



THE POLITICS OF OUR LIVES

The Raising Her Voice in Pakistan Experience



Aurat Foundation



OXFAM

'Pakistan is a difficult place to be female – I have hope, we have hope, we have to have hope. I am hopeful that the challenges I have faced, that my children will not. I am hopeful that the successes I have achieved will inspire my children. I think they are more confident because of my actions.'

Haseen Mussarat, RHV Women's Leader,
Sindh Province

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can we change the power dynamics that exclude women from decision making? How can the barriers that prevent women from exercising their rights as equals to lead, to propose and to call to account be overcome?

'No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you.' Mohammed Ali Jinnah, speaking to the Muslim University Union Aligarh, 10th March 1944

In partnership with 17 Oxfam country teams, 45 partner organizations and 450 coalition members, the Raising Her Voice (RHV) programme set out to find practical answers to these questions.

The RHV programme recognized the complexity of the obstacles women face in their personal, social and political spheres, and that lasting change would only be secured through strengthening women's positions across all three areas. The programme developed a Theory of Change based on this model to guide programme design, reflection and learning. More than 700,000 women in 17 countries have benefited from the results.

Well known for its highly articulate and influential women, Pakistan is also known throughout the world for the severe restrictions placed on women's personal and political liberties – so-called 'honour killings' being the most extreme example.

Pakistan is a country where, in 1988, Benazir Bhutto became the first-ever woman prime minister of a Muslim country; where, in 2008, Dr. Fehmida Mirza became the first woman to be elected as speaker of a National Assembly in the Muslim world; and where 2013 saw more than 100 women members enter both houses of parliament. Yet, Pakistan is also a country where Zubaida Begum was killed because of her attempt to break anti-women traditions by participating in local elections and raising women's awareness of their right to vote; and where, during the May 2013 elections, in violation of election rules and the agreed code of ethics, many women were barred from voting,¹ predominantly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.²

The RHV programme entered this very complex and sensitive space by building on a country level partnership with the Aurat Foundation (AF), which for the past 26 years has come to be known for its commitment to promoting women's empowerment and citizens' participation in governance. Working together, the RHV programme and AF established the '50 Women Leaders Groups' (WLGs) in 30 districts across Pakistan, with a total membership of 1,500 women activists, living and working in their communities.

The aims of the WLGs are: to promote activism within their communities; to defend and promote individual and collective women's rights; to represent marginalized women; and to raise women's collective voice at local and district levels, as well as, with AF's support, at the provincial and national level.

The decision to work with well-connected ‘home-grown’ women leaders strengthened community activism and, crucially, provided an entry point to reach the many women who remained marginalized. Their activism and campaigning has resulted in tangible benefits for women and contributed to changing a culture that all too often excludes women from decision making. Thanks to the courage and determination of these women leaders, hundreds of women – who would otherwise never have gained access to resources, informal and formal justice, or decision-making fora – are beginning to have a say in the choices that affect their lives.

From Sialkot, where WLG members helped nearly 116,000 women gain national identity cards, to Attock, where the WLG helped convince the local panchayat authority³ to ban honour killings, the creation of the WLGs has increased women’s personal and organizational capacity and confidence to influence and call those in power to account.

The increase in women’s political participation has provided new opportunities to form alliances and gain influence within centres of power, enabling women to help shape policy and practice. Safety in numbers and the novelty of an activist platform that, possibly for the first time, is

not drawn on family, religious or political lines has helped to develop mutual trust and strengthen the collective voice of local women. Despite their ideological or party political differences, the women leaders think alike on many women’s rights issues. They are able to work together to resolve local problems, such as violations of women’s employment rights and cases of domestic violence.

National and local spaces for community activism were supported by AF’s tireless advocacy and lobbying, which drew on its strong media and communications background. Thanks to its links to women’s groups nationwide, AF’s evidence-led advocacy is acknowledged as having been a driving force behind legislative changes (notably the introduction of the Domestic Violence Bill in Sindh Province) and pro-women reforms to the rules of political engagement. Cultural events and public rallies have also ensured that women’s rights remain a highly visible issue.

As the RHV programme draws to a close, the experiences and achievements of the WLG model, with its strong national partnership and focus of community-level activism, contain valuable insights for anybody working to promote women’s political participation and leadership in volatile and complex environments.



AFTER MONTHS SLEEPING ‘UNDER THE SKY’ FOLLOWING A DISPUTE WITH HER LANDLORD, NEETAN KOHLI (FAR-LEFT), WLG MEMBER IN HATRI, HYDERABAD, HAS RETURNED TO HER HOME AND TO WORK IN THE FIELDS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE WLGs (2012). PHOTO: IRINA WERNING

INTRODUCTION

How do you bring about positive change for women by increasing their political participation and leadership in a culturally and politically constrained environment?

Until such time that women are able to participate on an equal footing with men, socially, politically and economically, the world fails to fulfil its potential, and, as a people, we forfeit the right to be called ‘civilized’.⁴

In this review of the Raising Her Voice⁵ (RHV) Pakistan programme, we will start with an **analysis of the position of women in Pakistan**, and the forces for and against change, which informed the development of a **Theory of Change**. This was then developed into work in the **personal, social and political spheres**, in order to create practical and strategic gains in the quality and quantity of women’s political participation and leadership.

RHV is part of Oxfam GB’s global programme; it seeks to promote poor women’s rights and improve their capacity to participate effectively in governance at all levels: raising women’s voices; increasing their influence; and compelling decision-making institutions to be more accountable to women.

This falls within Oxfam’s broader organizational commitment to building a more inclusive and equitable society. It is essential that we learn from governance programmes, such as RHV, which put ‘women’s rights at the heart of all we do’. For governance programmes to bring about transformational change, it is important to find new and innovative ways of overcoming the many deeply embedded barriers to changing

the status of women in the home, the community, and in wider society.

This paper celebrates the changes that the RHV Pakistan programme has brought about and, more importantly, distils the choices and actions that generated these changes. It can offer insights to policy makers and practitioners developing and managing governance programmes in complex, and often insecure, contexts, where the political space for women is narrow and fraught with dangers.

We will begin with the achievements of the RHV programme before describing the processes that led to these changes.

Though there are still many barriers to women in Pakistan demanding and gaining their political rights, since 2008 the Aurat Foundation’s (AF) strategy of pressure and collaboration in tandem has enabled roughly 187,500 Pakistani women⁶ to raise their voices and claim their political space. This is all the more inspirational given the many constraints that those working for women’s political freedom face at every level of Pakistani society.

The RHV programme formally drew to a close in March 2013. This report draws on contributions from AF, the implementing partner, and the Oxfam Pakistan team, through interviews and a desk review. It also includes peer group input from RHV Co-ordinators in South Africa, Indonesia and Nepal, power holders at provincial and national levels in Pakistan, and, most importantly, the testimony of the women leaders themselves.

WHERE CHANGES ARE HAPPENING

The '50 Women Leaders' Groups

Across Pakistan, 1,500 women leaders, formed into 30 district-level '50 Women Leader Groups' (WLGs), have used their voice, diplomacy and influence to speak out on behalf of women. Working with AF, and created with support from the RHV programme, the activism and **campaigning of the WLGs** has resulted in tangible benefits for women and contributed to changing a culture that has often excluded women from decision making.

In each WLG, 50 women, representing different political parties and with affiliations to a broad cross-section of community and civil society organizations (CSOs), came together for the first time on one platform in order to develop mutual trust and strengthen the collective voice of local women. The WLGs are influential in their communities and have high levels of confidence and well-developed contacts. Despite their ideological and party political

The 'platform' of the WLG has brought together women from across the political spectrum, meaning they are focusing as women on women's issues.

differences, the women leaders think alike on many women's rights issues. They are able to work together to resolve local problems, such as violations of women's employment rights and cases of domestic violence.

'I believe that men and women are created equal and therefore should be treated equally...The time is past when women couldn't raise their voice against violence...I want to help local women influence local decision makers. Being a woman leader has helped me accomplish my goals and I will continue the struggle, with or without a platform.'

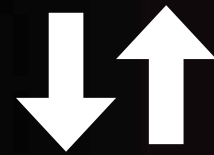
Razia Sultana, Rawalpindi WLG

Nearly 40 per cent of the women leaders⁷ had previously been elected in 2005 as Union Councillors⁸ and many had benefited from the political apprenticeship offered by the village-level Citizen Action Committees (CACs) formed in 1997 with funding from AF. With the Abolition of the Local Government Ordinance Act in 2009 and the subsequent collapse of elected representative bodies at the local level, a platform to hold elected representatives and government officials to account was lost. Following this loss, many Union Councillors suffered a crisis of confidence and a lack of direction.

