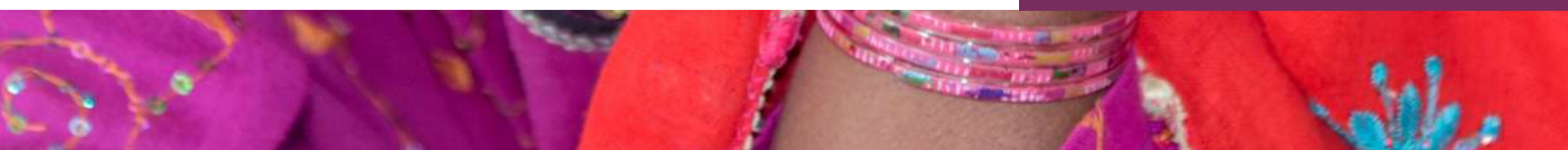




*Special Edition*

**International Women's Day**  
**March 8th, 2022**

**#BreakTheBias**



# Break The Bias

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*International Women Day commemorated every year to celebrate the social, economic political and cultural achievement of women across the globe. The current year theme is focusing on challenging the women stereotype and bias. "Break the Bias" gives a message to all women and men around the globe to take stand and challenge all actions related to gender discrimination. It's time that the world must focus on gender equal and just world.*

*The special feature of PHF on International Women's Day entail the powerful messages and stories of gender champions across Pakistan.*



*On this International Women's Day, I urge to all women to stand up for themselves and set an example for coming generation by empowering yourself economically, socially and politically. Please value yourself first and than let society to value you at all levels. Unleash the hidden potential and break the gender stereotypes by realizing your hidden power.*

**Mr. Shahid Kazmi, Country Coordinator, Pakistan Humanitarian Forum**



*On this Women's Day, my message for all my women colleagues in the humanitarian and development sector is to be kind to themselves and remember to pat themselves on the back for the achievement they have made. Our journey has not been so easy one, but I hope that those of us who have come this far, can make it easier for those to come by helping make our workplaces and our programming more inclusive and equitable.*

**Dr. Farah Naureen , Member Ex-com, Country Director , Mercy Crops**

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## Breaking the gender stereotypes

### *Empowering herself economically and socially by taking tangible actions*

#### *A story of Lachma who's trying to challenge the gender stereotypes and bias*

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Pakistan has the world's lowest rate of women's entrepreneurship with only one percent of female entrepreneurs compared to 21 percent of male. One of the major reasons for women to remain behind entrepreneurially is the lack of access to finances and social barriers. For women living in rural areas, the challenge is two-fold. They don't have only financial constraints, but they also face lots of bias by the village people especially the women who run their own businesses.

Women are expected to pursue traditional roles and responsibilities, but Lachma is breaking the stereotypes by running a home-based shoe shop. She encourages other women in the community to also take stand and support their family financially. "Currently, I am selling children's shoes, but I want to expand my business by adding the shoes for both men and women. I am also planning to establish a small shoe factory to produce comfortable and economical shoes so the people in my area can afford it well and enjoy the good product in a nominal price" expressed Lachma.

Lachma, 52 years old, lives in Tharparkar with her husband and children. Her husband is a working as a cobbler, and it was very hard for him to manage expense of household in a meager amount. While implementing project, Tearfund got to know about Lachma's economic condition and engaged her in the project title, Strengthening Self-Help Group which was implemented by Tearfund partner Lamp (based in Hyderabad). Through this project, Lachma got hands-on training on business development and was fully encouraged to start her own business. "I would have started my own business long ago, but financial constraints and social barriers did not allow me to do so", said Lachma.

However, it's never too late to take a new start in life. I am happy that I can earn and contribute to my family's income. To cope with the financial challenges in future, I am encouraging my daughters to have skillful hands" said, Lachma.



**" I am happy that I can earn and contribute to my family's income. To cope with financial challenges in future, I am encouraging my daughter to have skillful hands" said Lachma**

## Empowering and Encouraging Women to Challenge Gender Norms

### *Skills and Opportunities Changing the Life of Women and Girls*

#### ***A story of Aneesa who is finding a way for herself and other women in the community***

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“In the time of hopelessness and despair, when she had nowhere to go, Aneesa got to know about the skill enhancement training which transformed her life as well as brought economic uplift for her whole family.”

