

Aawaz II: Stories of Change

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Table of Contents

Programme Overview..... 2

Inclusion..... 5

Social Cohesion..... 15

Child Labour 21

Gender-based Violence..... 25

Early and Forced Marriage 29

Programme Overview

Aawaz II works with local communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab to promote the rights of children, women, youth and other marginalised groups to strengthen and facilitate their development.

The British Council is leading the delivery of the Aawaz II community engagement component, facilitating awareness, empowerment and behaviour change for accessing services and rights and decreasing the acceptance of harmful and exploitative practices. As a result of focused behaviour change communication (BCC) and information and referral support to communities, the programme expects to reach two million direct and five million indirect beneficiaries.

Thematic Focus

Aawaz II seeks to address the discriminatory socio-cultural norms that create acceptance of child labour, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence (GBV) and community-based conflict.

Priority Groups

- Children
- Women
- Youth
- Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)
- Transgender Persons
- Minorities
- Other vulnerable and marginalised populations

Aawaz II aims to create awareness and behaviour change and increase citizen-state engagement to promote change in the harmful practices of child labour, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence (GBV), exclusion, exploitation and intolerance.

The programme works through a network of 19 district and provincial partners in 22 districts—9 in KP and 13 in Punjab—to provide information referrals, facilitate citizen-state engagement for the uptake of services, and enhance the capacities of local communities. To achieve these aims, Aawaz II has set up district and sub-district Aawaz Aagahi Centres (AACs), community-based and led Village Forums, District Forums and Provincial Forums. All forums have government and civil society membership. An important component of the programme is developing a critical mass of youth volunteers (aged 18–35) from these communities to promote behaviour change through Social Action Projects (SAPs).

This five-year long programme is managed by British Council with support from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Key Interventions

- Establishing community forums and providing capacity building and institutional support to forum members, which eventually generates ownership and empowers them to address behaviour change, reduce harmful practices, and adopt appropriate means of pre-empting community conflict without infringing on the rights of the vulnerable.
- Strengthening citizen engagement to effectively raise informed and focused demands. This is critical when engaging government duty bearers and elected representatives, when advocating for service provision, budgetary allocations, efficient and timely use of resources, or the protection of vulnerable groups' rights.
- Training and development of Aawaz Change Agents, who engage with communities through Social Action Projects (SAPs).
- Developing and disseminating behaviour change messages using interpersonal, print, radio and digital media.

FACTSHEET

(Statistics presented as of 30 April 2021)

