

ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE



EMPOWER Project IMPACT REPORT



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FOREWORD

At Islamic Relief Worldwide, our mission is rooted in faith, justice, and compassion. This report shines a light on a critical area of injustice that continues to plague communities across the world: the inequality, marginalisation, and violence faced by women and girls.

Despite comprising half of the global population, women make up 70 per cent of the world's poor. They work two-thirds of all hours globally yet receive just one-tenth of the world's income. Two out of every three illiterate adults are women. One in every three women has experienced violence in her lifetime. These injustices are not inherent but borne out of unequal power relations, systemic denial of rights, and deeply embedded social norms which shape who has access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power within households and communities.

As a faith-inspired organisation, we find strength and guidance in Islam which – along with all major faiths – champions the principles of justice, dignity, and equality. Surah al-Nisa (The Women) in the Qur'an clearly affirms the social, economic, and legal rights of women and calls upon believers to stand firmly for justice, even when it is against their own interests (Qur'an 4:135). It is our duty to honour these values by working towards a world where women and girls can live free from violence and discrimination.

We believe that faith, when correctly understood and applied, can be a powerful driver for personal and social change. It resonates deeply in the communities we serve. That is why we work with faith leaders, Muslim and otherwise, to challenge harmful cultural norms, reinterpret misunderstood teachings, and promote gender justice through a lens that is both faithful to and transformative.

We also believe that true change comes from within communities and by prioritising the voices and leadership of those most affected. Through training, community mobilisation, and inclusive advocacy, we empower local stakeholders to lead local solutions. We speak their language—literally and spiritually—to change hearts, minds, and behaviours while respecting local cultures and specificities.

Islamic Relief has been addressing gender injustice for many years, with gender-based violence (GBV) being a core advocacy theme since 2013. Our work has made meaningful progress, but there is much more to be done. Our programmes in this area must continue—not only because they are effective, but because they uphold our deepest values.

Justice (adl) is not optional. It is an obligation. And gender justice—justice between women and men—is not a separate issue; it is central to everything we do.

We invite you to engage with this report with an open heart and a clear intention: to stand firmly for justice and dignity for all.

Shahin Ashraf
Head of Global Advocacy
Islamic Relief Worldwide



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender injustice continues to cause immense human suffering globally, denying individuals their God-given rights. Women and girls, in particular, suffer disproportionately from inequality and exploitation in education, health, and employment, and experience heightened vulnerability to physical and sexual violence. The same patriarchal mechanisms which harm women and girls also impact men and boys, resulting in a range of negative effects on their physical and mental wellbeing. This reality contradicts the Islamic ethos and the Qur'an, which condemns all forms of oppression and injustice.

Faith-based actors and organisations have long played a crucial role in promoting gender justice, offering vital support through health and education services, humanitarian relief, and social and spiritual guidance. Rooted in the communities they serve, with trusted access to some of the most marginalised individuals, these actors are uniquely positioned to advocate for gender justice.

Building on this legacy, the Declaration of Gender Justice in, which has emerged from a series of multi-stakeholder consultations led by Islamic Relief Worldwide, serves as a framework for advancing gender justice within an Islamic context. The Declaration marks a significant milestone, articulating key faith-based principles of justice and balance to challenge harmful cultural practices, social conditions, and injustices. By reaffirming the God-given rights of all human beings, it underscores our collective duty to uphold gender justice while also confronting the rise of Islamophobia, conflict, and anti-immigrant sentiment, all of which exacerbate gender injustices against Muslim women and men globally.

Accordingly, the Declaration aims to inspire change and mobilise action at local, national, and global levels. It urges Muslim stakeholders to unite, fosters interfaith and cross-sector collaboration, and calls on both faith-based and secular organisations to commit to ending gender injustices. The call for justice transcends boundaries, uniting people with a shared sense of purpose and identity, especially in times of division. The Declaration serves as a bridge, providing continuity, solidarity, and hope during challenging times.

Born out of this commitment, the EMPOWER project provides a practical response to addressing gender injustice. Building on the principles of the Declaration, EMPOWER seeks to strengthen communities—especially women and girls—through targeted interventions that promote gender equality, social justice, and lasting change. Recognising the power of faith to shape societal values, the project leverages religious teachings and faith leadership to drive transformative change. By integrating Islamic perspectives into advocacy, training, and policy influence, EMPOWER equips faith leaders and community champions with the tools and knowledge to foster culturally sensitive responses to gender inequality, challenging harmful practices such as GBV and early/forced marriage, sometimes called child marriage. The project also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Islamic Relief's broader commitment to gender equity and social justice.

To date, the EMPOWER project has been piloted in Islamic Relief's country offices in Indonesia and Pakistan, selected for their existing infrastructure, personnel, and safeguarding mechanisms. In Indonesia, the project targeted Aceh and West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), focusing on reducing domestic violence and child marriage through multi-stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and faith-sensitive advocacy. In Pakistan, EMPOWER addressed domestic violence and barriers to girls' education in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Rawalpindi, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, employing mass mobilisation and strategic awareness campaigns. The pilot phase also engaged faith leaders from diverse religious communities, including Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian.

Across both countries, EMPOWER has made key strides in strengthening coordination, raising awareness and capacity building, and mobilising community advocacy. The initiative has achieved key milestones, including the establishment of collaborative platforms such as committees of faith leaders, anti-child marriage task forces, and Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs). These groups have been instrumental in handling safeguarding cases, raising awareness, and advocating for improved regulations. The training programmes conducted by EMPOWER have generated strong engagement from stakeholders and high buy-in from faith leaders, enabling the project to reach previously overlooked spaces such as Islamic boarding schools. Trained facilitators have gone on to lead their own focus group discussions (FGDs), sermons, and community meetings, reaching over 2,350 people in Indonesia and more than 900 in Pakistan.

The combined impact of awareness campaigns and the influence of local champions has driven change at individual, community, and policy levels. The project has identified a greater willingness from the public to engage with issues of gender inequality following the implementation of activities. This can be seen in the increased reporting of GBV cases. EMPOWER has also led to meaningful changes in policies which promote the rights of women and children at provincial and village levels, as well in revisions to regulations that had previously disadvantaged women and children. Finally, the socialisation of the GBV referral mechanism in Pakistan has been instrumental in informing the public and fostering collaboration among organisations working under the system. These efforts have laid the foundation for long-term, systemic transformation in gender equality and child protection across the targeted regions.

Looking ahead, the project faces several challenges. Deeply entrenched cultural norms that reinforce patriarchal practices require sustained efforts to dismantle, necessitating long-term engagement and advocacy. Limited capacity remains an obstacle in this regard, highlighting the need for extended and more frequent training sessions, the development of additional educational materials, and the creation of platforms for knowledge sharing. Moreover, while significant strides have been made in fostering coordination, building and maintaining strong partnerships—particularly with community-based organisations—remains essential for continued impact. Political challenges also pose a risk, as inadequate government budgets hinder long-term efforts, and political instability in both countries threatens the sustainability of programmes.

