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Shagufta Aziz Khan

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Joint Network Meetings

Dastageer Legal Aid Center, Swat The Awakening

#### Introduction and Background

Under “Access to Justice for Vulnerable Populations” project, Dastageer Legal Aid Center (DLAC) has been established in District Swat through the organization “The Awakening”, since March 2014 and is operational with complete staff on board since 1st April 2014.

The stakeholders of the project include Rights-based organizations including NGOs/ CBOs, Judiciary, Bar, Law-enforcing agencies like police, government line departments including Social Welfare & Special Education, Education and Health etc.

In order to apprise these departments about the project Joint Networking Meetings of INP in collaboration with DLAC has been planned in the district. The purpose of these meetings is to promote and support developing partnerships and expanding networks among Legal Aid Centers, NGOs, and government line ministries to improve the environment in which legal aid centers operate. District-level local government representatives will also be invited to these meetings to further promote information-sharing, collaboration, and government buy-in. The basic idea is to have collaboration and coordination with Rights based NGOs specifically working on Minorities, Persons with Disabilities and Survivor of GBVs and establishing networking with Justice Institutions for stronger referral mechanism.

#### First Joint Network Meeting (Aug-Sep 2014)

In the quarter July-September 2014 a preliminary meeting was conducted with major stakeholders by visiting their offices in Swat district. The stakeholders were identified through Referral Directory of the district which included the following: President and Members of District Bar Association, Social Welfare Department, Rights based NGOs/local CBOs etc. The meeting was arranged by DLAC Swat and included team from INP, Center Coordinator and Counselor. Following agenda points were discussed:

* Information about Access to Justice Project
* Facilities provided through DLACs and progress till date
* Role of stakeholders during the project
* Support of stakeholder for DLACs
* Sharing information for next meeting that will be a joint meeting at DLAC office

or other venue

#### Rights Based Organizations (RBOs)

1. **Pakistan Special Persons Development Organization (PSPD)**

An organization working for Persons with Disabilities in District Swat. The meeting was conducted with following personnel:

1. Yousuf Khan, Project Coordinator
2. Adnan Khan, Project Manager
3. Suleiman Khan, Finance Officer
4. Ms. Parveen (Women Coordinator)

At present the organization is working in 3 UCs of Tehsil Matta on Persons with disabilities especially for post –crisis era of 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods. According to the organization as many as 500-7000 PWDs are present in 3 UCs of Tehsil Mata (No verification of data). However the organization has been working in collaboration with German Donor agency and STEP programme to facilitate and distribute wheelchairs, hearing aids etc to the disabled persons. Yousuf Khan and Ms. Parveen themselves are physically disabled and therefore able to understand the problems encountered by PWDs. They are both educated and applied for government jobs but were not considered even after qualifying the test/ interview for the vacant posts. This has made them skeptical, but also valiant to support disabled persons.

According to the organization, people need to be aware of the difficulties of PWDs especially the economic independency. PSPD is willing to join hands with The Awakening in its cause for access to justice through DLAC. The organization has already visited DLAC Swat and is willing to forward cases to the center while supporting for mutual benefit. The organization does not have its own website but was interested in Access to Justice’s website which is in its final stages and was shared with INP team.

1. **OMUNG Organization**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Naeem Sultan, Executive Director
2. Inayatullah, General Secretary

The organization is working for PWDs in district Swat. Naeem Sultan while young lost his eyesight due to an injury on his head. He was lucky enough that his family took him to Islamabad where he got his education. He did his masters and then M. Ed. and applied for various government jobs but was not offered any position. He has been disheartened and feel for the PWDs. He and his team is educated and have visited government offices for implementation of 2 % quota for disabled persons in the government jobs.

The organization is willing to cooperate and coordinate with DLAC on the issue of PWD. They said there is a need to increase awareness of people on the percentages of disabled persons present in District Swat. The organization is interested in providing special education to disabled children and at the moment they are working in Matta Tehsil with 13 UCs. There are 57 students. The data collected by Omung reports 17000 registered PWDs. According to the organization, the number maybe more, however people usually don’t report their disability. The major causes of disability other than natural includes earthquake, floods and recent attacks due to Taliban.