17 MILLION
INDIVIDUALS

reached through 110
radio programmes
and 6,320 insertions

155,670
INDIVIDUALS

received IEC material

47,019

INDIVIDUALS
provided with
information on
key services

12,876

MEMBERS
in 582 Aawaz
Village Forums

10,360
INDIVIDUALS

participated in
capacity building events

5,428

REFERRALS
provided to
individuals

2,589

INDIVIDUALS
ACCESSED
SERVICES

1,015

EARLY
WARNINGS
raised

670 CONFLICTS
PRE-EMPTED

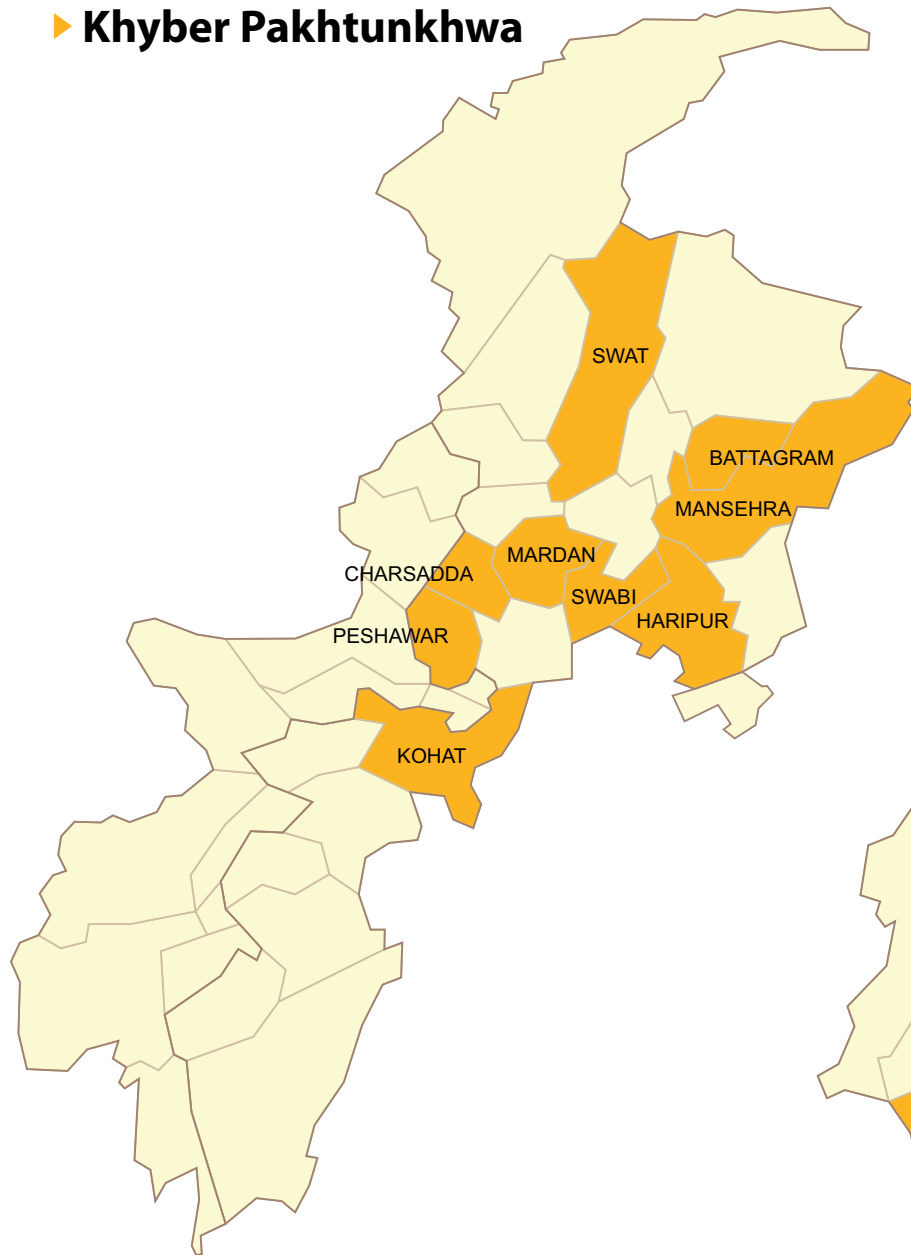
813 INDIVIDUALS
raised demands
with duty bearers