However, under the mantle of the WLGs, the RHV programme offered a new framework for women's activism, shifting



WOMEN
LEADERS
GROUPS



WOMEN
LEADERS



COMMUNITY
ACTION
COMMITTEES

KAUSAR RAJPUT, WLG LEADER AND CHAIR OF THE LOCAL
HEALTH COMMITTEE IN TANDO JAM. PHOTO: IRINA WERNING

the focus from working with women political leaders to supporting women activists. Of today's WLG members, 85 per cent have been with the group for more than two years and just under half have been members since the project began.

While allowing for variations between the 30 WLGs, their aims can be summarized as:

1. To act as catalysts for activism within their constituency; to defend and promote individual and collective women's rights;
2. To be representatives for marginalized women;
3. To work as a women's collective to raise women's voice at local and district levels, and, with AF's support, at the provincial and national levels as well.

Qamar Bano and the computerised national identity card campaign

Today, over 5,000 Hindu women in Jacobabad possess computerized national identity cards (CNICs), a feat which would not have been possible without the relentless efforts of social activist, political figure and WLG Jacobabad member, Qamar Bano.

Qamar Bano's personal motto is '*All human beings have a right to basic provisions in life irrespective of caste, creed or religion*'. Following this, she chose the CNIC campaign as a first step towards improving the quality of life for local Hindu women.

The Hindu community in Jacobabad is built on traditional values and, partly as a reaction to the persistent social oppression it has faced, it remains largely hidden from view. The women in this community are often housebound and lack formal education, limiting their social mobility and their ability to interact with the outside world. Few have CNICs, yet without one, they are not able to vote, and cannot use a bank, buy property, claim inheritance rights or get credit.

Having chosen to work within this context, Qamar's campaign to increase women's use of CNICs faced the considerable challenge of convincing Hindu women of the benefits of having one. To gain their confidence, Qamar set up a five-day camp at their *Mandir* (place of worship) and spoke to them directly on the importance of having an identity card. In this way Qamar established a level of trust which gave the women the confidence to register for their CNICs.

There is great symbolic value for a woman to own an identity card in her own right, not as a wife or daughter, but as an individual with an independent identity and independent rights. With an identity card in their hands, Hindu women can assert their legal rights and make full use of various government initiatives. One recent recipient of a CNIC, Aneela Moti Ram, admits that it has resolved many problems:

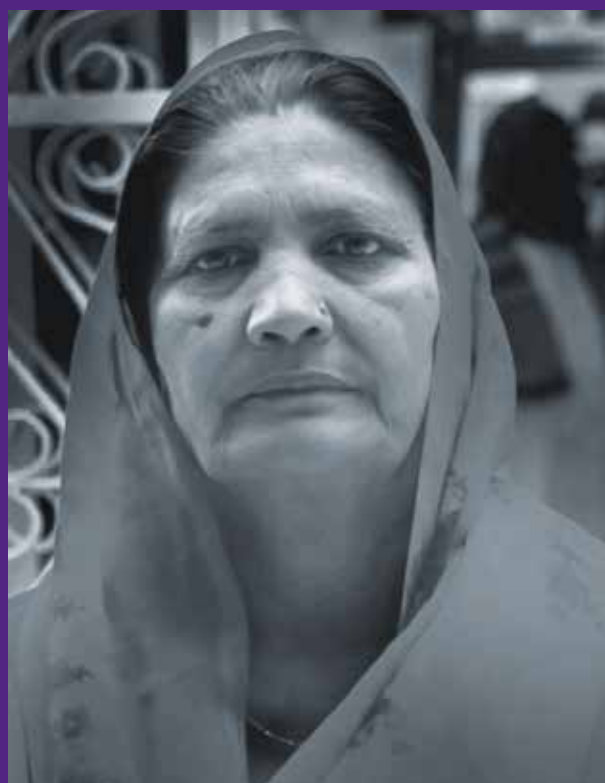
getting a passport, travelling, filling forms at her children's school and accessing other facilities have become possible and easy. For many women like her, this is the first step towards building lives of independence and empowerment.

Qamar has immense faith in WLGs; she believes that the strength of 50 is far greater than that of one. This has bolstered her confidence and resolve to achieve what is still not possible for many underprivileged women across Pakistan.

A video of Qamar Bano describing her thoughts on this issue can be found on the RHV website:

<http://raisinghervoice.ning.com/video/setting-the-precedent-rights>

BELOW: QAMAR BANO, WOMEN'S LEADER AND ACTIVIST, JACOBABAD WLG.
PHOTO: AURAT FOUNDATION



What have the WLGs achieved?

‘Initially I would be accompanied by my brother when I went to government offices, now I have the confidence to interact with government officers alone.’

WLG General Secretary, Abbotabad.

The achievements of the WLGs, both as a collective and as individual leaders, are numerous and powerful. They have fought the injustices that strike at the heart of women’s personal freedoms and dignity, including their right to live free from the fear of violence. These achievements have been possible in this difficult context through AF’s culturally sensitive policy of promoting personal transformation, by building the mentoring and pastoral-support capabilities of the women leaders to reach more marginalized groups of women. Equally important has been the role of women leaders and AF in creating an enabling and safe environment, in which changes in attitudes, policy and behaviour can develop.

Where WLGs are present, women are daring to speak out more in public spaces, challenging politicians and holding local authorities and businesses to account.

‘Let’s commit ourselves not to vote for you if you don’t vote for the Domestic Violence Bill.’ WLG Punjab

WLGs have actively encouraged women to stand for election in decision-making bodies. In Punjab, where there are 15 WLGs, 20 of the 54 social welfare posts in Jhelum are held by women. Also in Punjab, on average five to six women leaders per district have joined district-level committees on education, gender mainstreaming and gender justice. Similarly, two to four women leaders per district in Sindh Province have joined such committees. In Hafizabad District, Punjab, when there were no women on the *zakat* (Islamic relief fund) committee, the WLG filed a court order to enforce the legal minimum female representation of 15 per cent and campaigned for more women to come forward to join. 1,200 women have now joined the 670 committees in the district, of which five are now headed by women⁹ and 300 are RHV members, largely due to the strong advocacy of WLG members. This same pattern is spreading to other provinces, a change led by AF and the WLGs.

Atia Batool WLG Hafizabad member and entrepreneur believes passionately that eventual inclusion of 15 per cent female chairpersons will ensure transparency in *zakat* fund allocation and boost development.

WLGs, in consultation with CACs and other community constituencies, have been the driving force behind the

creation of a Women’s Manifesto for political parties. Ninety WLG members ran for political office in the 2013 election.¹⁰ *‘In politics it is very important for women to join. Until women do, they cannot fight for their rights. If a woman stays in her home she cannot fight for her rights’* says Kausar Rajput, WLG leader in Tando Jam, Sindh Province. This shows the extent to which women are entering political spaces, to articulate their vision of the rules of political engagement and organization.

WLGs have played a major role in mobilizing women to register for CNICs. Lack of knowledge, traditional confines and misinformation has prevented women from gaining their rightful ‘formal’ identity. Owning an official document as an individual (not a wife or a daughter) is an immense boost to gaining a sense of an independent identity for women. Between 2008 and 2012, WLGs helped nearly 116,000 women obtain a CNIC.

Registration day at Khamberanwala village saw a poor turnout. Women leaders went from door to door to invite and reassure women. Eventually, 506 women registered and this rite of passage into a new found social identity has motivated women to seek additional information about voting, constitutional rights and how to gain access to other resources to improve their lives.

In 2010, women leaders played a proactive role in helping more than 16,000 women flood victims to replace lost identity documents, and to register for ‘Watan’ cards to benefit from government welfare schemes.

WLGs have helped women gain access to local resources, including the Benazir Bhutto Income Support (BIS) scheme, Zakat Committee social welfare grants and little-known statutory maternity leave grants. Supporting women to register for CNICs opened up the possibility for many to apply to the BIS scheme. In Hyderabad, the WLG was swamped by more than 2,000 families wanting a BIS application form, but a pre-requisite was a CNIC. By mobilizing NADRA¹¹ vans and helping women with form filling, in the space of two years, 1,500 women had received financial support from the BIS scheme.

The RHV programme and the WLGs recognized the important contribution that economic empowerment can make to political voice, and implemented a wide range of economic initiatives. One RHV advocacy aim related to increasing district level budget expenditure for women’s development schemes and promoting an enabling environment for the active political role of women.

Many women leaders have been moved to do more, outside of the programme. There is the example of Sunila, who set

up a vocational training centre to help women become more economically independent. There are also women lawyers who offer free legal advice to women survivors of violence.

‘I’ve seen women at the grassroots due to economic empowerment feel more confident and vocal which was not possible before the start of this project.’

Sandhya Shrestha, RHV Nepal
Co-ordinator visiting WLGs in October 2012

Linked to economic gains have been gains in women’s employment rights. Following the action of WLGs to register a worker’s union in 2009, 167 unfairly dismissed workers in Multan and another 87 in Lahore were reinstated. The Multan WLG, with assistance from the International Union of Food workers (IUF), were undeterred by repeated efforts by the government labour office to block them; they eventually won a case in the High Court to register a workers’ union in a Coca Cola factory. The same WLG lobbied to improve working conditions for over 200 women and men in Coca Cola plants.

