

# Localized Actions for Social Behavior Change in COVID 19



# Ground Evidence



# Localization Shines a Spotlight on Ignorance

Infectious diseases remain a major challenge particularly in developing countries such as Pakistan; implementation and compliance with infection control guidelines should be a high priority for the safety of affected community as well as it is pertinent that hand washing is practiced with rigor.

As per WHO guidelines improved hygiene including handwashing is the key in preventing spread of the diseases. Handwashing is the simplest most cost affected and efficacious preventive measure that can make a significant difference against the challenge of infectious diseases such as Coronavirus (COVID-19).

One of the major barriers observed during initial COVID-19 response is non-availability of hand washing facilities and soap at public places especially hospitals, quarantine and isolation centres, markets, railway stations and bus stands, thus preventing people from washing hands



**AGAHEE** is determined to bring a social and behavioural change among communities through awareness and service provision to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. With support of Water and Sanitation Authority (WASA) Multan, the water bowsers were converted into mobile hand washing stations with the provision chlorinated water and soaps. These stations were placed at public

places and were routed to most crowded areas during peak hours including markets, fruits and veggie markets, etc. Apart from the peak hours, water bowzers were performing their work during alternate hours. Through this initiative, ters receive a regular flow of people throughout the working hours of the day.

*“More than 5,000 people are benefiting on a regular basis to wash their hands resulting in a positive behavioural change of regularly washing hands.”*

Water bowzers are active from March 2020 and are now placed at cash relief centers of Ehsaas Programme in Punjab. These relief centers are used to register and distribute cash among the vulnerable people. These centers receive a regular flow of people throughout the working hours of the day.

With close coordination of three district administration, Multan Lahore and Mlzaaffargarh 16 temporary handwashing stations are installed at different locations of city areas especially hospitals, quarantine and isolation centers, markets, railway stations and bus stands. 29, 000 people are regularly utilizing these facilities to wash their hands with chlorinated water and soap.

AGAHE ensured that SOPs of physical distancing were followed by the users on both type of hand washing stations. Government has been a great support in operations and maintenance of these facilities and taking further care for its sustainability.

AGAHE is a non-profit organization with a vision to create an enabling environment for vulnerable segments of society where they can utilize their full potential for improvement in their lives. AGAHE is a member of National Humanitarian Network (NHN) from Punjab chapter. Work of local organizations like AGAHE shines as a spotlight on ignorance among communities for progresive and constructive behaviour change.



# Flexible Programing & Direct Access to Funding **Strengthened** Local Organizations to **Fight COVID-19**

Since the beginning of the year, the Education Health Social Awareness Rehabilitation Foundation (EHSAR) has been supporting the outpatient departments of three health facilities in Pakistan's South Waziristan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The district is part of recently merged Tribal Areas. The area mostly consists of rugged mountains and due to its remoteness lacks basic facilities. With funding from the Pakistan Humanitarian Pooled Fund, the foundation carried out free medical consultations and provided much-needed medication to hundreds of patients every day.

When Pakistan declared a health state of emergency and lockdown due to COVID-19 in March, local health authorities imposed the closedown of all outpatient departments across the district. As a result people lost the everyday OPD support.

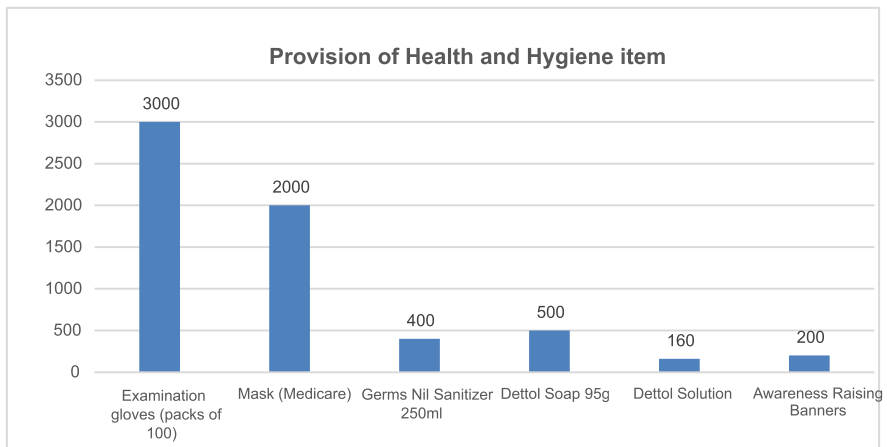
EHSAR was quick to adapt and re-programme its efforts, thanks to flexible arrangements that have been put in place by the Pakistan Humanitarian Pooled Fund (PHPF) and other Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) that are responding to COVID-19. The free medical consultations were commenced in tehsil headquarter hospital Mola Khan Serai, Civil Dispensary Chagmalai and Civil Hospital at Sararogha.