To overcome these challenges, the future of EMPOWER must prioritise expanding outreach, fostering stronger partnerships, and securing government commitments for long-term support. Incorporating economic empowerment initiatives, formalising faith leader training programmes, and leveraging digital platforms for advocacy and awareness will further enhance its effectiveness. By building on these foundations, EMPOWER can continue driving transformative change, fostering safer and more equitable communities for women and children.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

INDONESIA

Strengthened stakeholder coordination, including the creation of provincial task forces on women and child protection

Conducted eight capacity building events to train over 200 faith leaders, government officers, teachers, and NGO workers, with 100 per cent reporting increased knowledge on GBV and child protection following the training

Engaged faith leaders, government agencies, and NGOs, leading to a 19 per cent increase in GBV case reporting in Aceh

Conducted 89 awareness sessions and nine public campaigns, reaching more than 6,500 people and leading to 12 behaviour shifts observed at individual, institutional, and societal levels

Involved more than 10 Islamic boarding schools across two provinces in prevention measures and case handling of GBV and violence toward children in their respective institutions

Facilitated the drafting of 20 policies and the revision of gender-insensitive policies in Qanun Jinayah (Aceh's Shariah law)

PAKISTAN

Established four local advisory councils (shura) of faith leaders to support community engagement

Conducted eight awareness sessions and capacity-building workshops, training faith leaders, students, and teachers, with 84 per cent reporting increased knowledge on GBV and child protection

Established and revitalised CHATs in four regions with a total of 316 members

Organised national and provincial walks, rallies, and advocacy events, including a national multi-stakeholder event with a total of 344 participants

Socialised the GBV referral mechanism, improving community access to legal and support services

Reached over 5 million people through radio broadcasts, rallies, and social media campaigns

1. INTRODUCTION

The EMPOWER project contributes to achieving the SDGs, specifically Goals 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Rooted in the principles of the Islamic Gender Justice Declaration, the project integrates faith perspectives into gender justice and child protection advocacy, recognising the influential role of religious leaders in shaping community attitudes and behaviours.

The primary aim of EMPOWER is to challenge harmful social practices, such as GBV, that perpetuate gender inequality by creating community-based gender justice champions who will promote transformative change through advocating for behavioural shifts at the local level and influencing policy changes at both local and national levels. The project focuses on grassroots capacity building and facilitation, ensuring that faith-based responses to gender injustice at the community level are both effective and sustainable. It further advocates for legal systems, including religious and customary laws, to recognise, prevent, and adequately address gender injustice. To achieve this, the project takes an innovative and faith-based approach to gender justice and child protection that combines World Vision's Channels of Hope advocacy training with child protection methodology to extensively mobilise and engage faith leaders and invest in the development of female faith scholarship that contributes to faith literacy. The research component of the project, which includes this report,

helps to ensure that evidence-based advocacy informs behavioural and policy changes to promote gender justice.

EMPOWER targets two country offices, Indonesia and Pakistan, selected on set of criteria including the existence of infrastructure, personnel, and safeguarding coordinators. The area of work selected by the countries is based on an extensive five-day workshop and driven by the specific contexts and needs of each country.

In Indonesia, where Islamic Relief has been working on Islamic Gender Justice as mandated by its 2022-2026 Country Strategy, the core focus is domestic violence against women and child marriage. The project focuses on Aceh and NTB, areas where child marriage and domestic abuse are widespread and often normalised through cultural attitudes and misinterpreted religious beliefs. It aims to enhance multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination to mobilise civil society, equip faith leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to prepare on responding to gender and child protection needs, and systematically collect, monitor and utilise data and evidence in the field as a main tool for evidence-based advocacy action that in turn informs behavioural and policy changes adequately responding to gender justice.



Figure 1. Map of Indonesia, with Islamic Relief offices highlighted

In Pakistan, the project focuses on two key areas — addressing domestic violence and promoting girls' education — in four regions: Balochistan, KPK, Rawalpindi, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The overarching aim is to enhance gender empowerment through mass mobilisation, with improved gender empowerment measures adopted at both the community and national levels. The public awareness and behaviour change campaigns are conducted using a variety of strategies, including community information, education, and communication (IEC) kits, short videos, public walks and rallies, and radio broadcasts. These approaches highlight Islamic teachings on domestic violence and girls' education, aiming to influence legislation, policy, and practice at the community, state, and national levels.