76 DIALOGUES
ORGANISED
ON AAWAZ THEMES

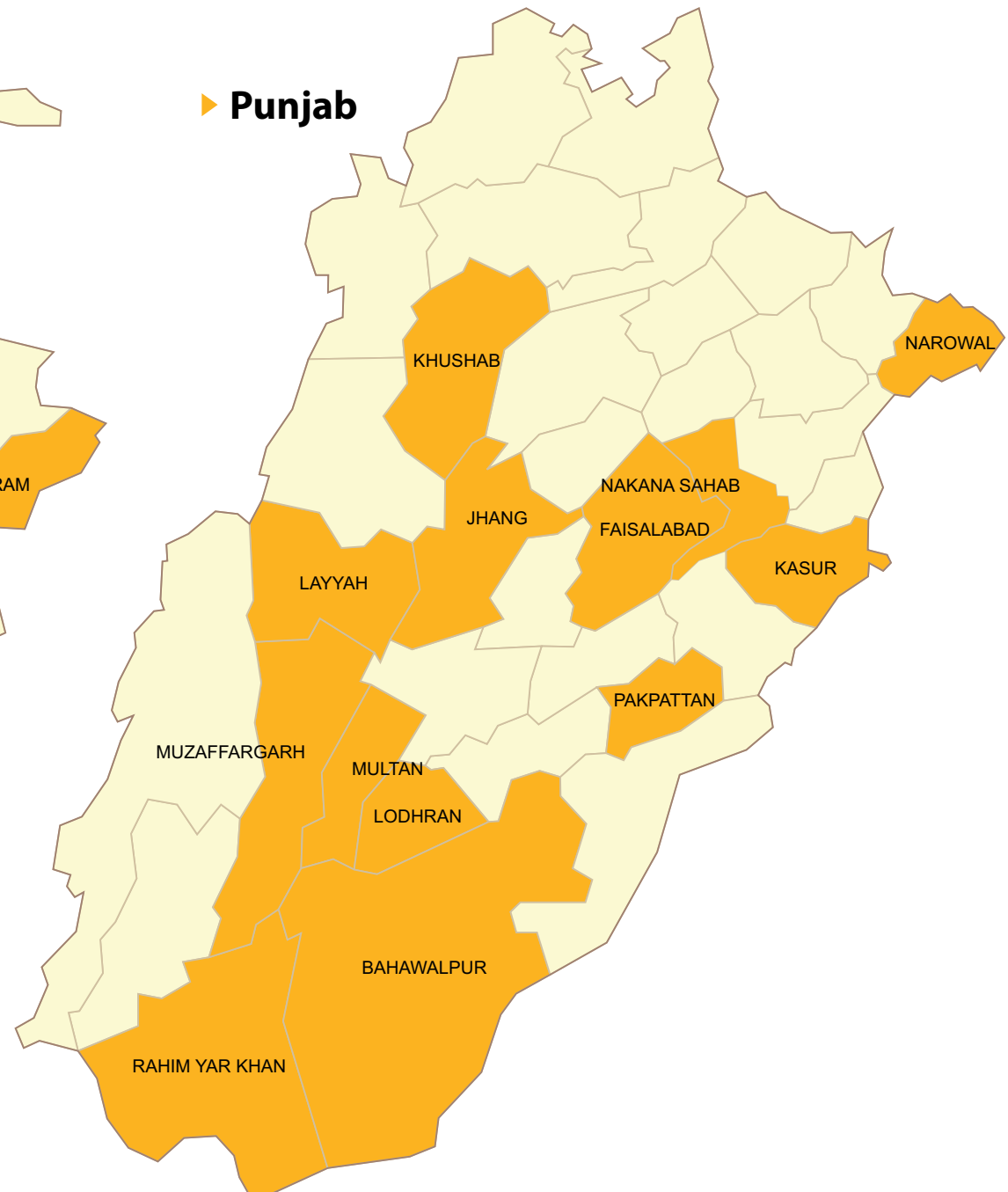
4,272
AAWAZ CHANGE
AGENTS TRAINED

Geographic Presence

► Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



► Punjab



Inclusion

Reducing Discrimination: Healthcare is Everyone's Basic Right

"I need dialysis every week depending upon the level of creatinine in my blood. However, I have been skipping dialysis because the local public hospital does not offer us free of cost services whereas a private hospital charges around PKR 5000-6000 per treatment, which I cannot afford," said Amanat Masih, a 63-year-old Christian community member from Narowal Tehsil, Punjab, while sharing details on his health issues.

Amanat Masih has worked as a Gardner throughout his life and doesn't have enough resources as he had spent most of his earnings on raising his four children. Amanat Masih shared

his healthcare issue, lack of resources, and the discrimination he faced at the local public hospital with Arfiksad Sitra Raja, a prominent member of the Christian community in Narowal and an active member of Aawaz District Forum in the area.

"Continuous pain in my kidney coupled with the worry to save money for paying the dialysis treatment fee created a massive challenge for Amanat. I felt sorry for him. Healthcare is a basic right of every individual, be it a Muslim or a Christian or a Hindu. As a regular member of the Aawaz District Forum, I raised the issue of non-availability of free dialysis treatment for Christian



Arfiksad Sitra Raja along with Amanat Masih as Amanat undergoes a kidney dialysis treatment at a local public hospital in Narowal.

community members and strongly advocated for the provision of free dialysis treatment for every individual without discrimination,” said Arfiksad Sitra Raja.

At the Aawaz District Forum, the concerns raised by Arfiksad Sitra Raja reached many key decision-making authorities, including the social welfare department and District Headquarter Hospital (DHQ) administration.

Raja, along with other District Forum members, discussed this issue with the hospital administration and urged them to allocate funds to treat non-Muslim patients as they are not eligible for the Zakat fund. They also met with the medical officer of the social welfare department and requested him to address this issue. After

rigorous follow-up, the district hospital administration allocated additional funds for the treatment of minorities apart from the Zakat fund, which is used to treat the patients from Muslim communities only.

With help from Aawaz II, Arfiksad Sitra has been able to reduce discrimination towards minorities as Amanat Masih and many other minorities now can receive free of cost kidney dialysis treatment at the local public hospital in Narowal.

Aawaz II helped District Forum member Arfiksad Sitra Raja raise voice for the provision of free dialysis services to minorities in Narowal and continues to work to ensure that their voices are heard with the local district administration.

Voices from the field



“Trans-women in Pakistan are being systematically left out of the mainstream social setup and have no political or social agency. They are denied access to healthcare and general wellbeing and lack knowledge and awareness on their basic rights as citizens of the country. Our Aawaz Provincial Forum is proactively working on projecting trans community in a positive light to enhance the social acceptance of trans individuals.”