Essential health services were provided in mentioned health facilities to control COVID-19 pandemic and other general disease in South Waziristan. Total 48639 patients were provided outpatient consultations, maternal and newborn child health services, dignity kits provision to poor women, referral services, psychosocial counseling, health hygiene promotion and provision of free medicines.

## Provision of PPEs

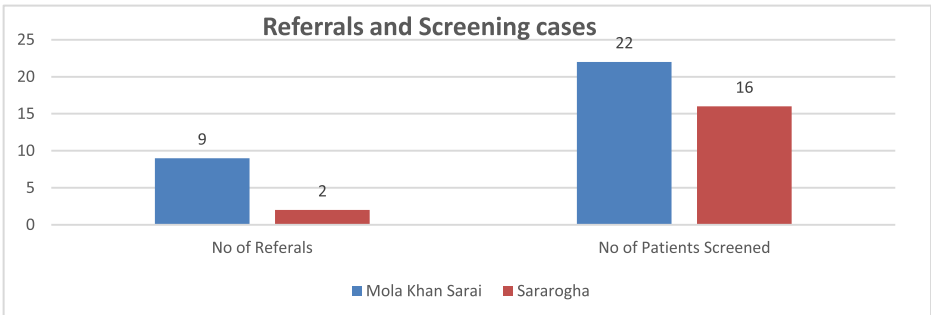
COVID-19 health emergency stretched the resources of government as well as private sector especially the health department. In order to support their efforts, PPE including Masks, Hand Sanitizers, Washing Soaps, Dettol solution and examination gloves were handed over to the district administrations of Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan and South Waziristan. In addition, awareness raising banners were displayed at multiple locations around the mentioned districts. The below graphs show the response activities that have been conducted so far in the district.



## Technical Support

Two Quarantine/Isolation center were established at two locations i.e. Tehsil headquarter hospital Mola Khan Sarai and at Army Public School, Sararogha by district health department and Pakistan Army. EHSAR medical and paramedic staff is providing technical support to these centers by providing 24/7 Medical Emergency Response Teams as first responders to any COVID-19 case or any

other emergency in the health facility or in catchment area of Mola Khan Sarai and Sararogha. The teams also facilitate health department and army in screening of COVID-19 suspected cases. The critical patients are referred to the district headquarter hospitals while suspected patients are quarantined in the isolation centers. The below graph shows the number of patients that have been dealt with in both the facilities.



*EHSAR is a non-profit organization working in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa district with main focus on health and WASH sector. EHSAR is an active member of National Humanitarian Network (NHN). NHN is a network of 170 local organizations. The commitment and dedication of local organizations such as EHSAR are a ray of hope for the underprivileged and deserving sections of society.*





# Leave No One Behind



Social mobilization process ensures the holistic development of the marginalized segment of society. Lodhran Pilot Project (LPP) building on its grass root level Networks of community-based organizations organized during last two decades initiated its COVID-19 emergency relief program under its corporate social responsibility initiative. The activists and community resource persons [CRPs] of these organized social structures in Jhang, Lodhran and Multan took leading role in identification & distribution of food items to 11000 [including 18 transgenders] vulnerable and marginalized households as per predefined criteria.

Keeping in view of protection and safety of community volunteers and staff all possible recommended measures were adopted and personal protective equipment's [PPE] were made mandatory during the whole identification and distribution process. In addition, during door to door visits CRPs and community activists also delivered health and hygiene messages to family's members. It is pertinent to mention here that LPP M&E department conducted pre and post verification telephonically based on information provided by community volunteers. During this verification process health and hygiene messages related with COVID-19 also disseminated. Through post distribution verification beneficiary satisfaction rate was recorded 95%.

Before distribution beneficiary data was also triangulated with Ehsas program for removing overlapping and to reach out most marginalized families like daily wagers, hawkers, transgenders and women headed families.

Transgender community member of the society are a marginalized section who are not welcomed in the employment because of the stigma attached to them. Guru Babar belongs to the transgender community he informed that “We used to perform on different occasions to earn our bread and butter. Sudden lockdown seized all the activities as a result our economic situation continued to deteriorate due to the suspension of business activities. To ensure our safety we are unable to move outside freely.”

***“We are thankful to LPP who provides support and fulfil our needs.” Guru Babar.***

An elderly person from District Multan Mr. Niaz Latif said that he can only work as a carpenter due to his age factor. This activity also stopped due to the pandemic.