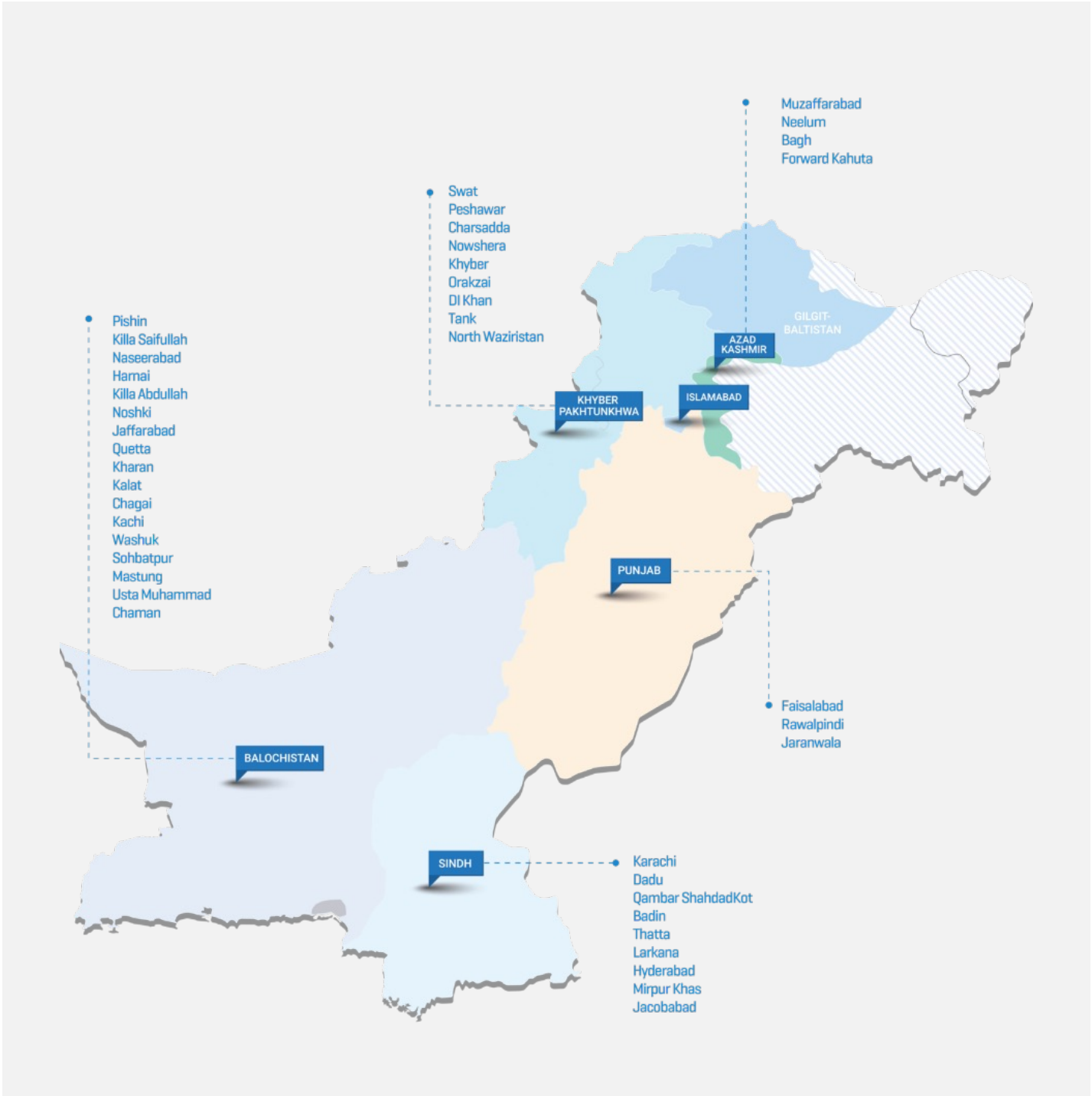


Figure 2. Map of Pakistan.

2. ORGANISATION'S MISSION AND RELEVANCE TO THE PROJECT

Islamic Relief is a faith-inspired organisation rooted in the Islamic values of excellence (ihsan), sincerity (ikhlas), social justice (adl), compassion (rahma), and custodianship (amana). These core principles guide its mission to alleviate global poverty and suffering, ensuring that aid is provided regardless of religion, ethnicity, or gender.

With a long-standing commitment to gender justice and female empowerment, Islamic Relief operates in over 40 countries, witnessing firsthand the consequences of gender inequities. This experience positions the organisation as a key agent of change, working to empower women and girls through integrated, context-specific, culturally sensitive, and community-based approaches. Recognising the complexities of the environments in which it operates, Islamic Relief has organisational policies to guide its work, including the Gender Justice Policy and Early Marriage Policy.

The foundation of Islamic Relief's Gender Justice Policy is drawn from a religious imperative that underscores the importance of justice: "You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly – if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do." [Qur'an 4:135]

Accordingly, Islamic Relief actively promotes gender justice through its programmes, ensuring that the specific needs of women and girls are addressed. Gender has been embedded as a cross-cutting theme within our Global Strategy since 2010, mandating the integration of gender analysis into programming while addressing the strategic needs of beneficiaries. GBV was first identified as a key advocacy theme in 2013 and remains central to our work, reinforcing Islamic Relief's commitment to combating gender injustice on a global scale.

To ensure gender responsiveness in our humanitarian action, Islamic Relief implements a range of measures. These include equitable access and participation, increased protection and accountability, focused support for women and girls in disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes, as well as the integration of gender considerations across all initiatives. Additionally, the organisation prioritises expanding gender-equitable economic and training opportunities and combating GBV throughout our programming. These objectives are outlined in detail within the Gender Justice Policy, demonstrating Islamic Relief's unwavering commitment to promoting justice, equality, and empowerment.

3. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Indonesia

a. BACKGROUND

GBV is a critical ongoing issue in Indonesia. According to a national survey in 2021, 1 in 4 women and girls aged 15–64 years have reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. To combat GBV, the Indonesian government has undertaken legislative and policy-driven initiatives, including introducing the Child Protection Law (No. 35 of 2014) and the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Violence Against Children (2017–2021). Additionally, it has established institutions such as the National Commission on Child Protection (Komnas PA) and the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection to coordinate efforts in preventing violence against women and children. However, significant challenges remain in the implementation of these laws and policies. A gap exists between policy and practice, with weak enforcement of legislation and policy posing a threat to the protection of women and children. Civil society organisations (CSOs) working on GBV issues also struggle with limited funding and resources, and in some cases, face harassment and intimidation. Other challenges which further perpetuate the spread of child abuse includes a lack of awareness around recognising signs of abuse, insufficient resources for child protection programmes, shortage of trained professionals to respond to abuse cases, and cultural and misinterpreted religious beliefs that may normalise violence against children. These barriers hinder the effectiveness of child protection efforts and underscore the need for greater investment in awareness campaigns, training, and policy implementation.

EMPOWER targets two provinces in Indonesia, Aceh and NTB, where Islamic Relief has been actively working for over a decade. Aceh has a long history of conflict and violence, contributing to a deeply patriarchal culture that perpetuates GBV. The Shariah law enacted in 2001 has, in some cases, been misinterpreted to justify discriminatory practices against women. For instance, the use of caning as a punishment for adultery disproportionately affects women, and the enforcement of Shariah law is often stricter against women than men. Sexual violence and cultural practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) also remain widespread, with survivors discouraged to report due to societal stigmatisation. Despite these challenges, several initiatives to address GBV already exist in Aceh, including advocacy campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, gender sensitisation workshops to promote awareness, legal assistance provided by NGOs and shelters, and various government efforts to shift patriarchal attitudes and improve access to justice.

In NTB, one of the key issues threatening the wellbeing of women and girls is child marriage, with a prevalence rate of 17.7 per cent in 2017, which is significantly higher than the national average of 14.1 per cent. While this number declined to 16.09 per cent in 2019, NTB remains among the top five provinces with the highest child marriage rates in Indonesia. Several factors contribute to the persistence of child marriage in NTB.

These are:

- Poverty, which leads families to marry off daughters young to ease financial burdens
- Lack of education, limiting opportunities for girls
- Traditional and cultural beliefs, such as the Sasak ethnic group's practice of merariq, where couples make verbal marriage vows before witnesses, sometimes leading to informal or early marriages.
- Religious practices, including nikah siri (informal marriages), which contribute to the cycle of child marriage.



Celebration of 16 days of Activism with community in Punjab

Child marriage has serious consequences for young girls, including increased risk of maternal mortality due to early pregnancies, greater vulnerability to domestic violence, and reduced access to education and economic opportunities. While the government has introduced several initiatives to increase education and reduce poverty as a means to combat child marriage, further efforts are needed to fully address the issue. The project identified the following three major gaps that need to be addressed to strengthen gender justice and child protection:

1. Lack of awareness and capacity among both government and non-government actors involved in GBV and child protection systems of prevention and response
2. Harmful cultural and religious practices that continue to underpin GBV and child protection challenges
3. Need for stronger laws, policies, and regulations, along with better collaboration and coordination among existing stakeholders.

b. ADVOCACY AIMS

There are a number of existing efforts by the government, faith-based organisations (FBOs), and faith networks to address gender justice and child protection in Indonesia, but coordination among them remains a challenge. The Islamic Gender Justice Declaration was established in response to this issue, recognising that close and intensive collaboration is essential for achieving widespread and sustainable transformation.