Moon Ali

Transgender Community and Provincial Forum member

Moon Ali, a transgender person from Lahore who actively works for the betterment of the transgender community. She is an active member of the Punjab Provincial Forum.

Giving Voice to the Transgender Community

Aawaz II helps transgender community in Kasur, Punjab to acquire national identity cards through awareness on their rights and advocacy with NADRA officials for registration.

“Transgender community in Kasur district of Punjab always had limited access to information and awareness about their rights and existing government laws that support them,” said Shama Jan, transgender member of the Aawaz Village Forum established in district Kasur (Punjab) with support from the Aawaz II Programme. “I instantly decided to join the Aawaz Village Forum when the programme team visited our area. I thought it was the right opportunity to be able to raise voice on behalf of my community,” Shama added while explaining how she became part of the initiative.

One of the main issues that was flagged by Shama in the Aawaz Village Forum was regarding the pressing need of registration of national identity cards for other members of the transgender community in her area. “Without the identity cards, transgender community cannot benefit from the facilities and services that the government offers to us,” Shama spoke on behalf of her fellow community members.

Shama decided to take lead over this issue and approached NADRA officials along with her fellow Village Forum members and representatives from the Kasur Tehsil team including Resource Person Asad Khan deployed at the Aawaz Agahi Centre in Kasur. The Tehsil team introduced Aawaz II Programme to NADRA while Shama took charge of the discussion and requested for complete guidance and facilitation for ID card registration of her 10 fellow members who also accompanied her to the meeting. NADRA officials provided all relevant information, documentation and briefing on the registration process to Shama and her fellows.

“I cannot explain the sense of achievement I felt when NADRA officials treated us with respect and promised to process our



Shama Jan with her fellow transgender community members proudly displaying their National ID Cards outside local NADRA office in Kasur.

cards on priority,” explains Shama while describing her sense of excitement over her achievement.

As a follow up of this effort, 10 transgenders applied for their National ID cards at NADRA office in Kasur. To date, 4 out of 10 members of the transgender community have received their cards, while the remaining 6 are being processed for delivery anytime soon.

“We were scared and unsure of the response we would get from the NADRA team. However, when Aawaz II Tehsil team and I informed them about the Aawaz platform we were representing,

the discussion with NADRA team became easier and more welcoming,” said Shama about her fears as she met with NADRA team.

Shama is constantly following up with NADRA on behalf of her fellow members, who have applied for the cards after the advocacy by her. With this success, she has now gained more confidence to give back to her community. Shama regularly attends the Aawaz II Village Forum meetings to learn more about the rights of the transgender community in her area and strives to provide voice to them.

Voices from the field



“Despite my disability, I managed to defy all odds and rose to the challenge. My disability encourages me to come up and continue struggle to live a normal life. Through the Provincial Forum, I support marginalized groups and stand with persons with disabilities particularly women.”

Imtiaz Fatima
PWD community and Provincial Forum member

Imtiaz Fatima, a Persons with Disabilities community and Punjab Provincial Forum member, spoke at a Aawaz provincial consultative session where she shared her inspiring story. As a member of Aawaz Provincial Forum, she has played an integral role in constituting a PWD Sub-group in the forum.

Protecting the Rights of Transgender Community

Zeeba, a transgender person, is the focal person of the district Transgender rights committee in Punjab province. She is also an Aawaz District Forum member and represents her community very actively at the community and district level.

Aawaz Aaghai Centre (AAC) received a warning from a local volunteer regarding a case of harassment against Zeeba. Some people in the neighbourhood of Zeeba attacked her home late at night and tried to harass her. Zeeba refused to comply with the demands of the attackers. In reaction, the attackers started threatening and harassing her.

“With support from the AAC Coordinator and other members, I stood up and spoke out against the people who harassed me. With support and encouragement from District Forum members, I went to the police station and registered a complaint. Also, the AAC referred my case to the office of the Human Rights Committee and Social Welfare department of the district, who assured me that the transgender people would be protected as per the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018,” shared Zeeba.



With the support from District Forum, Zeeba has not only gained respect and support from her community, but it was also inspirational for other transgender community who now look up to her and take her guidance on various matters.

Zeeba finds the newfound confidence, courage, and strength completely transformational, boasting her sense of self-worth. She voices her opinions and perspectives for raising awareness about transgender people's issues on different platforms with great confidence and ease.

(All names have been changed to protect identities.)