The impact of WLGs on human rights is impressive. In tandem with AF, WLGs have been effective advocates for changes to both formal legislation and traditional decision-making structures, to ensure that women’s rights are respected. They have contributed to both national civil society and international calls for changes in key laws such as the Women Protection Act (2009); the Anti-Sexual Harassment in the Work Place Act (2010); the Acid Control

and Crime Prevention Act (2011); and the Anti-Customary Practices Act (2012).

Implementation of the Anti-Sexual Harassment in the Work Place Act has been actively monitored by WLGs. Not only are women in districts with active WLGs more aware of their rights in the workplace, but women leaders are increasingly holding employers to account.

A woman college teacher who had been harassed by a senior colleague took the matter up with Haripur WLG. They took the case to the college referring to the Harassment Act and the accused colleague was removed from their post.

At the district and community level, WLGs have become powerful pressure groups. Whether advocating for the resolution of cases of sexual abuse in local schools, or custody rights and the right to a dowry after a marriage breakdown following physical abuse, WLGs have spoken out and taken action against injustice. Gaining strength and finding safety in numbers, they have challenged exclusively male arbitration bodies, such as *panchayats* and *jirgas*,¹² who traditionally decide the fate – and this can sometimes mean death – of women and girls in family disputes. Several district-level authorities now refer disputes and cases of violence to WLGs and CACs, who then refer them to lawyers. This ‘suggests something of a systemic change in some instances of dispute resolution.’¹³



MONTHLY WLG ADVOCACY MEETING IN HAFIZABAD. PHOTO: AURAT FOUNDATION

PAKISTAN AND THE POLITICAL SPACE FOR PRO-WOMEN'S GOVERNANCE

The national landscape

The political, economic and social gains achieved by the actions of WLGs are all the more remarkable given the context. The political space available to women is restricted by multiple barriers, including misinterpretations of Islam, patriarchal institutions of both formal and informal justice and governance, complex geo-politics, and a failing economy.

With 180 million inhabitants, Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world. It ranks 146th out of 187 countries on the UNDP 2012 Human Development Index¹⁴ and has slipped from 112th on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2006, when the Index was started, to 134 out of 135 in 2012,¹⁵ although it fares significantly better (52nd) on political empowerment.¹⁶

Pakistan ranks 134th out of 135 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index, ahead only of the Yemen. Source: World Economic Forum

For many Pakistanis, the country's economic downturn is their number one priority. With annual inflation running at 11 per cent per year and economic growth averaging 2.9 per cent over the past four years, Pakistan is falling behind its neighbours. Although Pakistan was previously the second biggest exporter of textiles in the world and boasts a vibrant, innovative IT sector, its recent economic decline is reflected in its diminishing share of global trade - this fell to 0.18 per cent in 2011, while shares of global trade for India and China tripled and quadrupled respectively over the same period.

Disgruntled entrepreneurs point to political instability, corruption and policy failures as the top three disincentives for doing business in Pakistan.¹⁷ Domestically, the country's political leadership has seen a rising tide of dissatisfied entrepreneurs and workers.

In addition, the country's governance, economy and social fabric have also had to endure a series of **natural disasters**. These include earthquakes in 2005 and 2008, a cyclone in 2007 and, most recently, devastating floods in 2010 and 2011, in which an estimated 20 million people were affected.

Systemic corruption, see-sawing military coups, continuing states of emergency and power struggles between the military (which consumes 70 per cent of Pakistan's total budget) and the judiciary have been **shifting sands** for equitable and inclusive governance to put down roots.

The grim reality is that all too often women in Pakistan bear the brunt of poverty.

Women are less likely to be educated¹⁸

In 2010, for every 100 boys in primary school there were 82 girls, and in secondary school there were 76 girls to every 100 boys. In 2008, the literacy rate for females aged 15-24 was 61 per cent, and for males aged 15-24 was 70 per cent.¹⁹

Women are less likely to own land or assets

While women do over 60 per cent of the work in the agricultural sector, they are not recognized as 'farmers' because most do not own land. Many banks in Pakistan do not to accept the signature of a female witness in financial transactions (a result of the Law of Testimony), even though the head of Pakistan's central bank was, until recently, a woman.²⁰

Women are less likely to be political leaders

Although Pakistan's male to female ratio is 1.06,²¹ in the May 2013 election women won only 76 out of 342 seats in the National Assembly – including only 16 women elected on general seats;²² just over 3 per cent of the total number of candidates contesting general seats in the Assembly.²³ 37.32 million of the 85.7 million voters in the 2013 elections were women.²⁴

Women are less likely to be safe in the home and workplace

As many as 90 per cent of women in Pakistan have experienced domestic violence at least once.²⁵

Women have fewer opportunities for gainful employment

Seven million women have entered the labour force in the last decade, representing a 50 per cent increase;²⁶ however, studies by economists for the period 1997–2006 showed that the gender pay-gap has grown over the same period.²⁷

'It is very hard for women to do any work outside of the home. Men don't give us permission.' Haseen Musarat, WLG Leader, Sindh Province

Women have weaker access to justice

All bills relating to women must still pass before the Islamic Ideology Council, where, under the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, many acts of violence against women criminalize the woman. The 1961 Family Law gives women (and men) the right to seek divorce through the civil courts if the spouse can be proved to be 'at fault', but with minimum legal fees costing as much as \$300, a year's wage for many, it is unaffordable for most and can take many years.

Women have weaker access to adequate health care

Although maternal mortality rates (MMR) are improving, 14,000 women die in childbirth every year.²⁸

Women's political exclusion

Security concerns inevitably impact on individuals, affecting the framing of national politics and potentially dampening political participation, both of voters and candidates. Since

Osama Bin-Laden's assassination in April 2011 on Pakistani soil, missile attacks by US drones in tribal areas have more than doubled. At the same time 1,700 people have been killed in some 140 extremist attacks.²⁹

In equal measure, hopes and fears ran high in the run up to 2013 elections, marking the country's first democratic hand-over of power since its birth as a nation in 1947. In the event, unprecedented levels of political violence, with reports of 130 killed in the two weeks preceding polling day and 64 on the day itself,³⁰ did not deter Pakistan's voters and candidates. On 11th May, 161 women ran for office – an increase of nearly 130 per cent – and voter turnout increased to 60 per cent – up from 40 per cent in 2008. 'The turnout in defiance of the threats against the process was an extraordinary vote of confidence in democracy itself,' commented MEP Richard Howitt to an Islamabad news conference.³¹

Permeating the lack of political voice of Pakistan's women – and other marginal groups – are the **cultural and social norms**, founded in a politicization of Islam and a misinterpretation of the Koran, as seen in Sharia law, which perpetuate discrimination against them. Cultural constraints restrict women's mobility and, although they contribute the majority of unpaid household labour, as well as other forms of work, this is often unrecognized. There is a disconnect between constitutional rights and customary or Islamic laws, with the latter making it harder for women to own land, vote, travel or have equal access to justice. In the absence of a functional system of justice, women are often used as 'compensation' in grievance cases and have little redress as victims of violence.³²

In a country where multiple forms of **violence against women and girls** exist, governance work, such as RHV's programme, is even more vital. However, this needs to be supported by solid analysis, risk assessment, mapping of support systems and structures, and strategic thinking about prevention of, and support for, victims of violence.



ARBAB ZADI, GHELPUK VILLAGE, SINDH PROVINCE. PHOTO: IRINA WERNING

DESIGNING A PRO-WOMEN'S GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME

Partners for change – Aurat Foundation and Oxfam

Founded in 1986, AF's origins as an information centre still show in its commitment to documenting and communicating its work.³³ Over time AF has shifted from information gathering and dissemination to building the capacity of decision makers and local women to use information for effective advocacy and lobbying. With headquarters in Islamabad, offices in all four provinces,³⁴ and active work in 100 out of 120 districts, it has a strong advocacy and campaigning base. AF's advocacy strategy is two-pronged: 1) **developing the advocacy capacity of poor and marginalized citizens (including women)** to speak up and negotiate with traditional and formal power holders; and 2) engaging in high-level advocacy and **strengthening of civil society actors to create an 'enabling environment'** for the promotion of pro-poor rights. AF's three core programmes are: information for grassroots action and organization; strengthening citizen advocacy and action; and affirmative legislation and policy development.

Pakistan is not a new area of work for Oxfam. In 1973, Oxfam started to support local partners and work with government authorities to improve the livelihoods of those living in poverty and to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by disasters and conflict. The RHV programme's partnership with AF built on Oxfam Pakistan's support for AF's work around ending violence against women and girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.³⁵ The RHV programme was an

opportunity to scale up the partnership. It was managed through a National Project Manager at the AF head office and Regional Managers in Sindh and Punjab provinces who also had responsibility for supporting WLGs in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

With the collapse of local government in 2009, DFID funding for the RHV programme enabled AF to reorient its work to providing support for activists and women leaders who had lost their political mandate, platform and connections. As the social and political base for WLGs, CACs were instrumental in putting forward women to join the WLGs. Fifty-two per cent of respondents in the RHV final evaluation said they belong to both a CAC and a WLG.³⁶ Fourteen per cent have a household member who belongs to a CAC and 78 per cent of them know a CAC member.