To bridge this gap, it is critical to engage key gender and child protection stakeholders, including faith leaders, community gender and child protection champions, teachers, and local authorities. Their mobilisation and advocacy efforts play a vital role in creating systemic change at both the community and policy levels. Accordingly, the EMPOWER project focused on three key objectives to achieve improved gender justice and child protection:

1. Strengthened coordination between stakeholders: Improving collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders on faith-sensitive gender justice in Aceh and NTB
2. Capacity building: Increasing knowledge and skills among local stakeholders in faith-based advocacy methods.
3. Advocacy: Enhancing community and village-level policy advocacy for the prevention and response to GBV and child protection issues.

Through these efforts, the EMPOWER project aims to create a sustainable framework for gender justice and child protection in Indonesia, ensuring that faith-sensitive approaches contribute to meaningful and lasting social transformation. Additionally, EMPOWER further seeks to develop robust research and data-driven advocacy efforts to inform policy changes and community interventions.

c. KEY STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Objective 1: Strengthened coordination between stakeholders

There are existing efforts in Indonesia to address GBV and child protection, involving legal services, health support, psychosocial services, and empowerment initiatives for victims. These efforts are carried out by the police, government hospitals, social welfare officers, and the Women and Child Protection Office at both the sub-national and national levels. The referral system is already established within the government framework at these levels, extending to the village level in Aceh and NTB provinces. Anyone can report cases directly to law enforcement or through specific referral service systems that meet the needs of the survivors. Once a report is made, designated personnel within the referral system, such as law enforcers, health workers, social welfare offices, and staff from the Women and Child Protection Office, process the cases and coordinate responses at the community or village level. The Centre of Integrated Services for the Empowerment of Women and Children, established under the Women and Child Protection Office, works at both provincial and district levels to coordinate among the referral system stakeholders in Aceh and NTB.

However, there is limited awareness within communities on the availability of the referral system. Furthermore, there remains a need to strengthen coordination among the various stakeholders involved in the system. The EMPOWER project aimed to address these challenges through several key activities:

- **Strategic mapping of coordination actions** among UNICEF, local child protection bodies (LPA), and three local NGOs to collaborate in advocating for child marriage prevention in NTB.
- **Establishment of coordination forums** in NTB and Aceh involving targeted stakeholders including religious and community leaders, the Health Office, Police, and the Manpower Office to discuss GBV and child protection systems in the regions.
- **Socialisation and monitoring** of joint forums for handling violence cases (FORBES ASIEK), and meetings to socialise the Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Woman and Children (Unit Pelayanan Teknis Kegiatan Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak). Monitoring of empowerment activities will also be part of these efforts.
- **Networking and advocating** for the NTB Provincial Parliament to lobby for the enhancement of government regulations on child marriage prevention and better implementation across various government offices and grassroots levels.



Distribution of school learning kits in Punjab

Objective 2: Capacity building

A second key gap identified among stakeholders was a lack of capacity. To address this, the EMPOWER project utilised an adapted Channels of Hope training for gender justice, child protection, and advocacy, specifically targeting faith leaders as influential figures within their communities with potential to drive change. The training is interactive and engaging, creating a safe space for faith leaders and their communities to learn, share, and discuss sensitive topics.

The focus of the training is centred around a three-year toolkit based on advocacy, programme development, campaigning, and communication. This toolkit aims to strengthen advocacy capacity and address harmful gender norms, including by engaging men and boys, as well as marginalised communities such as people with disabilities. Driven by the toolkit, EMPOWER involved eight capacity-building activities at the national level in Jakarta, Aceh, and NTB. These activities included:

- **Workshops** on women and children's issues in Aceh and NTB, involving both government and non-government stakeholders.
- **Gender and child protection Channel of Hope training**, incorporating an Islamic perspective, for government stakeholders, non-government organisations, and faith leaders from four districts across Aceh and NTB.
- **Training for teachers, village officials, and faith leaders** in NTB on gender and child protection with an Islamic perspective.
- **Parenting with Love Training** for faith leaders, community leaders, teachers, health workers, and government and non-government stakeholders in both NTB and Aceh provinces.
- **Additional trainings on advocacy for change**, aimed at strengthening knowledge on gender justice and child protection.

Objective 3: Advocacy by Stakeholders and the Wider Community

Driving long-term sustainable change, particularly for the purpose of changing societal norms, requires the leadership and participation of the community. The training on gender justice and child protection, combined with an understanding of advocacy, is designed to mobilise local communities for change through direct dialogues and discussions. Further, campaign activities are conducted to raise awareness, shift paradigms, and initiate tangible changes with stakeholders and communities. These aim to build a broad coalition of stakeholders and advocate for lasting policy and community-level change. Key activities in this regard include:

- **Multi-stakeholder advocacy meetings** to raise awareness, declare commitments to prevent negative cultural practices, and strengthen local regulations for women and child protection.
- **Workshops** to gather input for the reformulation of regulations such as the Aceh Women's Protection Qanun (Law).
- **Campaigns** involving mass public viewership to raise awareness and engage policymakers, including a National Children's Day campaign and a Cultural and Religious Festival to promote women and children's rights.
- **Commitments** to empower children through Child Rights and Protection training, mainstreaming of child rights and child protection agenda, and establishment of children's forums.

PAKISTAN

a. BACKGROUND

There are significant concerns around gender injustice in Pakistan, primarily driven by patriarchal attitudes, the low economic status of women, lack of awareness regarding women's rights, insufficient education, and unequal empowerment between men and women. A survey conducted by the Thomas Reuters Corporation in 2018 ranks Pakistan as the sixth most dangerous country for women. Reports suggest that between 70-90 per cent of women in Pakistan experience some form of violence, and 32 per cent of women have been victims of physical violence. It is further predicted that these statistics are conservative estimates due to underreporting and stigmatisation of survivors, with actual numbers likely to be higher. Addressing these issues requires raising awareness about domestic violence and strengthening laws and legislation to provide comprehensive protection for women.

Another related challenge in Pakistan is girls' education, with a significant disparity in access to education for girls. Only 51 per cent of girls attend primary school, with just 30 per cent completing their primary education. The attendance rate drops to just 21 per cent when looking at secondary school. While Pakistan's overall female literacy rate stands at only 38.4 per cent. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, the net enrolment rate for girls in regions such as Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Balochistan is even lower than the national average, while KPK faces challenges with low retention and completion rates for girls. Despite a 10.24 per cent increase in education spending between 2020 and 2023, significant challenges persist. These include cultural and social barriers, lack of infrastructure (including electricity, water, sanitation, and a shortage of female teachers), poverty, and economic instability. Urgent attention from both the government and civil society is required to change societal attitudes, improve infrastructure, and provide economic incentives for families to send their daughters to school.