Aneesa Kousar is the graduate of the MH's vocational training center, Kotli in the year 2021. (This institute is providing free of cost vocational training to most marginalized female headed, orphan families and disaster hit HHs of Kotli area). After sudden death of Aneesa's father, they got plunged into terrible financial crisis. They did not have any house or any means to support and fulfil their basic needs. Aneesa said, “I have to give-up my education because I was unable to pay my educational dues. My uncle spare two rooms of his house for my family of 08 members to stay there, as we did not even have any shelter to live in. In all these crises, I decided to do something and got admission in MH-vocational training center, Kotli.

In the center, I learned the skills of sewing, cutting and making Kashmiri dresses. I graduated from the VTC and immediately, started my own business at home of sewing cloths and earning enough to support my family. Then, I started selling dress to local boutiques and shops which boosted so much in merely six months that I had to employ other women in completing the large orders.

Now, I am running small home-based boutique with employing 05-06 women. Alhamdulillah's, I am blessed that I got the opportunity from Muslim Hands to make my life meaningful.

***It feels so satisfying that I am the means of livelihood for other local women. My family and the women employees see me as a role model. It has really transformed my life. Now, I am very ambitious to become a professional business women and open my own boutique in the future”.***



**"I feel proud that I am showing way to the women of my community to empower themselves economically " says Aneesa**

## Encouraging and Empowering Young Women and Girls by Providing Education Education opportunities for young girls in hard to reach areas

### *A story of Sana who is breaking bias and gender stereotypes related to girls education*

Sana, an eighteen-year-old girl, residing in the remote village Hafiz Muhammad Bux Malik, had never been to school. She lives with her father, mother and two brothers. Her father worked as a teacher at a nearby government boys school; where both her brothers go to school as well. However, the area does not have a school for girls. Despite her eagerness to study and acquire basic education, Sana's parents did not allow her to travel to another village to attend school citing security risks as the reason for their disapproval. They were also apprehensive of social backlash on sending their daughter to school at an age that is considered appropriate for marriage in their community.

Then one day, ACTED's community mobilisers visited her home to inform them about a learning center opening soon for girls in their village. However, Sana's parents were still worried: What if she is attacked by dogs? Who will ensure she is safe at the center? Who will marry her if she starts going out for school now? These questions arose from the deep rooted notions that girls should not be leaving their home, especially not for something as insignificant as education to them. It took multiple discussions with the team and the community mobilisers who reassured the parents about the security measures taken to ensure the safety of all girls who attend the centre. They were also able to convince them regarding the importance of education for all, both girls and boys, in order to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. They also assured her parents that gaining education will not reduce Sana's chances of finding a suitable marriage match. Sana was able to enroll in the eight-month Literacy and Numeracy Course at the LNGB centre which focuses on providing basic literacy and numeracy skills to girls aged between 14 and 19 years old.

Being at the centre and being able to learn has changed Sana's view of herself and her world. She confided that she acquired a confidence boost through her education. When she accompanies her parents or siblings to the market, she can read and check the prices. One day she caught a shopkeeper quoting a higher price while on a shopping trip with her father and brother; this left her family thoroughly impressed with her newly gained skills. "For the first time, I can now write my name and tell the time from the clock. I never thought that my parents would rely on me and take me along for grocery trips but it comes as a happy surprise". Sana is all set to graduate from the Literacy and Numeracy Course in August 2021.



**"For the first time, I can write now my name and tell the time from clock. I would never thought that my parents would rely on me and take me along for grocery trips but it comes as a happy surprise "**

**Sana is all set to graduate from the Literacy and Numeracy Course in August 2021.**

## Breaking gender stereotypes and bias by taking strong moves

### A story of Afsara who is educating and supporting to break the chain of gender stereotypes

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At 56 years old, Afsara Bibi is a passionate advocate for women's rights, but this wasn't always the case. Afsara lives in a refugee community in Pakistan where gender inequalities are accepted as normal, and women's rights are often ignored. It wasn't until she joined an International Medical Corps-run gender support group that her perspective changed. Born in Afghanistan, Afsara and her family fled the country when she was a child and gained asylum in Pakistan. Though she was too young to understand why they fled at the time, as an adult, she appreciates the huge sacrifice her parents made so that she and her siblings could live in safety. Still, as a refugee, Afsara has faced many challenges, and her life is even more complicated because she is a woman.