A trusting relationship between AF and the women's groups was a pre-requisite for the RHV programme.

AF promotes a culture of activism and volunteering, rooted in a mutually respectful and trusting relationship with CAC

and WLG members. For the RHV programme, with its aims of bringing about transformational change in a challenging and dynamic context, this was an essential starting point for the RHV relationship.

The programme landscape

Faced with the enormity of the challenge – a huge population, vast distances and multiple barriers to transformational change – the development partners needed to get the power analysis right. In the words of the Naeem Ahmed Mirza, Chief operating Officer, Aurat Foundation.

‘Understanding the complex interplay of cultural, social, economic and political factors underlying women’s inequality and lack of power in decision-making is particularly critical in a country like Pakistan. It is imperative to appreciate the different dimensions of empowerment in order to design successful interventions to promote gender equality and build inclusive, tolerant, social and democratic structures. In Pakistan it will be doubly important to analyse such factors not only at the macro level, but also at community and individual level. Interventions will need to take into account the intricacies of social norms and religious beliefs that may vary considerably, even between neighbouring communities, based on ethnic background, sectarian, caste and local customs.’

The country-level analysis, which identified the macro-level formal and informal power-holders and relationships, confirmed that the operating environment for a programme such as RHV, that sought to strengthen women’s participation in governance structures, would be very complex. Furthermore, given the high threat of violence, periodic risk assessments would need to be built into any programme planning.

‘Building the ideas together’ is how Uzma Zarrin³⁷ described the dialogue between Oxfam Pakistan, the RHV programme, AF and the CACs as they worked to deepen the power analysis. Applying the lens of a women’s governance programme, together they revealed the barriers and opportunities for change that would inform the Theory of Change and the programme design.

Power analysis – Understanding the barriers to change

Women’s weak access to formal governance structures:

- Although illegal, women are often prevented from voting, either through family pressure or signed agreements between contesting male candidates endorsed by religious leaders and traditional village committees.³⁸

‘In the 2013 elections, in Upper Dir women were barred from voting in the entire district and only one woman was able to cast her vote in Darora Union Council. In Lower Dir women were stopped from voting in seven constituencies and in Buner district women were not allowed to vote in seventeen Union Councils. Women were also barred from voting in several constituencies in Marda, D I Khan, Nowshera, Batagram and Malakand.’ AF

- Low levels of female representation in leadership. Prior to the 2013 elections, 20 per cent of members of the National Assembly and only 18 per cent of members in the provincial assemblies were women.³⁹ Shockingly, only three per cent of directly elected seats were held by women⁴⁰ and no women were included in the 2010 Constitutional Reform Committee.
- No women from assemblies or political parties are included in two of the most important decision-making processes of state and government: budget-making and finalization of party manifestos.
- Low levels of demand for governance and accountability. In 2012 it was reported that there were 11 million fewer women registered as voters than men on the electoral rolls.⁴¹
- Political parties are a product of the national culture with low regard for women’s political capital.⁴²

‘Women in Pakistan hardly interact with the state at all; the vast majority have no idea that they have rights under the law or that policies exist to support them.’

Farida Shaheed, sociologist

Women’s weak access to formal systems of justice:

- Under the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, incorporated in the Pakistan Penal Code, most sexual assault victims are deemed guilty of illegal sex.⁴³
- Since the Protection of Women Act 2006, rape (*zina bil jabr*) is now a criminal rather than a religious offence, but remains subject to different evidentiary standards and punishment. **Under evidentiary law, a woman’s testimony is given half the weight of a man’s.**

- The Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women voted to repeal the Hudood Ordinances in 2005, but this has not yet happened.
- Under the laws of *Qisas* and *Diyat*,⁴⁴ the sentence for murder is lessened when the victim's heir is a direct descendent of the accused, meaning that a husband guilty of murdering his wife is exempt from the maximum punishment if they have children.
- Pakistan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 with a key reservation 'subject to the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan'.

Women's weak access to informal governance:

- Women, and other marginalized groups,⁴⁵ are often excluded from informal and yet powerful traditional systems of governance.⁴⁶
- *Zakat* committees often do not have the legal minimum requirement of one woman on the panel.

Women's weak access to informal systems of justice:

- Tribal leaders and elders sitting on *panchayats*, *jirgas* or *hujra* act as arbitrators on a range of issues, from family disputes around land and property to water management. Women have no rights of representation or appeal.

'Generally when there are conflicts between two parties, we try to settle them by compensation. We ask the guilty party to pay the affected family by giving them a plot of land. It's only with those who do not own property or those who don't want to give it up that we are forced to sacrifice a girl, a sister or a daughter in compensation. It helps avoid violence.' Mali Sarfa, *panchayat* member

- Many *panchayats* are run by local elites, often feudal lords and landowners with high-level patronage.
- 'The *panchayats* are dangerous because they are not accountable to anyone; therefore they have an unlimited power and can order the practice of torture and physical abuse.' Rehman Rashin, representative for the Human Rights Commission in Multan, Southern Punjab.⁴⁷

Violence against women and girls:

- There are high levels of domestic violence, early forced marriage, acid attacks, kidnap, rape murder, and honour killings.⁴⁸
- Young girls and women are often the victims of traditional practices, such as the marrying of young women and girls to 'buy' reconciliation between parties.

- Reported rape cases increased from 778 in 2008 to 827 in 2011, but 'rape is under-reported as the victims and their families... keep the matter hidden because of the shame and disgrace attached to the crime.'⁴⁹

Attitudes towards women and girls:

- On average, women spend more than three times the amount of time on care activities than men,⁵⁰ as a result of strong gender inequalities seen all around the world in the way that care responsibilities are valued and distributed.
- Limited choices exist regarding number of children born, birth control and spacing between pregnancies.⁵¹
- There are lower levels of education and literacy among women. Only 34 per cent of women are literate as opposed to 64 per cent of men.⁵²

Political economy:

- The increased activities of the Taliban in the north, and the subsequent military operation and foreign involvement, have torn apart the social fabric of the area.
- Attacks by militant extremists on public spaces are on the rise meaning increased security risks for all Pakistanis, as well as additional restrictions to women's mobility amidst genuine concerns for their safety.
- Increasing inequalities in wealth and land ownership are dampening opportunities for economic empowerment, which can support women's political empowerment.

Power analysis – identifying the opportunities for change

AF identified two types of opportunity to further its work: allies and windows of opportunity.

Allies

- These include a significant number of confident and politically astute Pakistani women within and beyond the WLGs, together with groups of 'sympathetic' Pakistani men. Involving men to create an 'enabling' environment for women at household and community level was absolutely pivotal in broadening their support base and helping with logistics. Although WLGs are women-only fora, their roots are in CACs, which have both men and women members, and these links have been maintained and nurtured.

'Start where you have warm support... and they stand as examples, a strong presence for others.' Asim Malak, AF

- Pakistan has a vibrant civil society, as evidenced by large-scale popular demonstrations, as well as a relatively free and open press, and a number of respected NGOs, networks and coalitions.

- The media is a powerful body in Pakistan and a strong conduit for raising public awareness and calling politicians to account. This has proven to be a valuable ally.

Windows of opportunity

- Legislative changes have created opportunities to hold institutions to account over how well they protect women's fundamental rights. Legislative windows of opportunity were opened up by civil society's input into the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010), which enshrined the right to information, education from age five for girls and boys, and a fair trial, and prohibited discrimination based on sex.
- Administrative **decentralization** – devolving powers and resources to provincial assemblies⁵³ – has generated opportunities for grassroots women's groups to have a greater involvement in decision making, both as active citizens holding duty bearers to account and as elected leaders. Budget monitoring is a new area of work for RHV and the WLGs.⁵⁴

Decentralization brings power closer to grassroots women, but can reinforce traditional power bases in a feudal society

- Changes to the **rules of the political process** have created a more level playing field for women's active and effective political participation. These have included the introduction of 33 per cent minimum quotas for women's representation in parliament, and party political and civil society calls to declare political constituencies null and void where fewer than 10 per cent of women vote.
- Pre-electoral phases have offered opportunities for an intensification of governance work, notably around women's active citizenship, including voter education and holding parties to account, encouraging women to stand for election, and pushing for policies that respond to women's needs.
- Land reform has the potential to strengthen women's control of productive resources and improve their political status. A pivotal scheme in Sindh province set out to distribute 225,000 hectares of cultivable land to poor and landless farmers. Sadly, a study revealed that many Revenue Department officials had 'failed' to identify cultivable land in their districts, and land that was distributed was uncultivable due to salinity or risk of flooding.⁵⁵

In the face of so many barriers to women's political empowerment, it is essential to identify the positive openings and allies – legislation, men's solidarity, civil society, and elections.