To address the challenges related to gender inequality, the EMPOWER project intervened in four key areas of Pakistan in which Islamic Relief operates: Balochistan, KPK, Rawalpindi, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

b. ADVOCACY AIMS

Focusing on domestic violence and girls' education, the EMPOWER project aimed to raise awareness and advocate for equal rights for women and girls who face significant discrimination. The expected outcome of the project was that improved gender empowerment measures would be adopted at community and national level through the engagement of faith leaders, communities, and government departments. Through these efforts, the project seeks to empower communities, enhance policymaking, and create lasting changes for women and children in Pakistan. It includes three key aims:

1. increased sensitisation of policy-making actors and the wider community through partnership and alliance building
2. capacity building and raising awareness among targeted communities regarding domestic violence and girl's education particularly by engaging women, children, and parents
3. mobilising the wider community and other stakeholders to advocate and take action to promote the rights of women and children.

c. KEY STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Objective 1: Partnership and alliance building

- **Stakeholder analysis** to identify influential groups within the community, including faith leaders who can use religious teachings to address critical issues, and community groups and CSOs, which have a deeper understanding of local customs and traditions and can effectively engage with the community.
- **Collaborative meetings** to bring together faith leaders, community influencers, social activists, and representatives from academia and universities, as well as cross-provincial meetings to strengthen partnerships.
- **Formation** of a local level shura (advisory council) of faith leaders to provide guidance and support.

Objective 2: Raising awareness and building capacity

- **Dissemination** of numerous IEC materials, including shorter videos, promotional packages and radio broadcasts, to reach a broader audience and sensitise the community about women's and girls' rights, particularly from a faith-based perspective.
- **Distribution of learning kits** in each target area to encourage students to actively participate in their studies, serve as incentives to increase engagement, and promote education.

Objective 3: Advocacy by stakeholders and the wider community

- **Establishment and reactivation of community forums** and CHATs to facilitate ongoing discussions.
- **Awareness sessions** conducted by faith leaders within local communities.
- **National-level conference** on gender justice to mobilise stakeholders.
- **Launch of referral mechanism** at the local level and socialisation of its effective use through educational community sessions.
- **Walks, rallies, and the celebration of international days** dedicated to gender justice and women's rights, aimed at raising awareness and fostering community involvement.

4) OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Overview

The EMPOWER project has made notable strides in promoting gender justice and child protection in Indonesia and Pakistan, with significant successes in stakeholder coordination, community engagement, and policy advocacy. However, challenges remain in implementation, sustainability, and overcoming deep-rooted social and cultural barriers.

In Indonesia, the project strengthened collaboration among government agencies, local NGOs, and religious leaders, leading to increased reporting and handling of GBV cases. Training programmes successfully empowered over 229 faith and community leaders, while campaigns reached thousands of individuals through various media platforms. This resulted in increased public knowledge and willingness to discuss GBV and violence towards children. Additionally, advocacy efforts led to the formation of an anti-child marriage task force in NTB new policies that promote gender equality, and revisions to existing gender-insensitive policies.

In Pakistan, the project saw strong engagement from faith leaders and community influencers, resulting in widespread awareness campaigns and increased participation in educational and advocacy initiatives. Community forums were established to support GBV survivors, and media outreach efforts reached millions. The launch of the GBV referral mechanism further led to a growing awareness of the community around reporting cases of harassment and violence, reflecting increased community understanding and a change in mindset.

Despite these achievements, persistent challenges remain across both countries. These include the cultural normalisation of GBV, inadequate government funding for gender programmes, potential for political instability to impact policy implementation, and the need to expand the capacity and scope of the project to facilitate further collaboration and capacity building to sustain impact. Addressing these gaps will ensure the continued success of the project in fostering gender justice and child protection.



School boys taking a participate in a walk holding cards with awareness messages in AJK

A domestic abuse survivor's journey to empowerment in Pakistan

At just 13, Noor* was married off, a decision driven by her family's financial struggles. While her early marriage was marked by love for her husband and children, after Noor's husband died, she was subjected to violence and mistreatment by her in-laws. Her husband's family eventually forced Noor out of their home and separated her from her 2 sons and threatened to take away her infant daughter. With no formal education, few job prospects and a lack of knowledge of her legal rights, Noor felt utterly trapped.

Noor became aware of Islamic Relief's EMPOWER project after hearing about it from a neighbour. Through community activities and support groups organised by EMPOWER, she was able to connect with other women whose experiences mirrored her own.

For the first time, Noor learned about laws protecting women from domestic violence. Noor informed her in-laws that she would take legal action if they continued to harass her or tried to take her daughter away. Her confidence grew with every session she attended, empowering her to fight for herself and her children.

One of the most significant moments in Noor's journey came when she realised that she wasn't alone. With the support of Shugufta, a dedicated member of the EMPOWER community group, Noor began therapy, which helped her regain her sense of self-worth. Noor could now see a future where she wasn't only a survivor, but also a protector of her children and an advocate for other women in similar situations.

While Noor has come a long way, her journey is far from over. She now dreams of reclaiming custody of her sons and ensuring her children get the education she never had. Despite ongoing financial struggles, Noor is determined to provide a better life for them.

Noor's resilience and courage, fuelled by support and education, highlight the importance of grassroots efforts like the EMPOWER project. Change may come slowly, but for women like Noor, it starts with knowledge and the belief that they deserve better.

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

Indonesia

Objective 1: Strengthened coordination between stakeholders

The EMPOWER project successfully conducted several coordination meetings to facilitate collaboration among targeted stakeholders. These resulted in the establishment of a task force on women and child protection, which included a diverse group of stakeholders from government agencies (such as the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, the Regional Development Planning Agency, the Bureau of Law, the Education Office, and the police), local NGOs (e.g. Plan Lombok, LPA, Lakpesdam, Gagas, Santai, Sobot, LNH Apik, and village-based representatives, including facilitators from religious leaders and local government. The project also strengthened faith-sensitive platform coordination through 89 awareness sessions across eight districts in the two provinces and nine public campaigns organised collaboratively by faith-sensitive coordination platform members. As a result of these efforts, the number of cases reported and handled by the Technical Regional Unit of Women & Children Protection in Aceh increased from 1,029 in 2022 to 1,227 in 2024. In NTB, 80 GBV cases were reported and handled by provincial and district technical units in 2024.

The project also demonstrated strong coordination and collaboration among various NGOs, overcoming previous challenges in mobilising

these organisations. This collaboration included working with local NGOs experienced in child and women's rights advocacy which had pre-established positive relationships with the government and international organisations. Such collaboration significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the programme at the local level. Joint funding and resource-sharing initiatives between organisations such as Wahana Visi Indonesia (WVI) and Islamic Relief Indonesia (IRI) in East and North Lombok Districts particularly led to notable outputs.