***“They have dropped ration at our door step”***



“I was a brick kiln worker before pandemic. Due to the lockdown every economic activity ends. LPP kept its promise to provide ration at our doorsteps to ensure food security.” Haq Nawaz.

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## LPP pledges to leave no one behind through COVID-19 relief response

**STAFF REPORTER**

**MULTAN:** We have reached to 1.9 million beneficiaries through coordinated efforts in Multan, Jhang and Lodhran through our COVID-19 preparedness and response plan. In these critical circumstances of global pandemic, we pledge that no one shall be left behind in emergency relief program, said Mr. Ali Khan Taroon, President of the Board of Lodhran Pilot Project (LPP), a non-profit organization.


CEO of Lodhran Pilot Project Dr. M. Abdul Sabour said that facing COVID-19 which will have catastrophic consequences on the livelihood of the poorest and most marginalized, it is essential that government must introduce decisive action plan and strategies to collaborate with all relevant stakeholders to deal with the pandemic spread.

Lodhran Pilot Project which has expertise and a history of twenty years in emergency/disaster response and relief work for marginalized communities, established its COVID Emergency Preparedness & Response unit (EPR) with a generous fund of 40 million from Jhangir Khan Taroon family & enterprise.

UNICEF Pakistan and Concern Worldwide and commenced activities in district Jhang, Tehsil Ahmadpur Sarial, district Multan and district Lodhran. Through its Community Resource Persons (CRPs) in the field and young volunteers, EPR Unit of Lodhran Pilot Project distributed 11000 ration packs among daily wagers, transgender community, minorities and persons with disabilities in 3 districts. Parallel to that 4000 PPE kits, 5000 N-95 masks were provided to local deputy commissioner offices in these districts, established 15 hand-washing stations at the local markets.

In District Jhang Village Disaster Management Committees [VDMCs] & Union council disaster management committee [UDMCs] formed under Building Disaster Resilience in Pakistan [BDRP] project funded by Concern Worldwide [CWW]. Each VDMC consist of 15 members and represents 200 Households. General body meetings were conducted in 70 villages of 7 flood affected targeted UCs for the selection of these members through voting process. Then these VDMCs constituted the UDMCs structures at union council level. These structures capacities have been built on community-based disaster risk management including livelihood/food security. These VDMCs and UDMCs raised funds from local community members and philanthropists to support marginalized families through provision of food ration packs at their door steps. While responding this initiative Mr. Allah Ditta of Gail Pur remarked that

“The poor in our surrounding have lost their daily means of earning due to lockdown and hence their purchasing power diminished then we thought to stop selling our animals milk and decided to distribute among poor families who cannot purchase milk for their children and provided the milk at their door step.”



LPP is a non-profit organization committed to aiding underprivileged communities in Punjab and member of National Humanitarian Network (NHN). NHN is the lead network of local NGOs working in the humanitarian sector. The network was established in 2010 to act as an independent and vibrant voice of the communities and to engage with stakeholders throughout Pakistan for promotion of humanitarian values by influencing policies and building capacities to ensure right based humanitarian response. Initiatives like these remind us that taking right action at the right time from the right people is the societies greatest advantage.

# Rise up to the Challenge

The COVID-19 crisis forced many organizations to adjust and adapt quickly to an unprecedented situation. The COVID-19 epidemic and the lockdown forced all activities to be seized. This forced organizations to think of new and innovative solutions to continue their initiatives. The farmers' awareness and training initiatives were especially at risk since they were aligned with the crop seasons and delaying these initiatives would result in waste of valuable crops and farmers livelihoods. One of the biggest questions was how organizations would be able to adjust face to face training experience to a virtual setting where farmers would be able to not only receive the training but could also ask questions from the facilitators.

With dedication and steadfastness Rural Education Economic Development Society (REEDS) team was able to swiftly adjust its initiative “Better Cotton Promotion” to minimize the impact of COVID-19. Cotton is a major crop of Pakistan after wheat. Cotton crop earns the country largest export revenues and in addition to the lint, the seed of cotton for oil and meal accounts for 80 percent of the national production of oilseed. Cotton and cotton related products contribute 10 percent to gross domestic product (GDP) and 55 percent to the foreign exchange earnings of the country. The REEDS team realizes the importance of cotton production in the country and were well aware of the timely completion of their cotton indicatives. Therefore, the planned trainings were switched to online sessions using virtual meeting tool “GoToMeeting” with the support of Fauji Fertilizer Company (FFC). FFC is a public limited company with



a mission to taking a lead role in the agricultural & industrial development by delivering premium products and services while maintaining a high level of social and environmental responsibility for all the stakeholders. The company invests in farmers' awareness and capacity building programs through its corporate social responsibility.