In Afsara's community, women are taught to stay at home and not to express their views or opinions. Since the school in her village is co-educational, many parents do not allow their daughters to attend as it would be inappropriate to mingle with the opposite sex. These deeply rooted gender inequalities can lead to early age marriages for girls and domestic violence. In addition, without an education or the opportunity to work, many women fall into extreme poverty. In 2017, Afsara joined an International Medical Corps-run gender support group supported by PRM, at an Afghan refugee village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. After attending several sessions about human rights and gender-based violence (GBV) and its root causes, her perception of traditional gender roles began to change. Now, Afsara believes that gender equality is a fundamental human right, and she advocates for it in her community.

***“As a woman, talking to men in our community is taboo, but I think it needs to be changed, and I am trying to break these stereotypes with my strength and courage,” Afsara explains.*** Soon after joining the gender support group, Afsara began volunteering with the project, helping to educate her community about gender inequalities and their impact on women's lives. Afsara holds monthly community meetings and often goes door to door, teaching community members about human rights and GBV. Though she loves her work, she initially encountered negative comments and resistance.

***“Many people thought that I was getting money or receiving favors to talk about women's rights and harmful traditional practices,” she says with a laugh.*** Despite this obstacle, Afsara persevered—with confidence and courage, she made herself a recognized voice for women's rights. As a volunteer, she completed several training courses and now provides psychological first aid (PFA) support to women and advocates on their behalf. Afsara also resolves domestic issues and conflicts in her community, providing counsel to other women. They see her as a problem solver and role model.

Two women, who asked to remain anonymous, shared their thoughts. ***“I feel very comfortable whenever I talk to Afsara,” said one woman. “I consider her as my mother. She has been a great help in resolving my issues related to my relationship with my husband and children.” Another woman shared, “It is our culture that we are biased toward the girls—whether it's education or nutrition.*** Afsara helped me to understand the harmful impact of these practices. Now I am conscious about my actions toward my children, both boys and girls.”



## *Taking the moves for Social Change*

### **Courageous and Daunting Women Supporting Families and Communities through Tangible Actions**

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Jasoda, the 39-year-old woman received her education till Grade 8th lives with her eight children in village Pancho Bheel, UC Sayed Saman Shah, district Sanghar, Sindh. Out of her 8 children (7 daughters and 1 son), 5 of them are school going. She is working strenuously to remain a breadwinner for her family to meet the expenses. Jasoda is having the skill of embroidery and stitching which is helping her in earning for survival from the consequences of natural calamities last year. But Jasoda and her husband income wasn't sufficient to meet the needs of family. As in last year the family suffered lot and rely on the support of their relatives for the provision of food to nourish their kids.

Then one day, Jasoda got to know about the SIF initiative who were forming village development committees and giving training to villagers on kitchen gardening and health and hygiene. Jasoda was excited and actively participated in 12 days session. After getting the training on Kitchen Gardening, she said," When I was trained for Kitchen Gardening, I have found it as a new concept for women like us.

***We were surprised when our trainer shared that we can also do gardening in our homes. We were trained around how to make biofertilizers, soil type, seeds, organic pesticides and how to utilize them all. I have grown spinach, coriander, and carrot in my garden. She emphasized that by growing our vegetables, we are receiving three benefits, firstly we don't have to spend more money, we can save, and we can sell. By doing this, we are covering our family expenses".***

The cash for training has imparted skills not only to enhance their capacity but also to make them resilient around natural disasters and equip them with life-saving techniques. They are growing nutritious food to fulfil their daily dietary needs.

Jasoda has received PKR 7500/cycle for each training and she shared that she has utilized this in buying surplus food and educational stuff for children. By getting CFT on tailoring and stitching, she purchased a sewing machine from a training grant and started her entrepreneur business at her home. Now she is earning her living by stitching suits for community women and children. She confessed that without the early support of SIF and WFP, she wouldn't have this much courage and strength to start her own business.