Despite the success of the anti-child marriage taskforce, however, there remain a number of areas which require further development and monitoring. Regional plans which have been developed in NTB and Aceh face risks around implementation due to deeply ingrained cultural norms, inadequate awareness campaigns, socio-economic pressures, limited community engagement, and the threat of local political interests obstructing policy. Moreover, capacity remains limited, with no tangible commitment from the government in terms of budget allocation to fund above policies or action plans. This is concerning particularly as GBV prevention remains primarily under the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection without integration into the strategic priorities of other relevant government agencies. Finally, the scope and reach of the faith-sensitive coordination platforms need improvement, as they only oversee four districts out of 10 in NTB and four out of 23 in Aceh, and youth forums within the platform remain underrepresented.

Aceh's mothers spark change as EMPOWER project delivers justice and hope

In rural Aceh, silence often shrouds cases of GBV, child abuse, and underage marriage. Cultural stigma and fear of retaliation leave victims trapped. EMPOWER, which partners with local organisations such as Flower Aceh, exists to dismantle these barriers. Through legal aid, trauma counselling, and community advocacy, it empowers survivors to reclaim their rights - and their futures.

Mas Reza's story epitomises this mission. A 38-year-old homemaker, Mas Reza never imagined she would become a champion of hope for her community. But when her 13-year-old daughter was sexually assaulted by a local shopkeeper in 2021, her world shattered, and her journey from victim to advocate began. After connecting with Flower Aceh, she gained access to free legal support and psychological care for her daughter through Pulih, a trauma recovery centre. The perpetrator, a 50-year-old man who preyed on adolescents, was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison. "Only then did people say, 'Women can be heard,'" Mas Reza explains.

But EMPOWER's impact stretches far beyond courtrooms. It trains local advocates like Mas Reza to become pillars of support in their villages. Today, she leads a network of women who identify cases of abuse, accompany survivors to police stations, and challenge harmful norms. "We tell mothers: 'You're not alone,'" she says.



EMPOWER's success is due to its community-led approach. Local volunteers like Ms Yanti, a health worker, educate girls about bodily autonomy during village meetings. "She teaches them which body parts no one should touch," Mas Reza explains. Meanwhile, male allies including the village head Mr Musin collaborate to address issues such as child nutrition and stunting, creating holistic support systems.

EMPOWER underscores a vital truth: resilience grows when communities unite. For Mas Reza, empowerment means turning pain into purpose. "I don't want other children to suffer," she says. "Now, when someone is trapped, they know Flower Aceh and Islamic Relief will fight for them."

Her daughter, now 16, still struggles with what happened to her in the past. But she also has dreams for the future. "She's stronger," Mas Reza says softly. "And so am I."

Objective 2: Capacity building

The project's capacity-building activities have been instrumental in strengthening local facilitators. Over 229 faith leaders, community leaders, government officers, NGO workers, teachers, and health workers from Aceh and NTB provinces have been trained in gender justice, child protection, advocacy, and parenting from an Islamic perspective, with 100 per cent reporting increased knowledge on GBV and child protection issues. A total of 6,534 more people were reached through community awareness sessions and campaigns, including FGDs, Islamic speeches, and events during occasions such as National Children's Day and Independence Day. The project also mobilised trained stakeholders and faith leaders to conduct both offline and online campaigns, resulting in 1,000 text messages on child marriage prevention distributed by the public telecommunication provider, Telkomsel, in NTB, and 20,000 online audience interactions to posts on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

EMPOWER has fostered strong participation, enthusiasm, and stakeholder engagement. The project also garnered high buy-in from faith leaders, who played a crucial role in disseminating information to the community, particularly in Islamic boarding schools which had previously been neglected. This support led to a notable shift in how cases of violence at Islamic boarding schools were addressed, with these issues now beginning to receive serious attention. Additionally, the enthusiasm and acceptance of training sessions and meetings on Islamic-based gender and child protection, as well as Parenting with Love, far exceeded the project team's expectations. As one participant, a village imam, shared:

"Before EMPOWER, I didn't realise how silence perpetuated harm. Now, my sermons address toxic masculinity and the duty to protect Allah's amanah [trust]."

There remains a need to further develop the duration and content of the training and provide more learning tools that can be used to educate the community on child protection, parenting, and gender justice, including an encyclopaedia of Quranic verses and hadiths related to gender justice. The trainings also require formal acknowledgement from the local authority, such as in the form of a certification, to incentivise local champions. There is also a gap for a coordination platform for local champions to share learnings, and a long-term social media plan to spread EMPOWER's media tools and messages.

Objective 3: Mobilising stakeholders and community/village level policy advocacy

The project has achieved significant advocacy milestones in mobilising stakeholders, through initiatives including 21 advocacy meetings, seven campaigns, and two cultural and religious festivals across Aceh and NTB. These activities resulted in 12 observable shifts in individual, institutional, and societal behaviours. In NTB, sensitised and trained stakeholders, including faith leaders, established an anti-child marriage task force endorsed by a governor's decree. Similarly, in Aceh, stakeholders formed a forum for women and children protection and case handling. Additionally, 90 EMPOWER-trained facilitators conducted over 89 FGDs and community meetings across both provinces, reaching more than 2,350 people to promote gender and child protection issues, as well as parenting from an Islamic perspective. More than 10 Islamic boarding schools in Aceh and NTB have become involved in GBV and violence prevention measures and case handling. At the policy level, the project successfully facilitated the drafting and endorsement of 20 policies, including two village regulations aimed at preventing child marriage and drug abuse in Bengkel and Bayan villages in West and North Lombok, respectively. Furthermore, stakeholders were encouraged to advocate for the revision of regulations in Aceh's Shariah law which include harmful, gender-insensitive sanctions for women.

The project was very effective in socialising the issues of violence against women and children, encouraging more open discussions within the community. The project has also improved the community's understanding of GBV and advocated for the inclusion of legal protections for children and women at the village level. Such efforts have led to a shift in community mindset, with more individuals now willing to report cases of harassment and violence, marking a positive change in both awareness and willingness to report this violence. Despite these advancements, however, deep-rooted patriarchy continues to pose challenges in almost all districts/cities across the two provinces, requiring continued attention and intervention.

Pakistan

Objective 1: Increased sensitisation of policy-making actors and the wider community through partnership and alliance building

The EMPOWER project achieved significant success in partnership and alliance building by engaging religious leaders and community elders, which allowed the initiative to work within existing social frameworks and leverage trusted voices. Religious leaders were instrumental in raising awareness about domestic violence by reducing stigma, organising sermons and workshops, and referring cases to the authorities. As a result of EMPOWER, influential figures in the communities experienced a shift in attitudes and an increased willingness to take active roles in addressing these issues. The project experienced a high level of enthusiasm and strong engagement from stakeholders. Faith leaders and community members provided significant support for the cause, playing a crucial role in raising awareness and driving the project's objectives forward. This led to the formation of four local-level shura (committees) of faith leaders, which conducted awareness sessions reaching 913 community members. Local-level meetings with key stakeholders in different regions, such as Azad Jammu and Kashmir, KPK, Balochistan, and Punjab, engaged participants in discussing existing laws, identifying gaps, and emphasising the role of awareness-raising in marginalised communities.