The tool allowed members to directly participate through their smartphones, computers or tablets, while different field facilitators and lead farmers gathered groups of 8-10 farmers at multiple locations where they attended the session on shared devices following the SOPs for COVID-19 prevention. The sessions contained Power Point presentations from the REEDS staff and FFC experts, followed by Questions & Answer sessions from the participants.

One of the seminars with the title "Profitable Cotton Production" was joined by 213 direct participants from Sindh and Punjab. The participants included field facilitators, male and female farmers, lead farmers and master trainers.

Farmers commitment and REEDS team dedication resulted in the timely and effective completion of the capacity building activities.

Mrs. Shaista - Decent Work Program Head said "we are truly energized by farmers' willingness to help each other and to make sincere efforts to connect with farmers and lead farmers"

FFC Head of Agri. Services Mr. Zika U Din said that "All FFC team has embraced unexpected change and moved quickly to ensure new solutions. Each field facilitator and lead farmer should have access to any tool required for capacity building and knowledge sharing success"

*REEDS is a non-profitable, non-government and humanitarian organization, registered under the Registration Act of 1860 with the government of Pakistan. REED Society is working for the integral development of the rural marginalized communities without any discrimination of race, creed, and religion in district Rahim Yar Khan since 2002. REEDS is member of NHN from Punjab chapter.*



# Putting **Communities** before **Vulnerabilities**

The rapid spread of Covid-19 pandemic induced fear in the all segments of society. The humanitarian workers responding to the pandemic faced a dilemma either to stay home and be safe leaving the vulnerable and the needy on their own or to reach out to the needy and put themselves and their families at risk. The staff members at Initiative for Development and Empowerment Axis (IDEA) faced a similar challenge when the government forced a lockdown in union council Manga due to high rate of COVID-19 spread.

UC Manga was one of the first affected areas in the KP province. The first death from COVID-19 was reported from this area.

The area is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity with congested population of over 56000 and having more than 6000 households. The people are also vulnerable in the form of education, poor health facilities, etc. while people's main livelihood is farming, labor, and daily wage work. Due to the strict lockdown, majority of the vulnerable and poor families lost their only source of income and faced a very susceptible situation. The only hope for them was to be helped by the government and humanitarian organizations.

The staff at IDEA recognized their social and moral responsibility to reach out to the needy in the critical times. They had to put behind their fears and pressure from their families to provide food assistance to the people of UC Manga. By following the government SOPs of self-protection the first responders set out to provide food rations. The motivation and provision of PPE kits by the management further raised their morals.



“By ensuring protective measures by all the team members we successfully achieved our targets though the fear was rushing in our heart and mind that if we get infected what will happen to us and to our families. The response provided by IDEA raised our team member's humanitarian motivations and we feel pride now that we are among those who have put their lives at risk to save others”.  
Najeeb Ullah - (IDEA)

IDEA also has a strong network of volunteers and community activists in the area that played a vital role in beneficiary's assessment and distribution of food assistance to 1000 families at their door steps.

Food assistance and controlling people behavior in COVID-19 panic situation was equally difficult for IDEA to deal with, as the individual and collective behavior is particularly important during such pandemic.

*IDEA is a non-profit organization committed to aiding underprivileged communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and member of National Humanitarian Network (NHN). NHN is the lead network of local NGOs working in the humanitarian sector. The network was established in 2010 to act as an independent and vibrant voice of the communities and to engage with stakeholders throughout Pakistan for promotion of humanitarian values by influencing policies and building capacities to ensure right based humanitarian response. IDEA emerged as a hope for the vulnerable by putting their responsibilities before their fears and vulnerabilities.*





# The New Code of Conduct

Pandemics create a state of alert, enforcing changes in daily behavior. The COVID-19 outbreak introduced the new normal into our everyday life. Social distancing and isolation have become conventional for prevention and safety. However, drastic changes in conduct take administration and direction.

The Lodhran Pilot Project (LPP) has initiated the Behavior Change and Communication (BCC) Campaign on preventative measures. The movement is centered around raising awareness among the mass population. The BCC seeks to enable targeted communities and the country with the right practices and information in light of COVID-19. It is also using knowledge to instill behavior. They have customized IEC materials in the local context and ensured maximized sensitization.