**According to Jasoda, "Every single step counts, I am sharing my skills with my community and family so they can improve economic and social conditions".**

## **Effective role of Women Leaders for Community Development and Empowerment**

*A story of Parchee Gul who is up to provide support  
to women and men in her community*

***"I visit all women in community and ask their problems. Women are older, poor, disabled, widows and housewives in our community. For their well-being they look for someone who is a guide for them. Being a head of Afghan Community Forum established by Relief International (RI) I feel more responsible now.***

We work as a volunteer in our community for the welfare of our people.. They call me Ran'na (Light) and Mashara (Leader)" says 42-years-old Parchee Gul who lives in Village Tehkal Bala, District Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. Tehkal Bala is a village with 60% of out-of-school children and 70% of people living below the poverty line. 17% of the population in Tehkal Bala comprises of Afghan Community. Parchee Gul is one of the 70 members, who has received training on the initiatives of RI to cascade her learning to hundreds of other Afghan women. She has been sensitized in the primary and secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Menstrual and Hygiene Management, and has connected RI team with other Afghan women in Peshawar for food assistance, School Readiness Program and school enrollment.

***"I have nominated many volunteers of my community to Relief International because I am a leader for them in this community. Relief International has equipped me with the learnings which I never knew existed. I feel more empowered and this knowledge will not just end here, I will pass it on to all women in the village, so, our children and their children will be healthy and educated.***

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, Afghan families, along with numerous others, lost their livelihoods and their savings to feed their families. Last two Years were the worst years of my life. We are 14 family members, 7 females and 7 males where only two of them are working. My husband sells Jalebi (a deep-fried dessert) whereas my son goes to city to buy and sell slippers and shoes. But the pandemic left us destitute, and we were stuck in our home during the lockdown. We all are Afghans here and we don't get jobs easily, so we rely on self-employed jobs or work in private set-ups like shops, restaurants etc.

Then a community mobilizer from Relief International came to visited us to offer humanitarian assistance, providing food packets to thousands of Afghan women. Relief International made me the head of group last year for their education project, and I feel thankful that they have enrolled Afghan boys and girls which I helped nominate, in their regular education program. Many kids have reached to primary level and nothing makes me happier than to see our kids having education which we could not. I follow all the protocols for Covid19 prevention and keep reminding the community to follow the same. I also conduct various follow-up sessions in the community, discussing informing women of reproductive & menstrual health, good hygiene practices, as well as common protection and safeguarding issues. As we are not completely aware of laws here in Pakistan but we follow the laws and regulations provided to us by our religion which are empowering and give women full right to live their life with dignity.



**"I feel good to guide the  
women in community and  
to solve their issues"  
says Parchee Gul**



## *Skills and Opportunities Unleashing the Potential of Young Girls* **Community Changemakers**

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Anum Rafique hails from a remote area of Bahawalpur, Punjab. She lives with her mother and brothers in a rented house. Her mother was not well and her condition was getting worst day by day. Her mother regularly visit doctor for check-ups and buy medicine on regular basis. Apart from health-related issues, the family was also facing economic issues. Anum always wanted to support her family financially but due to lack of opportunities and exposure she couldn't get a chance to help her family.

She kept on striving for opportunities in life to grab and earn. Then one day, she came to know about the diploma level training of dress making at SDLC Bahawalpur which was sponsored by HHRD. The courses were helping the young girls to acquire some skills and empower themselves economically. She got enrolled in 6 month stitching course. After enrollment in center, she met with other women of same area who shared their feeling and struggle and their interest to acquire some good skills for economic empowerment. Over the time, she developed a very good relationship with other trainees at center and share a family bonding. She learned stitching clothes in the center and later she started using new skills for business development. On successful completion of 6-month course, based on her good skills she was offered to work on commission base in SDLC production unit where she was getting wage on daily basis. Gradually she became an expert in dress making and started getting orders from private individuals. She is now earning a good amount that is surely supporting her family in many ways. She is now able to meet medical expenses of her mother.

Anum is an independent woman now who tends to disseminate the knowledge she got from this course. She plans to expend the work she is doing right now to a bigger level where she can earn more and can benefit other women. She wants to become a role model for other women who are in struggling phase of their life.