Voices from the field



“We will certainly be the Aawaz (voices) of Aawaz II Programme. The transgender community pledges to work with the programme for the betterment of our community. We have got an excellent chance to put forward our concerns with the Social Welfare Department and other relevant departments.”

Nadra
Transgender community and District Forum member

Nadra, a transgender person and District Forum member of Manshera, who also held a meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ombudsperson for Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace, Rukhshanda Naz, regarding the rights of transgender persons.

Facilitating Accessibility

“I always used to wonder if the Government of Pakistan offers special facilities and benefits to persons with disabilities like me. I did not have access to information on the relevant government departments to approach,” said Ahsan Ali, a differently-abled person from District Narowal, Punjab, while explaining his challenge.

Ahsan learnt about Aawaz Aagahi Centre physically established in District Narowal and decided to visit the centre and seek help. The Aawaz District Forum team informed him that to acquire the special National ID Card, he must first get the disability certificate issued from the Social Welfare Department. Aawaz II team also guided him about the procedures and document requirements.



With help from the Aawaz II, Ahsan has now received his disability certificate, special National ID Card from NADRA and access to various benefits offered by the Government.

“Aawaz team frequently holds meetings to keep persons with disabilities informed and updated about our rights. Recently Aawaz II team invited me to a dialogue on persons with disabilities where they also launched a mobile application called Equal Access, which provides information on services, public service announcements and information pertinent to different government entitlements,” said Ahsan while explaining about his

continuous engagement with Aawaz II team in his area.

Through Aawaz II forums, Ahsan also learnt about a government entitlement that allows persons with disabilities to receive PKR 2000 per month if they have the special National ID Card. Ahsan now encourages his differently abled friends to seek guidance from Aawaz team to fully understand their rights and privileges.



Ahsan Ali actively taking part in a dialogue on rights for differently abled persons organised by Aawaz II Programme and proudly displaying his National ID Card acquired from NADRA through help by Aawaz II team.