From power analysis to developing a Theory of Change in a complex context

AF identified three key sets of factors as critical requirements to bring about transformational change for women's political participation and leadership. At the same time, the RHV global programme developed a shared Theory of Change to guide programme planning and monitoring, and to develop a better understanding of the individual, community and collective impact on women's personal, social and political empowerment. The RHV 'three spheres' model closely follows AF's framework, a reflection of the strong alignment between AF and the RHV programme.

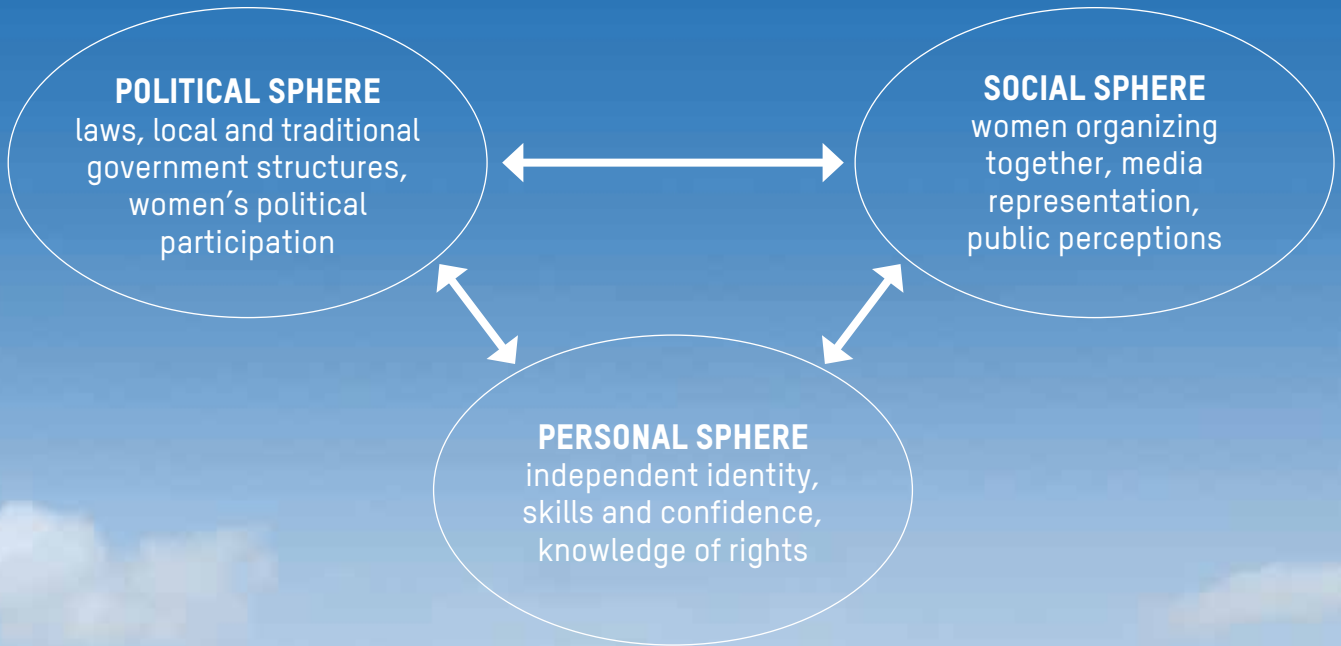
AF's framework for developing a transformational change programme:

1. Identify and work on the **political opportunities and constraints** facing women. (RHV's political sphere)
2. Support **mobilizing structures** (formal and informal organizations) and change makers. (RHV's social sphere)
3. Support framing processes that result in and from **cognitive liberation**. (RHV's personal sphere)

AF's strategies to overcome multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination for women are mindful of the need for creativity and cultural sensitivity. This has meant taking a **non-confrontational approach** to avoid women, or their advocates, being exposed to greater levels of violence or having their already narrow political space being closed down completely.

For change to be long lasting, and have the potential to expand beyond the small number of women directly involved with the RHV programme, AF's governance programme explicitly developed strategies for work **simultaneously in the personal, social and political spheres**. With the support of the RHV programme, AF set out to **increase women's individual and collective political agency**, providing direct capacity-building support for women leaders through the WLGs, and promoting an 'enabling' environment through efforts to influence formal and informal decision makers.

THEORY OF CHANGE



AFTER MONTHS SLEEPING 'UNDER THE SKY' FOLLOWING A DISPUTE WITH HER LANDLORD, NEETAN KOHLI (FAR-LEFT), WL6 MEMBER IN HATRI, HYDERABAD, HAS RETURNED TO HER HOME AND TO WORK IN THE FIELDS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE WL6S (2012). PHOTO: IRINA WERNING

HOW TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

Working in the PERSONAL sphere (independent identity, skills and confidence, knowledge of rights)

First steps: developing a political identity

'Having a CNIC is as crucial as having a name. It is your identity.' Naziran Bibi, Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh Province

WLG participation in the computerized national identity cards (CNIC) national registration campaign was a critical first step to developing and deepening the political identity and voice of women in their communities.

WLG support for individual women to register for CNIC cards not only opened up previously marginalized women's access to a range of services and resources, but it also introduced them to a new set of relationships. Besides being able

Tangible and immediate benefits for women strategically boosts the popularity of WLG leaders.

to vote, women with CNIC cards can independently apply to the Benazir Bhutto Income Support (BIS) scheme and, following the 2010 and 2011 floods, they were able to claim government compensation. With these benefits come opportunities for women to interact and enter public spaces, helping them to have a direct relationship with duty bearers.

'Your vote has not been registered, so you stay at home and cook, while we cast our votes' our family members say. Now I will be able to cast my vote according to my choice.' Anwara Bibi, helped by Sialkot WLG to get her CNIC

AF and WLG members strengthened registration initiatives at the community level by working with the NADRA and local decision makers to improve access to registration services. In Sialkot (Punjab Province), the WLG persuaded local government representatives to get government vehicles out to women in the rural areas and to make Fridays a women-only registration day. Between 2008 and 2012, nearly 116,000 women obtained their CNIC cards, as a result of the outreach and connections of WLGs.

Developing inclusive and collective leadership

AF chose to work with women leaders to develop their political leadership skills and enable them to support women in their communities. Deeply rooted work around personal transformational change was facilitated indirectly through

support for women leaders living in the communities that they represented as activists, rather than through government or civil society intervention. Given the cultural and religious sensitivities, supporting role models who have essentially emerged from the same context and begun the process of change themselves, proved to be a powerful strategy.

‘The basic premise of this programme, embedded in a rights-based approach, is that change has to come from within.’ AF

Not unlike a ‘training of trainers’ approach, AF’s training support for WLGs focused on developing their capacity to support CACs, and other community constituency members, to act on key women’s empowerment and governance issues.⁵⁶

AF supports WLGs directly, through training, exchange visits and information sharing. WLGs have organized themselves into thematic sub-groups focusing on education, health, legal rights and social networking. WLGs’ informal directories of members’ skills and contacts, and formal directories of local service providers and assistance to support referrals are highly valued by women leaders. The multiplier effect of contacts and information increases the potential for support and influence, and safety in numbers reduces the risk of individuals being threatened with violence.

‘It is said that one and one is eleven. Alone, one person is only one, but, when another person joins, they gain the power of eleven.’ Razia Mudasser, Attock WLG

Solidarity between the WLGs is reflected in the remarkable response from WLG members who sent donations to the WLG in Nowshera, an area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province severely affected by the 2010 floods.

The success of the WLGs is in part the result of high levels of political literacy among their members and their proximity to decision makers – women were able to leverage their political connections, while still remaining rooted in their communities.

AF explicitly chose to work with women of influence rather than the most marginalized. These women served as role models to catalyse personal transformation.



A 2010 PROTEST RALLY IN ISLAMABAD CO-ORDINATED BY THE WLGS AGAINST PROPOSALS TO AMEND WOMEN’S QUOTAS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT. PHOTO: AURAT FOUNDATION

Working in the SOCIAL sphere – women organizing together, media representation and public perceptions

AF's work in the social sphere is primarily focused on creating an **enabling environment** for women's political participation and leadership. AF has two interconnected strategies:

- 1) Developing women leaders' capacity through the WLGs to build and promote community activism;
- 2) Working with political gatekeepers to open up the political space for women to participate effectively.

'In communities that are traditionally drawn on family, religious, community and political lines, a neutral forum is a new social phenomenon.' Draft RHV Pakistan Final Evaluation, April 2013

The most successful initiatives, such as voter registration and work around domestic violence, also involve AF capitalizing on 'historic' windows of opportunity, including the introduction of new legislation and elections.

