

Ending Violence Against Women:

Violence against women in Pakistan is indeed a widespread norm. It has many forms and shades and is present across all strata. For example, in 1980s, multi-wicked kerosene stoves were the most popular weapons to kill brides. Law of *Diyat* was another license to kill. This law is still there with a slight change regarding honor killings. Until recently, this law permitted brothers and fathers to escape punishment of killing their sisters and daughters in the name of honor: an uncalled-for and unjustifiable act often undertaken against the crime of sexual promiscuity allegedly committed by the victims. Mothers of poor lots used to pardon their culprit sons often (and wives pardoned their husbands) because they could not afford to lose them in the existing form of economic dependence. Similarly, there are many other forms of violence against women prevailing in our society. These include acid burns, cutting body organs, rape, gang rape, public humiliation such as parading women of rival groups naked in streets, selling women, etc. And as part of a sordid reality, these heinous crimes continue to escape social, political, or even legal response because of predominant patriarchal values and the unawareness among women about the available social and/or legal cushions and mechanisms for handling the confounding forensic procedures.

Reports in the Urdu press also promote violence against and humiliation of women in Pakistan. News items on rape or elopements are often laced with innuendos and insinuations. Police is also there to spoil the matters further. While any Station House Officer (SHO) is more than happy to raid a private premises allegedly operating either as a brothel or a gambling den, he will hardly prevent a man beating his wife because the patriarchal culture, Pakistan Penal Code and the state machinery collectively treat any attempt to prevent occurrence of wife's beating as a breach of the sanctity of the home.

This prevalence of violence against women and other state-sponsored human rights violations taking place across Pakistan warranted SAP-Pk's active response. The organization responded to all calls made for training, research, advocacy and practical support especially of the victims. It also launched an advocacy campaign, Ending Violence against Women (EVAW).

SAP-Pk initiated EVAW in view of the findings of a survey on violence against women, which it conducted in nine districts of the Punjab province. The organization realized as the result of that survey that for a campaign to be successful, it has to be based on voluntary and pro-active support network of human rights organizations, human rights defenders, lawyers, police personnel, local governments, like-minded journalists, and socio-politically influential people of the communities.

SAP-Pk launched EVAW at Bahawalpur, Multan and Rajanpur districts. Each of these districts has its own face of violence against women. Rape is very common in Bahawalpur; Rajanpur is notable for the instances of *kara-kari* and so-called honor killing, while Multan also has a high figure of honor killings.

Before details of the activities of SAP-Pk, held in 2006, are presented here, it would be pertinent to view the operational structure of the EVAW. EVAW is based on:

- 1 Madadgaar Committees:** *Madadgaar Committees*, or Help Committees, function at the level of Union Councils or grassroots precisely. There are ten union councils in each of the three districts; each union council has its Maddadgar Committees (total 30). There are about 15 to 20, or more, community members and paralegal workers in each committee. These committees intervene to resolve cases at the communities' level, or refer cases of violence to the District Focal Group in view of the complexity and the level of offense.
- 2 District Focal Groups:** District Focal Groups is a broad-based and specialized body of human rights organizations, human rights defenders, lawyers, police personnel, local governments, like-minded journalists, theatre groups and socio-politically influential people. Each district has its DFG. Each DFG is responsible for:
 - Providing legal assistance to the victims
 - Referring the case to media

- Undertaking campaign around the case, if needed
- Sensitizing masses through various means and tools, especially theatre
- Training more workers after receiving TOT

DFGs hold monthly review meeting, namely *District Coordination Forum*, in which District Partner of SAP-Pk also participates. Sometimes, common citizens, especially females, also participate in these forums to seek information and legal assistance.

3 District Partner: District Partner is responsible for meeting *with* and training and monitoring of the *Madadgaar* Committees every month. It consults SAP-Pk in matters of interest to the campaign.

EVAW received financial assistance from OXFAM and European Union, for training, advocacy, legal support and publishing of advocacy material. One of the prominent works that SAP-Pk rolled out in 2006, under the EVAW campaign, was *Bus Bobat Ho Chuka*, or “Enough is Enough!” This booklet was based on case-studies of violence vis-à-vis EVAW’s modus operandi. It encouraged, through guidelines, the common citizens, parents, government, local governments, social organizations, shelter-homes, lawyers, police department, courts and writers, to fulfill their responsibilities respectively. Other than the booklet, SAP-Pk also produced and disseminated issue-based stickers, leaflets and posters to a wider spectrum of audience to educate them about the issue of violence against women and seek their support in the struggle for change. Each material reached about 5000 individuals, organizations and institutions.

SAP-Pk has been very active in the field during 2006, with regards to EVAW. This year, SAP-Pk undertook several activities of training and legal support. All these activities made little or big contribution in denting the conditions of violence against women and wielded further support of communities, police, journalists and writers. Following are important highlights:

1. Legal Support: Six Cases
Inputs/Results:
1. <u>Saadia Shafi</u> ; Dist. Multan; Charged under Hadood Ordinance because of choice-marriage; Case has been won and the couple has been freed from jail.
2. <u>Ghulam Fatima</u> ; Dist. Bahawalpur; Charged for marrying a man without getting divorce from the first husband; case has been won and the couple is free from jail.
3. <u>Sumaera Sattar</u> ; Dist. Bahawalpur; Case of gang-rape and kidnap; One of the culprits forced Sumaera to marry him so that he escapes punishment; Sumaera is recovered and case has been won; Sumaera and her family have been rehabilitated.
4. <u>Amina Mai</u> ; Case referred to Dist. Dera Ghazi Khan; In-laws of Amina cut her nose and lips because she was fighting a case for seeking divorce from her vindictive husband. The coalition of EVAW got her hospitalized where her surgery has been successfully done; Culprits are still at large; SP and DCO referred this case to the anti-terrorism court
5. <u>Meem Mai</u> ; Dist. Rajan Pur; Father and brothers of Meem Mai were found to be her murderers. Case was lost because Meem Mai’s mother pardoned her sons and husband. Yet another story of black laws!
6. <u>Zohra Khalil</u> ; Dist. Rajan Pur; Zohra’s step-mother turned her out in the absence of her husband. Zohra went to her aunt’s house where she married her son. Zohra’s father wanted her to be divorced when he returned after some months. The case has been won in favor of Zohra. She is living with her husband.
Beneficiaries: 5 women survivors and their families
2. Police Training: One Training
Inputs/Results: Police sensitized on gender and women issues and role of the department identified from the perspective of gender-based violence.
Beneficiaries: 22 police officials, from three districts
3. Meetings with Police: Three Meetings
Inputs/Results: District police officers orientated about EVAW and its functioning and

collaboration developed on the ongoing cases particularly and case of violence against women generally
Beneficiaries: 34 Police Personnel and CSOs' representatives, in 3 districts
4. Meetings with Elected Representatives: Four Meetings
Inputs/Results:
1. LG representatives in EVAW were orientated about their role of local Insaaf Committees, inclusion of women in these committees and method of preparation and presentation of resolutions in the district assembly
2. Lobbied with woman parliamentarian for repeal of Hudood Ordinances
3. Meetings with women councilors on developing schemes for women, in union councils, and assist in developing favorable environment for women to participate in politics
Beneficiaries: 27 Councilors, Naib Nazims and Members Provincial Assembly

SAP-Pk and EVAW partners also conducted several other supporting activities, mostly from the perspective of reviewing, planning, outreaching and building public pressure. Notable among such activities are as following:

1. Planning/Strategy Meeting of Partners' Staff:

During the reported period, EVAW district partners held 15 internal meetings for detailing out plans for workshops, seminars, press conference, rallies, etc.

2. Madadgaar Committees' Meetings:

During the reported period, all 30 Madadgaar Committees held 199 UC level meetings in which:

- A total of 2081 people were educated and sensitized
- Issue of sexual harassment was discussed and community actions to combat it were identified
- Issue based theatre performances and discussions on the themes of violence were held
- Discussions on women's crises held and strategies to deal with them during Action Week were developed
- Practices of communication skills were shared
- Broader discussions on the rights of women ,children and minorities rights were held
- State-sponsored violence and its effects on the Women and Society were discussed

3. District Coordination Forums:

In 2006, District Focal Groups organized 10 District Coordination Forums in which:

- Experts spoke on violence and human rights to enhance knowledge-base of the activists and shared with them different skills of mobilizing communities
- A number of women learnt about EVAW and contacted the organizers for knowing more about it and seeking legal assistance in case of torture
- Ideas of community-based "women assemblies" were discussed so that women from communities could have alternative forums for seeking justice and holding state institutions accountable of their actions
- Action strategies around the cases of violence were laid and members chose their tasks. Members included lawyers, journalists, political workers, community activists and the district coordinators

Nearly 350 men and women participated in DCFs, including the victims and survivors of violence.

4. Meetings of SAP-Pk and District Partners for Planning and Review:

SAP-Pk and its partners held two meetings during 2006, for reviewing the past activities, planning for the future activities, orientating partners how to advocate VAW issue in World Social Forum, and developing effective reporting systems. Among the 20 participants, members of selected Madadgaar Committees were also present in these meetings.

5. Action Week: March 8 and International Women's Day Celebrations:

A full week of activities in 30 union council and 3 districts was organized in connection with International Women's Day. Rallies, press conferences, theatre shows, women assemblies (at district and UC level), seminars and media consultation forums were held where messages were displayed and demands concerning policies and practices about women were announced in print and electronic media. Estimated 2400 people participated in these activities.

6. Orientation Meetings with Lawyers and Journalists:

DFGs organized ten orientations meetings with journalists and lawyers, both male and female, during the reported period. The sole purpose of these meetings was to enhance quality of the coordination between journalists and lawyers based on the on-going cases and philosophy of the campaign. There were 141 lawyers and journalists who participated in these meetings.

7. Theatre Performances

The theatre groups, which are working under ERAW in the three selected districts, gave 18 performances this year. These performances reinforced the contents of the seminars which were held before or after the shows. Following themes were identified as common in these performances:

- Honour killings
- Hudood Ordinances
- Effects of dowry, early marriages and exchange marriages on women's lives

ERAW is presently planning to extend the base of activism to the educational institutions also. As a starter, the theatre wing in Multan district gave a performance in **Multan Degree College**. The show was a great success. The Administration of the college requested the district coordinator ERAW to organize such shows in the college in future also.

8. Regional Exposure Visits:

Two regional exposures took place during 2006. In one of these visits, ERAW Coordinator, from Multan District partner, participated. Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER) sponsored this exposure to Nepal. It was organized for regional sharing on gender based violence. The civil society organizations of South Asia formed South Asian Peace Alliance (SAPA) at this occasion. This exposure was organized in July 2006.

Similarly, ERAW Coordinator from Bahawalpur district partner visited Sri Lanka, on August 12, 2006. He participated there in a regional consultation on "violence against women in politics" research component of "South Asia Regional Governance with People Program (SARGPP)". This exposure provided opportunity to share experiences, on the basis of which a comprehensive strategy for national researches was hammered out.