Additionally, the project partnered with the Peshawar University to coordinate efforts, as well as the International Islamic University Islamabad to organise a seminar on education and domestic violence attended by 250 people. A national multi-stakeholder event involving top government officials, the National Commission on Human Rights, UN agencies, INGOs, and other stakeholders was also held, reaching 150 people in person and 194 online. This groundbreaking conference engaged various key stakeholders to raise awareness on gender justice on a national level. Cross-provincial meetings were also conducted with a total of 27 participants, involving academia, faith leaders, government, civil society, and youth.

Although these efforts proved highly effective, the project identified the remaining need for greater involvement from community-based organisations, stronger partnerships with local organisations and government agencies, and better collaboration between educational institutions, religious leaders, and policymakers for a more coordinated and sustainable response.

Objective 2: Raising awareness and building capacity

The project was successful in challenging traditional beliefs, emphasising the long-term benefits of educating girls, and framing domestic violence as a societal issue. This led to a shift in community perceptions, increased willingness to report abuse, and reduced stigma. The project conducted four two-day training workshops for faith leaders and community elders to align stakeholders and encourage unified efforts in combating domestic violence and promoting education. These workshops were attended by 42 participants in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 42 in Balochistan, 28 in KPK, and 36 in Punjab. Four awareness sessions were organised for students, reaching 764 participants and encouraging them to advocate for gender justice, including students from Islamic boarding schools who are often excluded from such initiatives. They were guided on identifying gender-related challenges within their communities and developing innovative solutions to address them. Through these sessions, students gained knowledge on promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive development.

The project also used faith leaders to organise sermons and community engagement, while teachers incorporated discussions on domestic violence into their curricula. As listed above, awareness sessions involving faith leaders reached 913 community members. Students participated in seminars and poster presentations on gender inequality and received 1,062 stationery kits. Feedback showed that 83 per cent of respondents reported increased knowledge and awareness about GBV and girls' education, with many acknowledging an expanded understanding of domestic violence beyond physical violence to include emotional and financial abuse. Participants expressed greater empowerment and confidence in their rights. The

project also developed and disseminated four IEC materials, produced short videos shared on YouTube, and broadcast three radio programmes on the importance of girls' education and preventing GBV, reaching a total of 5 million listeners. Furthermore, four walks and rallies were organised across KPK, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Balochistan, involving a total of 2,160 participants. While significant progress was made, the project has also identified gaps, including the need to strengthen capacity-building efforts for teachers and religious leaders and increase parental understanding of the significance of girls' education.

How female faith leaders are challenging gender inequality in Pakistan

In conservative societies around the world, where tradition and religion are deeply intertwined, social change can often feel impossible. But change is coming from within, led by women who hold unique positions of authority in their communities — female faith leaders.

One such leader is Shazia, a 40-year-old religious leader and teacher from Islamabad, Pakistan. For more than a decade, Shazia had been a quiet presence in her community, respected for her role as a religious leader, but constrained by societal norms that discouraged discussions about gender equality. In her early years, conversations about girls' education were rare, and when they did occur, they were usually met with apathy. "Education for boys was always seen as the priority," Shazia recalls. "Girls were expected to marry young, and there was little discussion about what they could achieve beyond their roles as wives and mothers."

Domestic violence, too, was a topic shrouded in silence. "It was something we all knew happened, but we didn't talk about it," she admits. "In my community, it was considered a private family matter, something we shouldn't interfere with unless it became unbearable." Like many, Shazia adhered to these norms, believing it was not her place to challenge the status quo.

The turning point came when Shazia encountered the EMPOWER project through a meeting organised by Islamic Relief. With the support of EMPOWER, Shazia began to take action. She started holding community sessions where she advocated for girls' education, drawing directly from religious texts to make her case. Her argument was simple but effective: educating girls is not just beneficial for the family and society, it is a religious obligation. By grounding her message in Islamic principles, she broke down the resistance she had previously encountered.

"The moment I started using faith as the foundation for these conversations, people began to listen differently," Shazia says. "They no longer saw me as someone challenging tradition but as someone working within it to promote justice and fairness."

She also began addressing domestic violence, framing it not as a private matter, but as an issue that affects the wellbeing of the entire community. In her sessions, she quoted religious texts that emphasise the importance of respect and peace within the home, using her platform to challenge the harmful belief that domestic violence is acceptable or should be tolerated.

Her advocacy work quickly gained traction. Families who had been reluctant to send their daughters to school began reconsidering, and conversations about domestic violence were starting to be had. "People began coming to me with their stories," she says. "They wanted to talk. They wanted to find solutions."

Shazia's story is a powerful reminder that, in the fight for gender equality, the voices of women in religious leadership are not just important—they are essential. With the right support, they can break down barriers that might otherwise seem insurmountable, creating a future where girls have access to education and women are free from violence.

Despite the progress Shazia has made, the road to lasting change is not easy. Deep-seated traditions and conservative views still pose significant barriers. "There are always people who resist," Shazia says, "But with each session I hold, more people start to see things differently."

Objective 3: Mobilising the community

A key success of the project was its ability to mobilise various stakeholders and engage the community in addressing domestic violence and promoting girls' education. Community forums, known as CHATs were established or reactivated in Rawalpindi, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Balochistan, and KPK, with 76, 75, 77, and 88 participants respectively. These forums were crucial in educating community members about the available support systems for GBV survivors. Additionally, community sessions on GBV and referral mechanisms were organised in KPK, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Balochistan, and Punjab, attended by a total of 664 participants. Referral mechanisms were launched at the local level, bringing together stakeholders such as government officials, lawyers, service providers, and UN agencies. These sessions highlighted existing policies, laws, and service systems while demonstrating how the various organisations should collaborate under the referral mechanism to ensure GBV cases are directed to the relevant authorities for immediate intervention. By engaging with various national actors, including legal experts and government agencies, the project further helped to identify gaps in existing policies, particularly in terms of access to support services for survivors and the legal framework surrounding online harassment.

The project also commemorated key international days, such as the 16 Days of Activism and International Women's Day, through organised sessions, arts competitions, seminars, walks, and other programmes. On International Women's Day a seminar was held in AJK in collaboration with women development department, bringing together 200 participants. Women supported by Islamic Relief were able to showcase their handicrafts, highlighting our role in supporting women's economic empowerment. Through such initiatives, the project created an atmosphere of inclusion, which encouraged women's participation. This inclusive environment also inspired other women in the community to get involved at all stages of the project, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility for addressing the project's goals.

Despite these efforts, however, domestic violence remains normalised in many communities and is seen as an inevitable issue. This underscores the continued need for advocacy, policy interventions, and community-driven initiatives to ensure sustainable progress.

5) LESSONS LEARNED

Indonesia

The project's socialisation efforts have significantly improved community awareness, encouraging more open discussions about violence and enhancing the community's understanding of GBV. Respect for cultural understandings has been an essential factor in facilitating this, especially given the strong patriarchal norms in some areas. In certain regions, the term 'gender' is considered sensitive, necessitating a more subtle approach. By integrating the Islamic perspective of 'equality', the project was able to introduce the principle of gender justice in a way that minimised resistance and rejection from the community.