**"I am glad to support my family economically and bear the expenses for good healthcare of my mother" said Anum**

*"On this International Women's Day, I would like to pay tribute to all those brave Pakistani women who have overcome all the obstacles or struggling to realize their dreams in life. Let us be their support by breaking their bias for an inclusive and equitable work for all".*

**Caroline Duconseille, Country Director  
Handicap International**



“ Break the silence on violence against women, break the bias. ”

**Aamna Rashid, Senior Program Manager, Mercy Corps**

*"I am grateful to Helvetas for selecting me for the program. The training I got changed me completely. It enhanced my skills and gave me the confidence to face people. No doubt, I worked hard, but the key to success was the support from my family. Had that support not been there, it would have been impossible for me to break the stereotype. "*

***Tabbasum become an entrepreneur with the support of her family and Helvetas and now guiding to many other women in her area.***



*"If a woman gets opportunities and can enhance her skills, she is able to make decisions for her own life, for her children, for her family. Earning an income gives women authority to be part of decision-making."*

***Hina Ambreen, Livelihood Coordinator, WHH Pakistan***



*Welthungerhilfe essentially considers women and children as impact group of all our interventions. Women and children are most vulnerable when it comes to nutrition security. Women often depend on others to cater for their individual nutrition needs, while children depend on their mothers. Empowering women, through improved knowledge, practices along access to safe and nutrient-rich food, safe water and sanitation, income and civil participation, highly contributes to improving nutrition security of each household."*

***Omer Bangash, Food and Nutrition Security Advisor, Welthungerhilfe Pakistan***



*"I am thankful to be able to get out of my financial worries". Sadia Bibi, vegetable grower, UC Peer Bux Sharqi, Punjab. Generating additional income to the household and producing fresh food in the vegetable garden not only increased nutrition security and decreased financial challenges but also reduced harassment and bullying for Sadia.*

***Sadia shared her experience that how opportunity helped her to gain her confidence and empowered herself economically.***

## Messages and Quotes

### Stand Up for No More Missing Rights

*So, what if I am a human,*

*The war between you & me is being a man and woman*

*So, what if you say the world is beautiful,*

*Full of colorful flowers & green trees*

*So, what if you say mountains are high & deep blue is the color of sea,*

*For me it is fake & folk, If I don't have a single free walk*

*So, what if you say, stars are like diamond and moon is milky white,*

*The sun is bright & buildings of your city is full of light,*

*For me it is dull & dark if I am not safe nor in day nor at night*

*So, what if you say I am unequal*

*& You have all human rights*

*But I will raise my voice and I will fight*

*Till the last breath of my life for no missing rights*

**Sadia Inayat Khattak**  
**GBV Coordinator**  
**International Medical Corps**

*"Bias, whether intentional or unconscious, makes it difficult for women to advance at any level. It is not enough to recognize bias; actions are required to level the playing field".*

**Tayyaba Aurangzeb - Deputy Director Operations International Programs/Acting Country Director**  
**International Rescue Committee**

*"My message on International Women's Day is to continue to be there and take steps in the right direction to create an inclusive environment where people, especially women, can contribute without any fear. My message to our fellow men is to be the allies in our journey, which has been challenging. I wish a very happy Women's Day to the strong women and allies and aspire for an equitable environment where we all support each other in breaking the biases, lifting the fears and making it possible for all women".*

**Lubna Javaid, Director of Programs, Mercy Corps**



# Take a Step to Break Bias

*It's our fears that prevent us from doing what we know is right. In patriarchal society, **we (men)** have to come forward by overcoming our fears to be the voice and to break the bias by giving the sense to all (women and men) what actual possibilities are there for them (women).*

**Zain ul Abidin**

**Deputy Director Programs International Programs  
International Rescue Committee**



*On this International Women's Day, I would like to urge all our men and boys, to play their role in breaking the bias, against women and girls in the society. This is how we can make our country a place to live for everyone.*

**Maryam Khan -Head of Program-  
Handicap International**

*Women deserve respect and honour in their own right, not because she is a mother , a daughter , a wife or a sister but because she is a human being.*

**Ameena Ilahi  
Country Director, Relief  
International Pakistan**

*"Break the bias and speak out whenever you see gender discrimination and violence happening around you. Let's work together to build a society where women and girls can enjoy their equal human rights."*

**Mehvish Bibi Senior Manager - Women Protection &  
Empowerment International Programs**





International Women's Day

**BREAK THE BIAS**

<http://pakhumanitarianforum.org/>



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