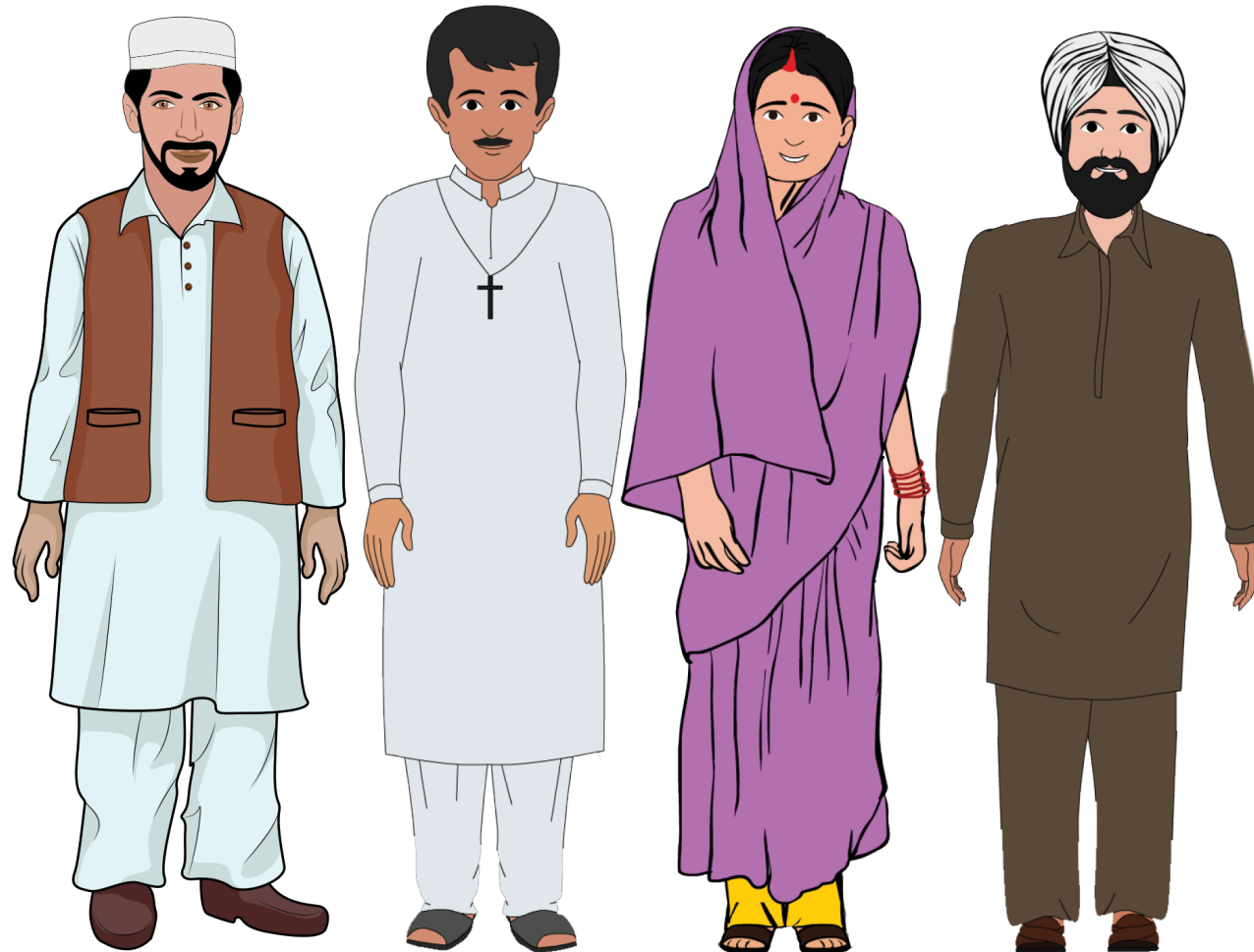
Social Cohesion

Promoting Interfaith Harmony

Patan Minara is a historical area in Rahim Yar Khan district affiliated with the Bheel Hindu community. This area has an old graveyard of Bheel Hindu community with hundreds of graves where they bury the deceased.

People from the Muslim community started to pick sand and soil from the Hindu graveyard, resulting in the land's erosion. Due to this act, many graves began to collapse, causing distress among those visiting the cemetery to offer prayers for the deceased loved ones.

The Hindu community, deeply disturbed over this issue, felt strongly that the Muslim community violated their rights. Anand Nawani, a Hindu member of District Forum and District Aman Committee and focal person of minorities, sent an early warning to the Aawaz Aagahi Centre (AAC). The centre documented the case and planned a strategy to facilitate the minority community in an attempt to prevent escalation of a possible conflict.



Considering the gravity of the issue, the AAC Coordinator and District Manager raised this matter with District Forum members and facilitated the minority group to submit a written application to the Deputy Commissioner's office (DC). Upon receiving the complaint, DC called a meeting to get a detailed briefing on this issue. After receiving the detailed briefing, DC commented that the government would not allow any community to hurt other communities' sentiments. The escalation of violence between both communities was halted due to the DC's intervention.

"We would never have succeeded in addressing this issue if it had not reached the local office-bearers. We felt that someone

is there to hear our issues and concerns, and this has only been possible with the help of the Aawaz II team and District Forum members. With our joint efforts, we have avoided a potentially violent conflict, as well as our old sacred heritage site has been protected," said Anand Nawani.

(All names have been changed to protect identities.)

Voices from the field



"Today's event has brought us all together under one platform to raise mutual concerns of harmony in form of a dialogue and suggest ways to work together to develop more tolerant communities. The discussion held today reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogues are key ingredients of a culture of peace. I am proud to be part of the District Forum of Aawaz II Programme, which provides awareness to the people."

Sardar Gopal Singh
Sikh community and District Forum member

Sardar Gopal Singh, District Forum member, Nankana Sahib, spoke at a dialogue session organised to promote interfaith harmony among the communities.

Caring for Your Neighbours

Paul Shahid, an Aawaz Village Forum member lives in a Christian residential colony in Jhang district, Punjab where around 35 per cent of the population belongs to Shia community. He noticed that youngsters of his area have been playing loud music frequently causing disturbance for many community members in the locality.

As the Muharram was approaching, one of the most holy months for Muslim community, Paul Shahid felt that it might become a cause of conflict if the younger Christian boys kept playing music loudly in a month in which Shia Muslim sect mourns. He feared

that the loud noise of music might hurt Shia Muslim community's sentiments as they undertake sacred rituals and could lead to a violent conflict.

Perceiving a risk of a violent clash, Paul Shahid raised this concern in one of the Aawaz Village Forum meetings where Asif Munwar Masih who is an Aawaz District Forum member, suggested to engage father of the local church in solving the issue.



“We requested Father of our local church to make an appeal to the Christian community to stop or decrease the volume of the music during the Ashura days in respect of Muharram in his Sunday Service sermon and his interaction with other local community members. Village Forum and District Forum members also spread the message of peace of harmony in various meetings and sessions that resonated with the young generation,” Asif Munawar Masih said.