Building community activism

AF's capacity-building support aims to enhance women leaders' capacity to:

- defend, represent and advocate on behalf of women in formal and informal political spaces, at community, district and provincial level;

- provide practical and moral support to women in their communities and act as role models;
- encourage and promote more women to become active citizens and to take up leadership positions.

AF's support for women leaders has enabled them to speak confidently, ask probing questions, collect women's views and report back on a range of issues affecting the daily lives of women in Pakistan.

AF has helped WLG members travel to observe women members of the provincial assemblies in action, as they call to account and challenge senior government officials and civil servants. AF's facilitation enables women leaders to build their confidence, skills and contacts at senior levels. The final evaluation of the RHV Pakistan programme⁵⁷ confirmed that capacity-building workshops have been comprehensive and of a high calibre, equipping women leaders with topical and accurate information to perform their roles as advocates and guardians.

Excellent opportunities for networking and development of synergies have also been made through linking the RHV programme to other AF and Oxfam projects and campaigns; including AF's Gender Equity Programme and Oxfam's We Can campaign. In the final evaluation survey, 113 WLG members said they are affiliated with another AF programme.

At the beginning of 2012, when asked, around 70 per cent of the 1,500 women leaders stated they would maintain their involvement with the programme and with the CACs after the RHV programme closed in 2013. The most recent AF consultation meetings with WLGs gave an estimate of five per cent of their members who will stand in the provincial elections.



KAUSAR'S SON KHALID HAS BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE OF HIS MOTHER'S WORK: 'I WANT TO GIVE THE MESSAGE TO THE WORLD THAT MY MOTHER WORKS A LOT FOR US. AND SHE DEALS IN HARD TIMES OF PEOPLE, SHE HELPS THEM. ... I AM VERY HAPPY THAT MY MOTHER FIGHTS FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHER PEOPLE, SHE HELPS THEM TO GET THEIR RIGHTS AND I WANT OTHERS TO DO SIMILAR THINGS.' PHOTO: TANDO JAM

Ending honour killings in Bahadur Khan

The Pakistan model, working with 1,500 district-level women activists and decision makers, is a good example of developing a leadership model that can bridge the gap between community-level priorities and national-level influencing and lobbying.

Razia Mudasser is a member of the Attock WLG. They are committed to changing perceptions and creating awareness among women and members of the community around women's rights. As women leaders, Razia and her counterparts collectively counter and resolve incidences of violence or injustice against women.

Razia was called to Bahadur Khan, a small conservative village in Tehsil Hazro, to the north west of Islamabad, where honour killing has been a customary way of justice. When 17-year old Khalida was murdered by family members after refusing a forced marriage to an elderly man, Razia called on her working relationship with community leader, Muniba Bibi, and her influence with local duty bearers, to encourage and support Khalida's mother to take a stand for justice for her daughter. Together the women reported the murder to the police and commenced criminal proceedings against the family members responsible for Khalida's murder. Razia and Muniba also ensured that the District Police Office conducted a post mortem to confirm the true cause of death and gather vital evidence for the trial.

Despite strong opposition and harassment, the WLG maintained its pressure on the local *panchayat* until they agreed to end the inhumane tradition. To prevent the *panchayat* reneging on its commitment, the WLG secured a written statement, which would stand up in court. Since the landmark decision, no incidence of honour killing has taken place in Bahadur Khan.

'Our unswerving stance prevailed in breaking a long standing tradition as the panchayat took the landmark decision to end honour killing in Bahadur Khan village.' Razia Mudasser, Attock WLG

Several pro-women laws – dealing with harassment at the workplace, sexual harassment, anti-women

practices and acid throwing – have been passed by Parliament during the last decade.

Many of these began as private members bills and owed much of their success to the women's caucus, but ending domestic violence seemed to elude the law makers because many male members privately believed – and even publicly stated – that they had the right to punish and chastise the women of their households.

AF worked relentlessly for the passage of legislation against domestic violence by the Sindh Assembly in collaboration with jurists, lawyers and human-rights activists. They were supported by the women legislators of the Sindh Assembly. AF's advocacy was strengthened by the quality of data collected on violence against women. AF lawyers debated the legislative provisions clause by clause and lobbied Sindh's lawmakers for five years.

At provincial and national levels, AF was effective in developing the advocacy and lobbying strength of RHV's Women Leaders. Women leaders have demonstrated outside provincial assemblies in Sindh and Punjab, carrying banners and demanding the right for an end to impunity, and support for the victims of domestic violence, reported to be a reality in every third household.⁵⁸

Capitalizing on their connections to provincial level parliamentarians, women legislators and district council members, women leaders have maintained the momentum to ensure that the draft Bill reflected the women's agenda and was not forgotten. AF played an important role as a convener, inviting influential figures to roundtable discussions with the women's leaders the evening before any provincial assembly regarding the redrafting of the bill.

In 2013, in the same week as the 103rd International Women's Day celebrations, the Domestic Violence Bill was approved by the Sindh Assembly. The WLGs and AF will continue their advocacy and lobbying for approval in Pakistan's other provinces and to ensure that legislative gains have meaning in the lives of Pakistan's women.

Building an enabling environment for women's political leadership and participation

AF works at the national level as an active member of Pakistani civil society and supports WLGs at the provincial, district and community level to work with a wide range of political gatekeepers, including traditional decision makers and opinion leaders, political parties, the media and other CSOs.

(i) Working with political gatekeepers and forming alliances with decision makers and opinion leaders

From household to national level in Pakistan, men are the traditional decision makers. AF tries to develop culturally sensitive strategies to 'reward' male supporters of women's empowerment, for example by helping them to benefit from positive media coverage broadcasting recognition for their contribution, and inviting them to meetings with other influential members of the community.

'We need AF to work with men for change.'
Jehlum WLG

Approximately 40 per cent of CACs now have women co-ordinators thanks to the strong women whose abilities have been 'nurtured in the WLGs' and crucially, to an increase in 'support for women's leadership' engendered by the RHV programme.⁵⁹

Although AF does not choose to work with individual religious leaders, it does nurture relationships with progressive religious scholars to build understanding and dialogue around positive calls for gender equality in religious texts. Similarly, AF and the WLGs have engaged with traditional decision-making structures, such as *panchayats*, and built relationships with other representatives of power, including the police and NADRA, to promote women's political participation and leadership.

The purpose of developing these relationships is both practical and strategic: to foster attitudinal change, increase political space, and provide logistic and material support.

(ii) Working with the government and political parties

Where laws and policies to protect women's rights are in place, if duty bearers are unaware of them, or lack the knowledge or will to implement them, AF and WLGs provide information, identify gaps and call duty bearers to account on shortfalls between practice and policy.

As previously noted, many of the WLGs were elected as Union Councillors and a significant number have links to political parties. The RHV programme recognizes the need to find ways for women to engage directly with political parties, to embed political change by influencing policy development. This may range from exercising active citizenship rights or party membership, to standing as a party political candidate or government office holder.⁶⁰

'The structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in the political life of their country.' Mariz Tadros⁶¹

AF has a direct line of communication and influence to party politics at district and provincial levels, and indirectly promotes changes to the rules of the political system that will make it easier for women to enter party politics or make their voice heard by political parties. This influence has supported WLGs to effectively carry out their mandates.

Many politicians in Pakistan are unaware or unwilling to frame the challenge as one of unequal power relations and a resistance to change. In the words of Sandhya Shrestha, RHV Nepal Co-ordinator visiting the RHV Pakistan programme in October 2012,

'Government officers see women as beneficiaries and don't think about their workload, right to freedom of mobility and choice. They believe government is doing an excellent job providing livelihood support for women, women can work within the home and have no need to go out.'

Women leaders value the political leverage and supportive environment of the WLG platform, in sharp contrast to the normal operating environment within political parties. The WLG platform provides a 'safe haven' for developing consultation, representation and advocacy skills. Supported by AF's national and provincial level work, the WLGs are better able to influence changes in the party political system, with this reservoir of legitimacy and support, than they would be as isolated individual women party members.

(iii) Working with the media

AF works with the media at a national level to develop common messages on key governance issues for translation and broadcast in local languages on local channels. This is complemented by collaboration with local media to raise the profile and promote the achievements of WLG members and other women activists. Similarly, AF help to increase media coverage of local WLG events by inviting parliamentarians and politicians as guests of honour.

In March 2013 alone, AF had 12 articles published in the national press supporting women's political participation. These included a celebration of the women's movement in Pakistan, calls for election monitoring from a gender perspective and increased quotas for women's seats.

(iv) Strengthening civil society

Strengthening links between women, irrespective of their background, is crucial to advancing women's political rights. Although there is a 'typical' WLG member (literate, articulate and well-connected), the groups also draw women



WLG MEMBER, DR NASEEM SHAKEEL, HELPS WITH VOTER REGISTRATION IN SIALKOT, PUNJAB PROVINCE. PHOTO: AURAT FOUNDATION

together from a variety of backgrounds in terms of religion, ethnicity, rural/urban location and age. Women leaders are committed to representing their community's interests and there are examples of outreach to include minority groups. One example already mentioned is Qamar Bano's work in Jacobabad to extend the benefits of owning a CNIC to Hindu women. This personal, woman to woman, contact in their own 'safe' environment, encouraged more than 5,000 Hindu women to register.