Building trust and rapport with stakeholders has also played a crucial role in fostering further discussions and action to prevent and respond to GBV and child protection incidents. Collaboration with multiple stakeholders, particularly with WVI, has made a notable difference in outputs. The task force on GBV at the provincial level, moreover, has brought together diverse perspectives, resources, and influence from sectors such as government, CSOs, the private sector, community leaders, and survivors, creating a more holistic response to the issues.

Going forward, the project highlighted the need for evidence-based regulations in addressing GBV and child protection. While advocacy efforts of EMPOWER relied more on personalised lobbying, the development and implementation of evidence-based and participatory advocacy have been proven essential for tackling the root causes of these issues in the future.

Pakistan

Several lessons were learned throughout the project, providing valuable insights for future initiatives. In terms of efficiency, it was found that the project could have benefited from more extensive community-level awareness campaigns, increased gender sensitisation sessions, and leveraging social media to amplify outreach. Expanding the project's scope to include more rural areas would have further maximised outreach, especially in communities where domestic violence and educational disparities are more pronounced.

Regarding sustainability, the project ensured lasting awareness by engaging key community figures such as religious leaders. The influence of religious leaders on issues such as domestic violence, women's inheritance rights, and early child marriages, particularly in rural areas with high illiteracy rates, cannot be understated. Religious sermons were found to be a critical medium through which to mobilise communities and share corrective measures in light of religious teachings obtained from the Qur'an and the Hadith. Similarly, engaging teachers, who spend protracted periods of time with children, has been critical in raising awareness among the children regarding their rights, leading to long-term change.

To further sustain the project's impact, there is a need for continued training, stronger partnerships with local organisations, and the establishment of grassroots community groups focused on addressing these issues. Additionally, expanding access to digital platforms, particularly social media, would help maintain awareness efforts. Ensuring sustainability also requires policy-level commitments, resource allocation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Moreover, there remains a recognised need for additional training in effective communication and advocacy. Proposals in this regard include mentorship programmes and leadership workshops specifically for young girls, as well as the integration of domestic violence awareness and gender equality education into formal training programmes for teachers and religious leaders.

Finally, the project highlighted the importance of tackling root causes, particularly the economic deprivation or marginalisation that impacts girls' education. Many parents indicated they would support their daughters' education if scholarships were provided or if girls could acquire vocational skills to contribute to the household income. Addressing economic barriers, alongside advocacy and capacity building, was found to be crucial for improving girls' access to education.



6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The EMPOWER project has demonstrated the power of an innovative, faith-based approach in driving transformative change. By leveraging Quranic principles, key stakeholders, including faith leaders, civil society, and community champions, have been able to challenge deeply entrenched societal norms that perpetuate gender injustice and harm women and children. One of the most significant shifts has been in faith leadership itself. Many religious leaders, once hesitant to address gender equality, have become advocates, using their platforms to promote justice and protection for all. This transformation has rippled through communities, replacing stigma with solidarity and fostering a broader normative shift toward gender equity.

While concrete data on reduced violence rates is still emerging, the impact of EMPOWER on individual lives is already evident. A mother living in a rural area was once forbidden by her husband to attend an EMPOWER workshop, now she runs a small business with his support. A teenage girl, once withdrawn from school to work, has returned to her education after her village imam intervened on her behalf. These stories, though anecdotal, represent the real and lasting change EMPOWER has set in motion.

Yet much still needs to be done. True gender justice requires sustained commitment, expanded outreach, and deeper institutional support. As Dr Abdurazakh, an EMPOWER-trained faith leader from Indonesia, envisions: “Our work must outlive us. Imagine a world where every girl learns in safety, every mother leads with confidence, and every child’s potential is cherished.” EMPOWER has laid the foundation for this future. This work must now continue until protection is proactive, not reactive, and justice is not the exception but the norm.

Indonesia recommendations

- **Continuation of activities:** Given the complexity of women’s and children’s rights and protection issues, future projects should include targeted interventions with specific outcomes. These interventions should focus on developing children’s life skills and increasing their awareness of their rights, ensuring better protection from violence.
- **Certification for local champions:** Local champions should receive official certification from the regional/district Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection. This certification will validate their knowledge and skills in GBV prevention and child protection. Many trained local champions have already conducted awareness sessions and gained public recognition. Providing them with formal endorsements will further enhance their credibility and enable them to reach more people in promoting gender justice and child protection.
- **Establishing a coordination platform:** A dedicated platform should be developed for local champions to share knowledge and experiences in conducting awareness sessions and handling cases. Such a platform would foster innovation, improve decision-making, accelerate learning, enhance problem-solving skills, and build a culture of continuous learning. This would ultimately increase the effectiveness of local champions in facilitating protection against GBV and violence against children.
- **Evidence-based policy approaches:** Future interventions should incorporate evidence-based policy approaches to ensure effectiveness, sustainability, and optimal use of resources. This will enhance existing GBV and child protection-related programmes and improve their impact.
- **Financial sustainability through government commitment:** Efforts should be made to collect formal data on confirmed budget commitments from government agencies and village authorities. The project has not recorded data indicating official commitments from provincial and village governments to fund regional and village action plans for GBV interventions. Ensuring financial sustainability will strengthen long-term efforts in addressing GBV and child protection.

Pakistan recommendations

- **Grassroots engagement and awareness campaigns:** Community engagement should be strengthened through gender sensitisation sessions and widespread awareness campaigns. Forming local community groups can help address domestic violence and educational challenges, ensuring timely support for affected individuals.
- **Expanding outreach to rural areas:** Rural communities face higher incidences of domestic violence and more significant barriers to girls’ education. Partnering with local organisations embedded in these communities can enhance engagement and effectiveness. Additionally, mentorship programmes can be introduced, where older girls guide younger ones on education and domestic violence awareness.
- **Strategic partnerships for awareness and support:** Strengthening collaborations among educational institutions, parents, and religious leaders can enhance community awareness and support. A culturally sensitive curriculum integrating gender equality and domestic violence awareness should be developed. Establishing safe, confidential reporting mechanisms in schools to encourage students to report domestic violence incidents without fear of stigma or retaliation is also critical.
- **Capacity-building for religious leaders:** Training programmes should be provided for religious leaders on policy-related initiatives, equipping them to advocate for girls’ education more effectively. Gender equality workshops can also enhance their ability to promote these issues within their communities.
- **Economic empowerment programmes for women:** Initiatives such as financial literacy training, entrepreneurship programmes, and vocational education can enhance women’s independence and reduce their vulnerability to domestic violence. Long-term public-private partnerships should be explored to ensure the sustainability and scalability of these efforts.
- **Multi-stakeholder approach for sustainability:** A multi-stakeholder approach should be maintained to ensure long-term impact and sustainability in addressing domestic violence and the barriers preventing girls from accessing education.



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