young participant expressing her views at a meeting

Making husband realize the importance of wife's reproductive health

S A 23, resident of Pind Jatri was married to a man twice of her age. Soon after her marriage, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Over the period of five years of marriage she gave birth to five girls. Her husband who wanted a son, grew frustrated, and S felt helpless. After giving birth to her fifth baby, S's health began to deteriorate. She lost a lot of weight and developed severe iron deficiency. Her husband was adamant on having a son, and S was scared to get pregnant again.

It was Rani Shamim, the focal person of Aurat Akath, Pind Jatri who came to S's help. Rani spoke to S's husband and briefed him about the danger to the life of S due to repeated pregnancies. He eventually agreed and allow S to try a family planning method. Rani helped S make an appointment with the doctor and get necessary treatment. Over time, S's health improved, and she was able to take better care of her daughters. She started to feel more confident and empowered, knowing that she had taken control of her own reproductive health. Her husband eventually came around to the idea of having only daughters, and he became a more supportive partner to S.

FEM Green – Raising awareness about the perils of climate change

The focal persons of Aurat Akath in three districts of Lahore, Sheikhupura and Nankana Sahib spearheaded a plantation campaign in their respective areas with members of Aurat Akath. Driven by a vision to raise awareness about the perils of climate change and the far-reaching impact of global warming the campaign aimed to highlight the critical role of plants in preserving our environment, instilling a profound sense of responsibility in the community. Through their collective efforts, all the 10 focal persons not only encouraged people to champion tree-plantation but also inspired them to be fervent guardians of their environment, fortifying the pledge for a brighter, greener future.



Women Social Actions Appraisal: Evidence from the ground

The Aurat Akath centers carried out awareness sessions for members on legal, social and development rights with focus on gender-based violence and its consequences for everyone. To carry out an appraisal of the resultant social actions by the community women was important. For the purpose a survey questionnaire was developed and administrated to all the 250 members of the 10 centers.

The exercise was supposed to gauge the impact on women who attended these sessions on topics including; Muslim family laws, gender equality, gender-based violence, right to education, health and development. The exercise shows that a good number of women took actions and initiatives in their respective vicinities to address cases of domestic violence, early child marriages, inheritance problems and other family disputes. Besides they also engaged themselves in actions resolving development problems in their neighborhoods.

The appraisal also shows Aurat Akath Centres have highlighted a range of benefits and positive outcomes for women members. There are also reported benefits for the wider health, social care and criminal justice systems. Feedback from members suggests that women value support provided and that this is crucial to facilitating emotional and physical safety for women, especially those who have experienced violence or abuse. Majority of women showed substantial improvements in mental health. Almost all the women reported a significant improvement in their life as a whole. They also identified improvements across other dimensions e.g. relationships, self-confidence, social and legal rights awareness.

Following are the findings of the 250 respondents.



Representatives of WISE partners in Aurat Akath – Global Affairs Canada and Oxfam visiting a center

Social Actions at community level

Nature of Issues resolved		Respondents	Percentage
Social / legal Issues	Domestic violence	40	16%
	Child marriage restraining	15	6%
	Minor family disputes	50	20%
	Inheritance issues	15	6%
Total		120	48%

As a result of awareness on legal and social issues, 120 members (48%) took different actions and initiatives to help resolve social and development issues at local level. These respondents told they were proactive to help resolved family disputes of different nature, including domestic violence, stopping early child marriage and issues of inheritance, which was one of the main objective of the establishment of these centers.

"I have learnt about power, both inside and outside of myself, about moments of feeling powerless, and learning to be powerful, to use power well, to stand for myself and others"-

Jameela, member Aurat Akath Center, Kot Lakhpat

Development actions at community level

No	Nature of Development work	Respondents	percentage
1	Plantation activity	50	20%
2	Street/Road cleaning	50	20%
3	Street /Road repair	10	04%
4	Drainage/Sewerage cleaning	25	10%
5	Power supply	29	11%
6	Water supply	36	15%
7	Total	200	80%

The assessment reflects that women also took interest to resolve the development issues in their areas. Around 80 % women were found active to engage themselves with local councils for cleaning/repair of streets/roads/drainage and resolve water supply issues. Not all were successful but some 25% women got their streets/roads cleaning/repair, followed by plantation drive by 20% respondents, water supply by 15% and power supply by 11% women

"We come together here – listen to each other – learn from each other and get strong. You learn you deserve better and have things to offer. That living can be more than just surviving. You never feel awkward here. You walk in and feel welcome and relaxed. You're just a human being - you get respect and you don't get judged...It's safe and I've made good friends"-

Rukhsana, member Aurat Akath Center, Nankana Sahib



Ways to help women empowerment

Nature of help extended	Respondents	percentage
Aurat Akath mobilization	125	50%
Stitching Training	20	8%
School/college admission	26	10.4%
Help in job searching	03	1.2%
Total	174	69.6%

Majority of respondents 125 (50%) told they mobilized the women to be part of the Aurat Akath centers and got learning opportunity about women legal and social rights. Around 10% respondents said they provided young girls technical help to get admission in schools and colleges. While 8% respondents extended help to women for their economic empowerment through imparting free training of stitching. A couple of respondents (3) also helped young girls in searching job opportunities.

“There is a need to increase young women's and girls' awareness and understanding of their own potential to influence their lives, families, and communities. Given the specific characteristics of a particularly disadvantaged group to which young women and girls belong, training should offer tools for finding their own motivation, developing self- confidence and determination, together with self-management and self- control skills”.

– Humaira, member Aurat Akath Center, Shahdhra

Transformation

Questions	Yes	No
Feel safe and secure at center	250	0
Got awareness on women/girls' issues/rights	250	0
Sense of selfworth improved	250	0
Mental health improved	203	47
Self-confidence improved	250	0
Social relations improved	207	43
Experiencesharing with other women	242	08
Voice heard/listened at the center	250	0
Attendance in center opposed by family	06	244

Overwhelming majority of the respondents (98%) told that they felt safe and secure at the center. They got awareness on women/girls' issues/rights, their self-confidence, sense of self-worth and social relations were improved. They also felt that their voices were duly heard during discussions. There was total acceptance of these centers at community level as only 2% respondents said their family opposed to visit the center.

“Safety, both physical and emotional, was a key benefit of these centers. Women here always feel supported and comfortable. They become empowered and developed confidence, greater independence and higher self-esteem. Women feel that their voices are heard and listened to. Through sharing their experiences with other women to make sense of the world together, they develop a sense of solidarity.”

– Sidra , member Aurat Akath Center Badami Bagh