Naeem Sultan was interested in the next Networking Meetings where government officials may be apprised of the plight of PWDs and enforcement of implementation of 2 % quota for disabled persons in government jobs.

1. **Sarhad Rural support Organization (SRSP)**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Arshad Alam Khan, Legal Advisor

SRSP, established in 1989 has been working in KP on Development and Humanitarian programmes. Currently in District Swat it is working 5 UCs especially in flood affected areas. In addition to other development and microenterprise skills generation, SRSP is handling legal issues of the communities. They have selected 2 paralegals from these Tehsils and are training and capacity building these paralegals. The selected paralegals should have minimum matriculation qualification. There are female paralegals as well. These paralegals provide community awareness on legal issues starting from NADRA, Agriculture and land and property issues.

However SRSP is ready to join hands with DLAC Swat and The Awakening which is working purely on legal issues. On request from INP team, the legal advisor has ensured sharing their training material which according to them includes very basic knowledge.

1. **PAIMAN**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

* 1. Usman Gul, District Coordinator

PAIMAN Alumni Trust is a non for profit organization registered on 8th March 2004 with its headquarters based in Islamabad while other offices are located in all the four provinces of Pakistan under the leadership of Ms. Mossarat Qadeem. It aims at providing multi-faceted services including capacity building, economic and social development of community partners and research and advocacy serving as a resource centre for dissemination of updated information in relevant areas like income generating opportunities to marginalized segments, Gender Justice, Crises management, Rehab and Relief efforts through updated databases and policy briefs; and holding of workshops, as well as serving as a platform for civic action for positive change through community mobilization and advocacy.

As a Non for profit organization PAIMAN is working for the deprived sections of the society. In a similar capacity its office in Swat is working on PEACE project for developing organic conflict resolution practices and structures in order to create sustainable peace. The youth undergo psycho-social counseling belong with training in life skills and livelihood skills so that they can contribute positively to their community. They are also being helped in rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities by sensitizing the communities. In this regard the organization interacts with mothers in the conflict torn areas to identify youth who have been under different orientation of extremism and could be potential extremist.

The organization has had strong ties with The Awakening in the past and is currently providing full support to DLAC.

1. **Environmental Protection Society (EPS)**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Israr-ul-Haq, M & E Manager
2. Mohammad Tahir

Environmental Protection Society (EPS) is a non-governmental organization (NGO). Initially its main activities and projects are concentrated in District Swat but with the passage of time the Society has intervened in other districts like Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Buner, Shangla, Kohistan, Batagram and Malaknd Agency.

Its core activities include working on projects related to environment, however it has been working on Persons with Disability in collaboration with Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) with is main activities as awareness raising sessions, teachers’ trainings, independent living trainings, skills trainings, enterprise development trainings, business incubation, celebrating sports days, medical camps and provision of assistive devices.

Israr ul Haq were forthcoming and interested in all the activities of Access to Justice Project. EPS has also signed an MOU with DLAC Swat for acting as support organization.

1. **HUJRA (Holistic Understanding for Justified Research and Action)**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Mohammad Naeem, Project Manger
2. Inayat ur Rehman, Liaison Officer

#### HUJRA was established in 1997 and is working on community capacity building, issue based networking and advocacy and human rights. Through its “Right of Expression Assembly and Thoughts” an advocacy project funded by The Asia Foundation it is with almost 500 Households of minorities in district swat.

#### HUJRA is again a support organization of DLAC Swat especially working with minorities. The organization has conducted FGDs with minority groups to address their major issues. The major communities include Hindu, Sikhs and Christian minorities. The project manager has recently taken charge of the REAT project and therefore was interested in understanding the Access to Justice Project.

#### The organization will share its FGDs results and profile of minority families’ present district Swat.

#### Government Institutions

1. **Social Welfare & Special Education Department Swat**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Jamal Shah, Deputy District Officer
2. Gohar Khan, District Child Protection Officer

The Deputy DO has recently been transferred to Swat district and will take charge as District Officer as the previous DO, Hamid Khan has retired. Being new to the area, he is also in an initial learning phase about the district.