The LPP is one of the 170 local organizations that make up the National Humanitarian Network (NHN)- a network that is one of the founding members of our national partnership, the Pakistan Resilience Partnership (PRP). The organization highlights how locally-led action is taking charge during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Agents of Change From Within

The LPP recognizes that the most compelling change-makers are members at the grassroots level. They have registered 450 community resource persons (CRPs) that include local religious leaders, and some of the local staff members to mobilize the campaign in Jhang, Multan, and Lodhran. CRPs are the torch bearers in most developing countries. They reach the remotest parts of communities that are often neglected during disaster events. The BCC campaign has sparked the knowledge that equips CRPs to inform and impart knowledge in their regions. The campaign started with an orientation with these community leaders that included guidelines for social distancing, handwashing, the use of face masks, and overall prevention measures of COVID-19.

Understanding the weight of preventive measures is the key to introducing it within the community. These leaders have made it their mission to spread the awareness campaigns across their communities through door-to-door visits, announcements from mosques and communication mediums, displaying informative banners, and delivering aid in villages.

## Clocking in for Aid

COVID-19 conditions require elevated measures when performing essential activities. The LPP started its emergency response following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of Pakistan. The organization has distributed masks, hand sanitizers, soap, and installed handwashing points at vegetable markets. The cost of food baskets in Pakistan has increased by 80% between 2007 and 2017. The demand has led the lowest two quintiles to allocate approximately 60% of their income on food.





The organization has also distributed 11,000 ration packs to daily wagers, elderly, widows, persons with disabilities, and minorities in Lodhran (9,400 ration packs), Multan (1,400 ration packs), and Jhang (200 ration packs) during the lockdown. Funding and distribution were a collective effort of LPP volunteers and community emergency response teams. The packs consist of 20 kilograms of flours, six kilograms of lentils, three kilograms of sugar, three liters of cooking oil, one pack of chili, one pack of salt, and four bars of soap.

The CRPs were essential in executing every step of these distributions. They enlisted and identified the most deserving families in their localities. Going the distance was not a challenge for these community advocates. Once these areas were identified, 15 to 20 community members handed out food rations at the family's doorsteps.

## Tuning in to the Same Frequency

Knowledge resonates the loudest when our voices are unified in its messaging. COVID-19 has led to a vast influx of disinformation. CRPs and religious leaders have collaborated with FM radios and social media campaigns to broadcast the right messages to a wider audience. The LPP initiated the C-19 Social Media Awareness Campaign through various channels. It reached 465,932 individuals via Facebook, 9,510 individuals via Twitter, and 1,270 individuals via a Whatsapp group in Lodhran.

The organization signed a memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with FM-98 in Lodhran, FM-100 in Multan, and FM Radio Awaz in Jhang to circulate key messages. They have reached 500,000 people in all three districts through the radio channels. The circulation of such messages has promoted adaptability towards safety measures. Recipients of ration distribution now form social distance queues. Hand washing and using face masks have become widely accepted practices and they are being adopted in everyday settings such as the vegetable markets.


## Delivering the Demonstrations

Maintaining the functionality of rural water supplies is a high priority for improvements and sustainability for the government. Many rely on communal sources for everyday water consumption and mass collection becomes a critical point for spreading the virus. Pakistan allocated \$973 million of its fiscal budget in 2018 towards WASH. Fortunately, proper knowledge management has enforced social distancing from source points such as water filtration plants, public latrines, and handwashing facilities.

The LPP displayed information, education, and communication (IEC) materials reflecting social distancing and wearing masks at its water purification plants. The content was developing according to the WHO, UNICEF, and the Government of Pakistan and Punjab official guidelines. The community volunteers marked social distancing circles because visual markers support a better understanding of social distancing in these locations.

Wheatfields are a part of Pakistan's landscape with approximately 9 million hectares (40% of national cultivated land). Eight out of 10 farmers participate in wheat cultivation and production. The agricultural sector employs more than 80 million people which makes it essential to apply social distancing practices when these workers enter the field. The LPP and the CRPs have taken their teaching to these farms by forming the Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTS).





The CRPs have carried out orientation to teach social distancing practices. Farmers that harvest knowledge and behavior practices ensure each other's safety. The organization has conducted 25 sessions reaching 180 farmers in Jhang, and 28 sessions reaching 190 farmers in Lodhran. The CERTS have joined hands with local mosques, utilizing the institutes' loudspeakers to reach over 5,000 farmers during the harvesting season.

Organizations such as LPP remind us that taking action is a society's greatest advantage. Equipped with the right knowledge, a community becomes the orchestrator for adaptive and progressive behavior.