Aawaz II helped promote social cohesion among different segments of society and sparked a behaviour change process to

encourage tolerance and respect for each other’s feelings and religious sentiments.

“We should care for our neighbours. This is what our religion teaches us. Our community members have shown a clear sign of leadership as we worked together to create a cohesive society where each community respects other community sentiments. Together, we have prevented a chance of clash in Muharram’s Holy month and maintained peaceful relations with others in the ensuing months. Also, we have taught our young generation how to care for others,” said Paul Shahid.

Voices from the field



“In today’s gathering, we got the opportunity to listen to an episode of Aawaz II radio programme, and to engage in a discussion afterwards. I am inspired and appreciate the efforts made by Aawaz II. It is the first time for me to listen to a radio programme related to the rights of minorities and other human rights issues related to women, transgender persons, and social issues.”

Gurdeep Singh
Sikh community and Village Forum member

The Village Forum in Swat organised radio listenership sessions for members of Sikh community in Swat. Gurdeep Singh from the Sikh community in his feedback appreciated the initiative.

Child Labour

Addressing Child Labour

“I always wanted to be a social activist. I had been doing community work as a student; however, the recent training sessions imparted by Aawaz II have proven to be transformational. The sessions helped me design and implement what my vision is for my community,” told Obaidullah, who became Aawaz Change Agent and attended virtual training sessions in August 2020.

Aawaz II works to develop a pool of youth volunteers like Obaidullah from local communities. These young members are supported with training to work in their communities as volunteers. They are also provided with skills and tools to identify, plan and execute social action projects to address social issues such as child labour, gender-based violence, early/forced marriage, and social cohesion.

Obaidullah chose the social issue of child labour for his social action project. One day, he saw Shah Zaib, a 9-year-old boy, working at a local poultry store in village Dholan Hattar, tehsil and district Kasur in October 2020. He learned from Shah Zaib that he stopped going to school in the last quarter of 2018. Initially, his father engaged him in his seasonal farming activities, and then he asked him to work at a general store in his area. Muhammad Rafiq, Shah Zaib's father, who is a rickshaw driver and runs a small confectionery shop in village Dholan Hattar, felt that education is not necessary to excel in life.

Obaidullah highlighted this case of child labour in the Village Forum, attended by nearly 25 members of diverse backgrounds. Along with other forum members, he met with Shah Zaib's father, Muhammad Rafiq to educate him on the negative consequences of child labour, especially vulnerability to abuse. In a few meetings, Obaidullah convinced Shah Zaib's parents to send him back to school and then helped him in school re-enrolment in November 2020 when the school was reopened after the closure due to COVID 19.



“The interaction with Obaidullah and other forum members has been an eye-opener for me. It is not okay for children to work. Now I realise that I have put Shah Zaib at great risk of physical and sexual abuse by sending him to work. My son should only focus on study and play with his siblings and other children in his free time,” said Muhammad Rafiq in an emotional tone.

Aawaz II has not only helped Shah Zaib abandon child labour by influencing his father's behaviour but also developed a community leader, Obaidullah, who is enthusiastic about a positive social change at the community level. Aawaz II trains and supports Obaidullah and many other youth volunteers like him to undertake social action initiatives in their communities to address social evils such as child labour.



Shah Zaib, a school dropout, has been re-enrolled to school because of the efforts of Obaidullah, Aawaz Change Agent in Kasur.

Gender-based Violence

A Woman Who Fought for Her Rights

Uzma Sajjad, a 21-year-old woman, who lives in Haripur in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, married Jahanzeb at the beginning of 2020. From the first day of her marriage, Jahanzeb and his mother mistreated her. He use to physically abuse her and did not allow her to contact her parents.

“When my parents came to know about this, they contacted the local female Aawaz Change Agent (ACA) and requested her to support me against my violent spouse and his family,” shared Uzma.

The ACA shared the warning with the Village Forum’s focal person. The Village Forum members discussed and decided to share details of the issue with the district Aawaz Aagahi Centre (AAC). AAC escalated the warning to the Aawaz District Forum. The District Forum members contacted Uzma’s mother and sought her input on how the case should be addressed. They also suggested Uzma to visit the local DRC (Dispute Resolution Council) for support.



“After four months of marriage, my daughter left her husband’s house and came back to us. We did not want to send our only daughter back to her abusive husband. Our community members also encouraged us not to tolerate further violence but to save our daughter’s life through legal means,” said the mother of Uzma.