The RHV programme has created opportunities for exchange and solidarity between WLGs across the 30 districts. Being WLG members has given women the opportunity to make meaningful contacts, to call service providers, law enforcement agencies or policy makers to account, and to access resources. For example, by networking with lawyers and other CSOs, WLGs have secured legal aid for victims of violence.

Work in the POLITICAL sphere – laws, local and traditional government structures, and women's political participation

RHV with AF working to change the rules of party political engagement

RHV's goal of increasing women's political participation and leadership is built on the role that political parties and processes have to play in developing more gender-sensitive policies and practices in the rules of political engagement.

'Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only human rights, they are also imperative for achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Women's political participation is central to these goals, and political parties are among the most important institutions for promoting and nurturing such participation.'
Julie Ballington⁶²

Advocacy that brings about transformational change ideally brings short-term benefits and builds capacity for long-term movement for change.

With AF support, the RHV programme has sought to increase women's political participation through reform of political institutions and targeted support for women party activists.

AF is optimistic that the renewed process of administrative decentralization provides opportunities for women to be closer to decision-making, and creates opportunities for more women to enter politics, hopefully as pro-women advocates. AF is pushing for the immediate restoration of local government with elections held on a party basis, and the number of seats reserved for women to be nearly doubled, from 17 per cent to 33 per cent.

'The most effective strategies to increase women's participation in political parties combine reforms to political institutions with targeted support to women party activists within and outside party structures, women candidates and elected officials.' Mariz Tadros⁶³

With this in mind, in the months leading up to the May 2013 elections, WLGs, in consultation with their CACs and other community constituencies, developed a manifesto listing the minimum acceptable requirements of political party engagement (see Annex). As part of the process of

producing the manifesto, AF organized a series of senior stakeholder meetings across the four provinces, and enlisted the support of development practitioners and human-rights activists. Following its launch, together with the Parliamentarians' Commission for Human Rights, AF held a two-day national consultation with civil-society representatives and women legislators representing all the major political parties to examine 'Women's Empowerment in Political Parties' Election Manifestos'. The fact that the grassroots demands of women have penetrated the national media and inner circles of influence, achieving a high level of 'buy in' from political parties, reflects the added value of the WLG's partnership with a well-connected, highly regarded, media and communications-savvy NGO such as AF.

'Local government serves as a political nursery wherein people are groomed and creates space for people to directly contribute to policy development.' AF

Broad cross-party agreement was reached within the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on the issue of declaring election results null and void in constituencies where less than 10 per cent of votes cast are from women. However, in spite of civil society and party political backing, it was not endorsed by parliament and so the law could not be passed. There has been agreement on the need to introduce minimum quotas for numbers of women in party politics – 33 per cent of party members and 33 per cent of leadership positions. Remaining high on the agenda is the push for publicly accessible gender-disaggregated data, ordered by administrative unit, to effectively scrutinize women's political participation. Political parties will also be obliged to provide gender-disaggregated statistics to monitor the numbers and proportion of women in executive and leadership positions in their party. In addition, AF called for parties to be required to put forward a minimum 15 per cent of women to contest general, safe seats. As a result of continuous advocacy by women's rights groups, women were included in several parties' 2013 election manifesto committees and AF continued high-level engagement with all major parties to take forward the WLG proposals.

AF was active in pushing for the ECP to fulfil its mandate to promote women's political participation, through measures such as: specialized voter education for women; increased integrity of the over 72,188 polling booths across the country,⁶⁴ including provision for women only stations or, as a minimum, booths to be staffed by women; and stronger action against those who prevent women from voting.

RHV working to change the legislative environment

It is crucial that laws to improve the daily lives of women are introduced or implemented to promote their political participation and effective leadership, and that laws which act against this are repealed. The work of the RHV Pakistan

programme has 'contributed to the passing of ground-breaking legislation concerning women.'⁶⁵

'No person or forum, except for the State's legal institutions, has the right or power to punish and penalize whether in the name of custom or religion.' WLG/ AF Women's Manifesto for Political Parties

Real life testimonies and the experiences of the WLGs and the women in their communities demonstrate that AF has been an indefatigable, prolific and well-connected advocate. Pushing for the approval of the Domestic Violence Bill in Pakistan, AF has collaborated with, and often been the hub, for a network of alliances that include the Insani Huqooq Ittehad (IHI) Network, End Violence against Women and Girls (EVAW/G) alliance, Women Action Forum (WAF), Fight against Dowry Advocacy Network (FADAN) and Dosti YAN (Youth Advocacy Network).

Legislation regarding domestic violence was not passed by law-makers because many male members privately believed – and even publicly stated – that they had the right to punish and chastise the women in their households. After it was denied success at national level, jurisdiction for the Domestic Violence Bill was devolved to individual provinces. Taking advantage of this, AF worked tirelessly with women legislators, jurists, lawyers and human-rights activists at both provincial and federal levels.

AF lawyers spent five years lobbying law-makers in the 'stern environment of the Sindh Secretariat, to literally win the hearts and minds of the members of the bureaucracy.'⁶⁶ In March 2013, the Sindh Provincial Assembly approved the Domestic Violence Bill, which will become an act bearing the force of the law. It was successful as a result of patient and sustained team work. The effort and contribution of AF was acknowledged by law-makers from the floor of the Provincial Assembly, when the provincial legislation was tabled and passed. The Sindh Assembly also unanimously passed two resolutions moved by the treasury benches and the opposition, to pay tribute to the 'dynamic women' of Pakistan.

Pressure will be maintained by AF and other CSOs in the other three provinces to follow suit, and to ensure the punishment fits the crime. Currently the punishment for different forms of violent crime varies from province to province.

The impact of AF's work has also reached beyond Pakistan's borders. For example, the UK Home Secretary's Operational Guidance Notes on Pakistan relating to domestic violence has been informed by AF's highly respected quarterly journal *Legislative Watch*, and other high quality reports.⁶⁷ These draw on the experiences of rural and urban women in the RHV programme, combined with statistical and analytical research. Furthermore, AF's reports have been cited in cases submitted to the European Court of Human Rights.

LEARNING POINTS

As the RHV programme comes to a formal close,⁶⁸ a number of learning points can be drawn from the experience of the WLGs in Pakistan alongside aspirations for what will be sustained in future. These learning points are documented as food for thought for gender and governance programming in other parts of the world.

The RHV programme has:

1. Encouraged the emergence of new types of women's organizations and networks.

i. AF's explicit choice to work with well-connected, literate and articulate women leaders as an entry point was politically astute and culturally sensitive. It would have been extremely difficult for an NGO, even a home-grown one, to have direct contact with the most marginalized women in

a way that would have enabled such sustained political activism and strategic influence.

ii. The WLGs have proven to be an effective model of linking community, district and provincial level political decision-making. AF provides a bridge to national policy and legislative fora.

iii. The WLG community increases members' confidence and influence due to safety and strength in numbers.

iv. The WLG platform has united women from different party political, ethnic, religious and geographic backgrounds, particularly when rallying around issues such as the Domestic Violence Bill.

2. Strengthened the links between women's organizations and decision makers.

i. The stronger collective voice of WLGs, both numerically and in terms of legitimacy, has increased their bargaining power and made them more attractive as allies, opening up access to decision makers.

ii. The WLG community provides an excellent apprenticeship for its members where they can develop their communications and advocacy skills to better influence decision makers.

iii. AF's excellent communications work has benefitted both Oxfam and other RHV country programmes, helping them to reflect on and learn from practical examples of effective governance work in difficult and insecure contexts.

'The gender gap in South Asia remains wide, and women in Pakistan still face significant obstacles. But there is now a critical mass of working women at all levels showing the way to other Pakistani women.'⁶⁹

'The 'theory of change' has been shown to be a useful conceptual model ... Oxfam Pakistan is 'in a position to advocate the use of the model in further programmes.'⁷⁰

3. Built capacity for grassroots pressure groups and alliances to influence legislation in ways that support women's access to political spheres and bring about lasting change.

The RHV Pakistan programme has increased the skills and confidence of the women leaders in the WLGs. While effective individual case work is critical to promoting activism and protecting and promoting women's voices, it is only when the systems and structures that marginalize women are challenged that real change happens. This can be seen in the influence on the development of provincial legislation as part of the decentralization process, and the development of the national Women's Manifesto.