*The NHN was established after the 2010 floods and earthquake with the vision to address limited support and information exchange during emergencies. It is in line with the national priority on disaster management. The NHN capacity building initiatives, sharing of in-country/ regional updates and information packages, and policy focus to the entire spectrum of disaster management with greater attention to DRR.*

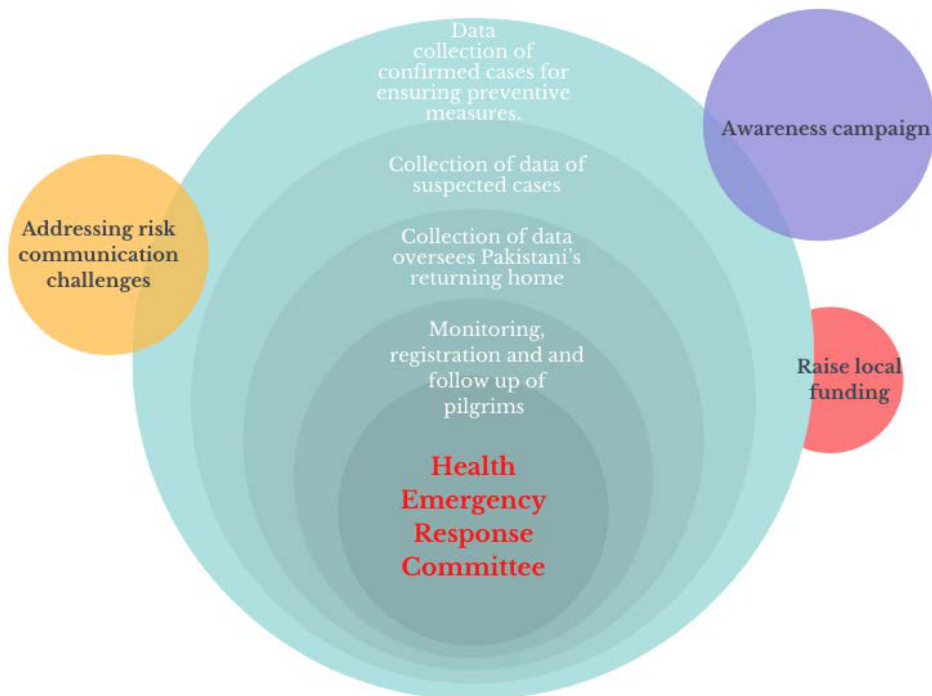
*PRP has promoted the mobilization of the media and academic and research on advocacy and awareness in the field of disaster management. The PRP has also contributed to drafting the National Disaster Response Plans (NDRP) 2019. The plan recognizes the changing environment and disaster management mechanism in Pakistan.*

# People **Joining Hands** with **Government** at Local Level

District Muzaffargarh of province Punjab is prone to recurring floods. Humanitarian organizations have been implementing disaster resilience projects in the area. These project focus on building resilience through community lead structures at ground level as the local people are the first responders in any disaster. Before the pandemic, community structures at Village and Union Council level were already in place in three union councils of tehsil Ali Pur in district Muzaffargarh. The structures included Village and Union Council Disaster Management Committees, Disabled People Centered Committee, Disabled People Organization and Community Based Early Warning Committee. These structures have been established through a project “Building Disaster Resilience in Pakistan.” The village level committee identify individuals for receipt of emergency response training and accompanying kits. Selected members from village committees form a UC level committee to coordinate with government authorities including disaster management.

Once the government declared an emergency, local authorities called a meeting with UC committee representatives and formed 14 Health Emergency Response Committee in all union councils. Each committee comprised of 05 nominated members including Basic Health Units Officer. The purpose of this committee is to prevent and control the pandemic at local level.