District Forum members also assured Uzma and her parents to support them at the community level. The District Forum has helped arrange for a female lawyer to file a divorce case in the court on a pro bono basis.

“With the help of ACA and lawyer arranged with the District Forum’s support, I was able to understand and exercise my legal

right that helped me seek exit from an abusive relationship. My parents and I are satisfied with the guidance provided by the Aawaz II because alone, we would have never been able to handle this issue. They gave me the courage to fight for myself and my rights,” shared Uzma.

The support of ACA and District Forum has saved a 21-year-old girl from psychological and physiological abuse and inspired other women of the area to raise their voices against violence and injustice.

(All names have been changed to protect identities.)

Voices from the field



“In Haripur district, women work in different factories where they face harassment frequently. They face harassment at the workplace as well as at bus stops and other areas. I received many complaints of harassment by women from across the district. I raised this issue in the Aawaz District Forum meeting, where I suggested sharing this issue and its proposed solutions with our local office-bearers. Upon our joint request, the Additional Deputy Commissioner asked the local factories to constitute the Anti-harassment committees immediately to prevent workplace harassment. This is a big success for the women of my area.”

Shazia Jadoon

Women representative and District Forum member

Shazia Jadoon, District Forum member, Haripur, actively works for promoting the rights of women in the area. She has played an instrumental role in the formation of Anti-harassment Inquiry Committees in Hattar Industry to help protect the local women at the workplace.

Early and Forced Marriage

Pre-empting Early Marriage

A Village Forum in a district Nankana Sahib received warning of an early marriage of a 14-year-old girl, Saima, through a local volunteer. Upon receiving this complaint, the Village Forum members discussed this issue and discovered that the parents were unaware of legal and health consequences of early, child marriage. The female Aawaz forum members met with Saima's mother and sister-in-law.

"The Village Forum members convinced us not to marry our daughter at this young age and wait for her to reach a suitable marriage age. They told us about the potential harm of child



Voices from the field

"Aawaz II Programme, through its Village Forum, sparked a transformative change in patterns of discrimination and exploitation related to early and forced marriage in the community. Through its Village Forum, it has triggered a process of social change in the community by challenging the negative norms and behaviours of people and facilitating alternate ways of doing right things regarding early and forced marriage."

**Village Forum member
Aawaz II district**

A Village Forum member of a district in Punjab spoke about the issue of child, early and forced marriage in his village. (name withheld for privacy)

marriage and the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth for a child bride. That was too scary. I did know that marriage would not only deprive Saima of her right to education but also burden her with adult responsibilities like pregnancy,” said Azra, who is the mother of Saima.

Village Forum members also held a meeting with the local Nikah Khwan and pre-empted the marriage without involving local administration.

“Village Forum members told me that I could not perform the marriage ceremony of a bride child; I need to ensure that girl and boy both reach the minimum age of marriage and are preferably 18 years old. We also discussed potential harms of early marriage

for girls,” Azmat Hassan, local Nikah Khawan.

The realization of harmful effects of child marriage on the part of parents and the nikah khwan is the first step in bringing change in the community towards this discriminatory practice.

(All names have been changed to protect people's identities.)

Voices from the field



“Women needs are often neglected and unheard by the dominant groups of the communities, I am glad and thankful to the Aawaz II Programme for the inclusion of women in Village Forums, and for giving us voice to raise our demands with tehsil and district level Administration.”

Arooba Bibi
Teacher and Village Forum member

Arooba Bibi, a teacher and Village Forum member, spoke at a dialogue session in Peshawar organised to commemorate the International Women's Day.

The stories included in this booklet are only a few voices from the Aawaz II Programme, but their impact is far-reaching. These stories symbolise the change generated by enhancing community voices and agency, promoting tolerance and inclusion and connecting citizens and the state. The change is slow, incremental but provides hope to others who feel marginalised and vulnerable.

The Aawaz II theory of change rests on the belief that informed and aware women, men, youth, religious minorities, persons with disabilities (PWDs), transgender persons and other marginalised communities can lead change and pre-empt conflict. While translating their knowledge into actions, these groups can influence behaviours to decrease intolerance.

Aawaz II will continue to build communities' capacities, amplify voices for behaviour change, provide information referrals, and encourage communities and duty bearers to work together to improve access to services.

This booklet has been made possible with support and contribution from Aawaz II partners, provincial, district and village fora members, who shared their thoughts and stories with us. Aawaz II editorial team highly appreciates this support and extends special thanks to all contributors.

Aawaz II

Inclusion. Rights. Reducing Exploitation