4. Contributed to the development of new ways of thinking about transformative change for future governance programmes.

i. The RHV Theory of Change has been shown to be a useful conceptual model and Oxfam Pakistan is in a position to advocate the use of the model in further programmes. The final evaluation recommends 'fine tuning' the 'three spheres' model to reflect cultural differences, even within Pakistan. In relation to the personal domain, many responses suggested that 'there is little perceived difference between the self and the family'.⁷¹

ii. The added value to the WLGs of being linked to other AF and Oxfam projects provided opportunities for networking and creating synergies that will continue beyond the life span of the RHV programme, building a well-informed, well-connected movement for change.

iii. Monitoring and evaluation continues to be a challenge for this type of work and useful lessons could be learnt from the RHV Pakistan programme, both in terms of successes (strong on capturing women's voice/testimony) and weaknesses (weak baseline and under-staffed).

iv. Highly beneficial to the programme's success has been the relationship between Oxfam and AF, defined as 'strong and consultative... almost a single project team'.⁷²



ATIA BATOOL LEADING THE HAFIZABAD WLG IN A DEMONSTRATION (2012). PHOTO: AURAT FOUNDATION

CONCLUSION

AF is already building on the successes and lessons learnt from the RHV programme. Its collaboration with Gender Concerns International drew directly on the political and social capital of the WLGs to become more actively involved in Gender Election Monitoring.⁷³ It is hopeful that capacity building support will continue for the WLGs, but that a new stream of work will be developed around support for women parliamentarians. The RHV Pakistan Final Evaluation endorses the benefits of the RHV approach to governance programming in Pakistan, with recommendations for integration of the thinking and approaches in other programmes, not confined to governance.

'These women activists will continue, with or without support, this is their own vision, they are not working for any project.' Feroza Zahra, Project Officer, Oxfam Pakistan

During the RHV programme's life-span, there have been gains for women's political rights as active citizens and decision makers, as well as in holding decision makers, both formal and informal, to account. AF's contribution to the advancement of women's rights, including the approval of the Domestic Violence Bill in Sindh and pushing political parties on their policies and practices, has been nationally and internationally acknowledged.

The RHV programme is part of a rising tide of better educated, better connected women. Large scale investment by DFID and others in girls' education is paying dividends: 42 per cent of Pakistan's 2.6 million high school students are girls, an increase of 30 per cent over 13 years; just under half of Pakistan's 11 million university students and – topping India – 4.6 per cent of Pakistani companies' board members are women.

It is too early to make a full assessment, but a hopeful picture of increased women's political participation is emerging from the May 2013 elections. An increase of nearly 130 per cent in the number of women running for political office and long queues of women outside polling stations are historic landmarks. As the numbers of women in WLGs and CACs swells, the challenge will remain, individually and collectively, for their members to continue to provide and model influential, inclusive and accountable leadership.

And the last word must go to an RHV women leader,

'If there are 1,200 [elected female representatives] in Hafizabad, there will be an equal or even greater number...in other districts. Therefore, considering the total number from all districts, a lot is lined up for 50 Women Leader Groups and we want to rise to the challenge.'
Atia Batool, Hafizabad

ANNEX: PROPOSED WOMEN'S MANIFESTO FOR POLITICAL PARTIES DEVELOPED BY WLGS AND AF

'All mainstream political parties to ensure.....'

1. Women's political representation to be a minimum of 50 per cent in legislative structures.
2. Timely elections, 50 per cent tickets to be awarded to women candidates, and election commission to take steps to suspend elections in constituencies where women are prevented from voting.
3. Women party members to participate in all party decision-making structures.
4. Political awareness and registration of women voters in their respective constituencies.
5. Registration of repeal of discriminatory laws against women and engagement in reporting mechanisms on international commitments on gender equality.
6. Active support for approval of Domestic Violence Bill by the assembly using CEDAW legislative guidelines.
7. Gender-responsive legislation to protect the rights of women workers, including brick kiln workers, factory workers, farmer women and women in formal and non-formal sectors. This needs to reform labour policies and protect women from violence caused by traditions such as exchange marriage (watasata), early childhood marriage, marriage with Quran, Karokari, honour killing and the practice of using women as 'compensation' to settle disputes.
8. Thirty-three per cent of District Development Funds (DDFs) to be allocated to women social groups to design gender-promotion interventions such as child-care facilities for working women, special transport for factory women workers, skills development and IT centres for women, working women hostels and women's helpline.
9. Policy regulation at federal/provincial level for minimum 30 per cent quota for senior management positions in private and public sector organizations and to raise the upper age limit for jobs for women from 45 years.
10. Needs-based community demands for health and education to be met through government flagship programmes in the education and health sectors by extending positive support of Member Provincial Assembly (MPAs) and Member National Assembly (MNAs) in their respective constituencies around Pakistan.
11. Integrated planning for formal, non-formal and technical education for women and girls and removal of gender stereotypes in curriculum.
12. Efficient use and planning of Department of Bait-ul-Mal and Zakat and Ushar in favour of women's self reliance beyond mere welfare/charity.

Notes

1 <http://www.af.org.pk/election.php>

2 Formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province

3 A traditional form of local self-government.

4 'At an advanced stage of social and cultural development, usually marked by the existence of organized communities and an adherence to established conventions of behaviour.' (Oxford English Dictionary)

5 The RHV programme seeks to promote women's political participation and leadership in 17 countries around the world with funding from DFID's Global Transparency Fund. For more information see: <http://raisinghervoice.ning.com/>

6 1,500 women are members of the WLGs; for each of those, another five women on average have benefited from WLG work indirectly (7,500 women), with 25 more women supported for every woman indirectly supported (making a total of 187,500).

7 RHV Pakistan Mid-Term Review, February 2011. This is an internal Oxfam document – should you require more information, please contact Emily Brown, RHV Global Co-ordinator (embrown@oxfam.org.uk).

8 'Lowest' tier of local government, beneath Tehsil, Departmental and Provincial. Varying from province to province, WLG membership is roughly equally divided between ex-Union Councillors, NGO and CSO representatives, and government workers, including teachers and health workers.

9 RHV Pakistan Mid-Term Review, February 2011. *Op. cit.*

10 Draft RHV Pakistan Final Evaluation Report, April 2013. *Op. cit.*

11 National Database and Registration Authority, <http://www.nadra.gov.pk/>

12 A traditional tribal assembly.

13 Draft RHV Pakistan Final Evaluation Report, April 2013. *Op. cit.*

14 Human Development Report, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/PAK.pdf>

15 The Global Gender Gap Index (<http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>), introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities. The index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria for 135 countries, representing over 90 per cent of the world's population.

16 This sub-index is narrowly defined as the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, included is the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office for the last 50 years. No date is included for participation rates at local level.

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26 'Pakistan Employment Trends 2011', Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/Labour%20Force/publications/Pakistan_Employment_2012.pdf

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29 'Mapping US drone and Islamic militant attacks in Pakistan', BBC News South Asia, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10648909>

30 According to EU election observers, as reported by the BBC: 'Pakistan election: Sharif poised to take over as PM', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22506036>

31 *Ibid.*

32 Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2012) 'Evaluation of DFID's Bilateral aid to Pakistan', http://www.oecd.org/countries/pakistan/ICAI-per-cent20Pakistan-per-cent20Report_P1.pdf

33 AF has invested in recording the testimonials of women leaders both on paper and video. It also produces the influential *Legislative Watch* and regularly updates its website with press and communications work.

34 Punjab (Lahore), Sindh (Karachi), Balochistan (Quetta) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (Peshawar)

35 As part of the national WE CAN campaign, <http://wecanendvaw.org/>

36 Sample survey of 360 members of WLGs, taken from the draft RHV Pakistan final evaluation, April 2013. This is an internal Oxfam document – should you require more information, please contact Emily Brown, RHV Global Co-ordinator (embrown@oxfam.org.uk).

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54 Although not funded by the RHV programme, 30 women from 15 WLGs in Punjab province and duty bearers (government officials and parliamentarians) have been trained in gendered budget tracking to enhance women's ability to call to account and duty bearers' capacity to design and deliver gender equitable programmes.

55 Study carried out by Participatory Development Initiative (PDI) in collaboration with Oxfam Pakistan. For more information see: <http://www.oxfamlogs.org/asia/pakistan-fighting-for-land-rights-for-the-poor/>

56 AF Training Manual for WLGs, '*Pehla Qadam – first step*' is a reference point for women leaders and a capacity building tool for work with CACs.

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73 Collaboration with Gender Concerns International to monitor Pakistan's elections from a gender perspective and work to ensure that Pakistan's newly elected government will place women's political participation high on its agenda.

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Raising Her Voice was a five-year global programme to promote women's rights and capacity to engage effectively in governance at every level: raising women's voices, increasing their influence, and making decision-making more accountable to women.

Working through partners in 17 countries, Raising Her Voice received significant funding from the UK Department of International Development (DFID) Governance and Transparency Fund, and was co-ordinated by Oxfam GB.

This paper gives an in-depth analysis of the RHV experience of promoting women's governance in the culturally and politically constrained environment of Pakistan.

Cover picture: A rally in Hafizabad for Pakistan Women's Day. Photo: Aurat Foundation

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Front cover: Atia Batool leading the Hafizabad WLG in a demonstration (2012). Photo: Aurat Foundation

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