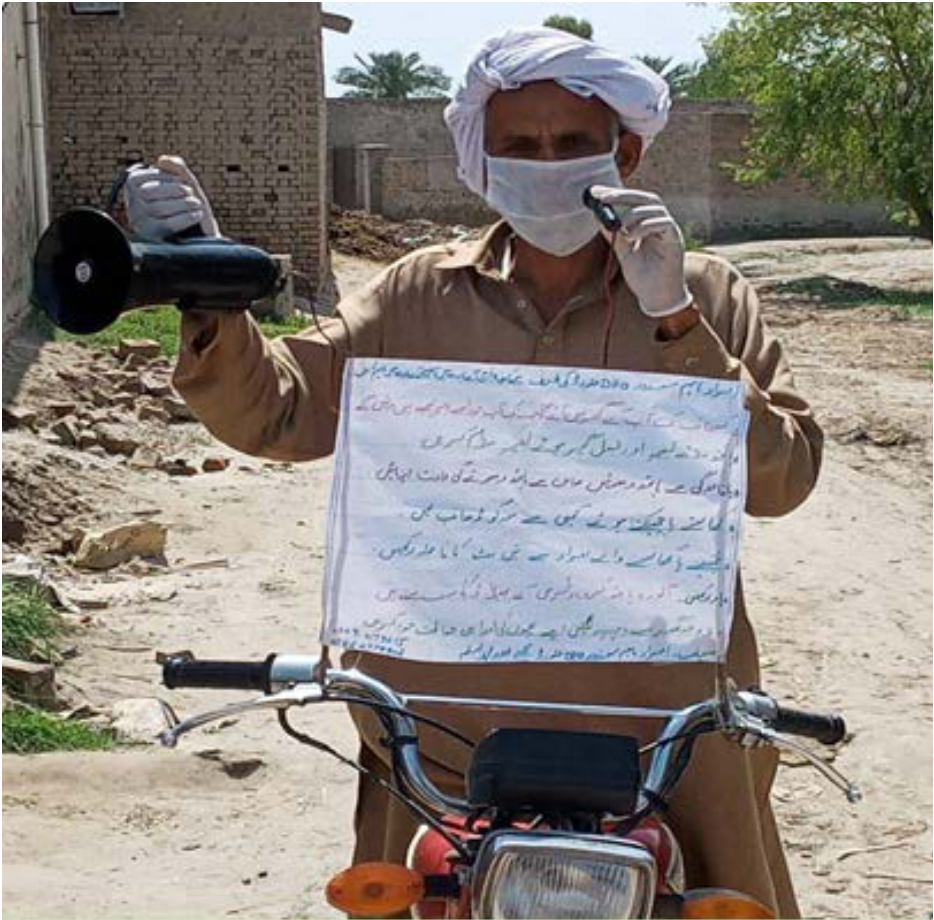
Village disability inclusive organizations make union council level Disabled People Centered Committee to manage activities and coordinate with government departments. These committees received awareness sessions about corona from government authorities. The members were also oriented on how to effectively and precisely communicate the COVID-19 awareness messages to other community members in local languages. The awareness was then further transmitted to the other community members especially the disabled people.

During this COVID-19 outbreak, The Disabled People Organizations (DPO) trained key activists and sub-committees are delivering messages focusing on critical 'preventive and protective' behaviors of public i.e. social distancing and self-isolation, hand hygiene, respiratory protection, useful contacts of hospitals and quarantine centers. They understand knowledge, attitude and practices of locals so they are communicating people "to change their behavior by making them aware of the threats of Coronavirus (COVID-19)".



Together with other communication channels, Community Based Early Warning Committees were provided early warning kits. Mega phones were part of those kits to loudly communicate in a village or hamlet so that everyone can listen as an important announcement for the benefit of all. Key persons are using relevant communication tools to announce messages among rural riverine public who are settled in scattered houses where they have their native land in far-flung villages away from outreach from cities and other communication channels.





The Doaba Foundation, is a not-for-profit-organization, registered under the Trusts Act 1882, as a Public Welfare Trust working since 1987. Doaba is the member of NHN Islamabad chapter since 2010. Doaba Foundation believes in enabling the disaster prone communities to become self-reliant in pursuit of their common interests.

# Inclusive Solution against COVID-19

Isolation is a norm for marginalized people. When a pandemic strikes, their exclusion from basic services is amplified. Their economic burdens and vulnerabilities commonly become a matter of survival. The Rural Education Economic Development Society (REEDS) has its expanded services, to help farmers, widows, the disabled, and the transgender community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The task force members and volunteers at REEDS have made it their mission to incorporate advocacy and inclusion into their activities across the Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan. The two provinces have the highest concentration of cases and collectively make up more than 75% of the cases nationwide. Disasters do not ostracize in their damage and organizations such as REEDS focus on inclusive intervention which is the cornerstone of any relief effort.

REEDS is one of the 170 local organizations that make up the National Humanitarian Network (NHN)\*. The network is one of the founding members of our national partnership, the Pakistan Resilience Partnership (PRP). Our national partnership has promoted the mobilization of the media and academic and research on advocacy and awareness in the field of disaster management. The PRP has also contributed to drafting the National Disaster Response Plans (NDRP) 2019. The plan recognizes the changing environment and disaster management mechanism in Pakistan.

The Rahim Yar Khan district is located in the Punjab province. The city has put physical distancing measures in place to curb the spread of the virus. The provincial government has been effective in imposing lockdowns in order to control the outbreak. However, parameters of the lockdown such as physical distancing have constrained and even stopped many income generating activities. The pandemic is predicted to force 125 million people below the poverty line in Pakistan.



Marginalized are one of the first and most affected populations during any disaster event. Qambar Kashish is a young transgendered women from the Railway Colony in the Rahim Yar Khan City She has joined REEDS during the pandemic to give her community the support and priority that is their basic right.

## Advocate for the Silenced

Qamber takes on many leadership roles for her community. She is a volunteer and active member of the REEDS task force from the Railway Colony- “We have become used to being neglected. I chose to be a voice of support because the disaster has pushed many of us into a state of helplessness.”

Although they have a space in the community, acceptance is still a distant reality. The 2017 census reported 10,418 transgender persons in the country- an enumeration that contradicts studies that one out of every 50 children identify with a transgender tendency/potential. “We are citizens of Pakistan but we are still not accepted in everyday society. Our community suffers from an inferiority complex that stems from a community that ostracizes and mocks us. The Almighty has blessed us with extraordinary patience and will to continue living,” states Qambar.

Qambar conducted an assessment in the area to find that 56 transgender individuals have lost their livelihood resources leaving them unable to support themselves or their loved ones. “They are unable to access any support from the Pakistani Social Protection Program (Ehsaas) as they do not have ID cards or have not registered because they are not aware that we can receive one.”



REEDS is exceptionally unique in their community engagement according to the Qamber, “I joined the COVID Task Force Program knowing that we would engage in preventative behavior. They enforce inclusion in all of their response

programs. Together, we have ensured that each individual in the community applies proper handwashing, coughing ethics, social distancing, wearing masks, and disinfection.” Conveying these messages is a constant endeavor for the task force. “Our daily work is to deliver simple, clear, and repetitive messages that guarantee a community incorporates and perceives these behaviors as a positive change. We have not had a positive case in our community as of now.”

## Bridging Policy and Reality

The Supreme Court has recognized the rights of transgender people in 2009. Unfortunately, systemic change and societal practices are not a unified effort. The transgendered community had long faced stigma and discrimination which makes them reluctant to approach formal channels for support. COVID-19 highlights the necessity for public services to be inclusive in their practices and the government has taken steps to support this shift. Transgendered people can access the governments health insurance scheme as of this year. The coverage provides Rs, 720,000 (\$4.670) a year for health treatment.

Discrimination is the most covert and common manner to isolate marginalized communities. A vast majority of transgenders attend secondary and tertiary schools because of their treatment. Education is the start of a series of lost opportunities towards progress. Although '73% of Pakistans labor force is under an informal economy, the negative stigma around the transgender population follows them well into their adulthood. It prevents them from skills related work opportunities.




“We would earn PKR 200-300 (USD 1.30- 1.70) from begging and offerings we received throughout auspicious functions. That has all ceased during isolation and we have fallen into even deeper poverty,” expresses Qamber. Starvation and financial struggles become a much more apparent reality that affects more citizens than the pandemic. “The organization offered to provide information and Roshan packages. I collected district-wise data for distribution to all of the households in a particular area,” explains Qambar. REEDS follows government guidelines for standard ration packages. “The community received packs that contained the food staples that included flour, rice, pulses, spices, oil, sugar, tea, and dry milk. Each package would sustain a family of six to seven for a month.”

## When Efforts are Escalated

REEDS members assembled to provide protective measures and information for the marginalized communities that seldom receive it. They launched a campaign to raise funds through a staff coordination fund platform aiming to support 600 marginalized communities who similarly rely on begging as a means of meeting their daily needs. The safety packages comply with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation and Core Humanitarian Standards. The organization also ensures the safe delivery of these packages at community members' doorsteps. The safety kit contained surgical masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and COVID-19 information leaflets.

REEDS amplify their efforts with coordination. They are continuously synchronizing with the District Government and WHO through radio programs and distribution of educational flashcards to community members. These mediums expand the reach of knowledge regarding the symptoms of COVID-19 and how to prevent it.





Qambar perceives the current crisis as a reminder for the collective responsibility towards marginalized communities, “The burdens on these populations become greater than ever. My request is that you stay at home to practice awareness and use your voice to spread awareness. We are all reformers when we promote and follow safety guidelines.” The most dedicated advocates arise from the community they serve. Qambar is more than an advocate- she is the systemic change that progresses a community. She is the representation of a community whose voice and rights have long been stifled.


This World Humanitarian Day, we celebrate real-life heroes- the frontline workers and community volunteers like Qambar, who put their community's safety before their own.

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