The meeting started after 4:00 PM and the officer had been requested earlier to conduct the meeting as there was no further time. The Access to Justice Project was explained in detail to the DO, who took keen interest stating that he himself has worked in DFID funded project and was already gender sensitized. It was explained that the DLAC consisted a team of highly qualified professionals including center coordinator, counselors (with Masters in Psychology) and panel of Lawyers. The DO asked the whereabouts of the center and assured the team that he will visit the center and it may be unannounced.

The DO was told that the project manager Access to Justice Project has worked in the Ministry of Women Development and was well versed with the procedural mechanisms.

On an inquiry about the support required from the social welfare department, it was requested that the focus areas of the project including violence against women and the persons with disabilities came under the jurisdiction of the department. The officer was requested to support in the implementation of 2 % quota in government jobs for persons with disabilities.

The child protection officer at this point intervened and said that a case was referred to the DLAC and there was no time to waste but was then forwarded to HUJRA by the department itself. It was explained that the court cases were taken on focused areas and the DLAC is capable of referring the case to HUJRA or any other organization if it is beyond the project’s scope.

Jamal Shah assured that there are many instances when the civil society organizations are required to take the lead as the government departments are bound by bureaucratic channels. He referred to Women Development Officer Amna Durrani and to convene a meeting with her for support in government issues.

1. **Assistant Commissioner**

Said Nawab, Assistant Commissioner Kabal

The assistant commissioner showed interest in the Access to Justice Project, however was distrustful about the workings of NGOs. He said usually the civil society organization highlight issues and generates a media campaign while doing nothing. He informed that due to these reasons he had taken down (canceled) many NGOs from working in the area.

He was assured that DLAC Swat included a team of highly qualified professionals. He asked to give one example of a case that DLAC had taken from Dar ul Amaan and was successful or provided relief. He was told about the recent case of GBV where the nose of the female victim, belonging to Tehsil Kabal had been severed off by the husband and the case was being contested by the center lawyer.

AC Kabal was also interested in how the people contacted DLAC and was informed through walk-in, or through phone calls. He noted the toll-free number of helpline.

He advised the team to visit Jails especially the female barracks and Daar ul Amaan and deal with genuine cases. It was also advised strictly not to deal with missing persons cases.

1. **District Health Officer**
2. Ijaz Khan, Assistant District Health Officer

The district health officer had been transferred and the meeting was convened with Assistant DHO. The officer had attended the PILER seminar and referred to it. He again assured of the departments support in strengthening the DLAC. He was requested by the INP team to visit the center and to ask for updates by the center at regular intervals. At this point he requested an update from the center coordinator Ghazala Rehman and Counselor Iftikhar.

1. **District Bar Association**

The meeting was convened with the following personnel:

1. Mohammad Zahir Shah, President District Bar
2. Khurshid Ali Walikhail (Advocate)
3. Sohail Sultan, Advocate & Panel Lawyer DLAC

The President District Bar was not aware of the project and insisted that the first meeting should have been convened with DBA. He said he was happy for his lawyer colleagues who had been taken on board as panel lawyers. He was however informed that the panel lawyers were giving their time and services at the center free of cost and were being paid for the court cases only. He was also assured that this was the first meeting being convened in the district and that too with DBA. He informed that through a project of DTC, quarterly a crosscheck of Rs. 50, 000 was deposited in the account of district bar to be utilized for the welfare of all advocates. He wanted to know the support DBA will get through Access to Justice Project. He assured of his support when he was placated by inviting him in the upcoming meetings as well requested him not to criticize the working of DLAC, but to provide guidance.

* If any of the team members either from INP or DLAC has ever worked for the government then provide that information.
* Don’t tell them about the procedures/ methods that the cases are first referred to INP for approval and then taken up by DLAC. This gives an idea that in cases of emergency, there might be unnecessary delays.
* Avoid mentioning US funding or any other funding source. Emphasize the respective district organization and its role.
* As an example the President District Bar Association Swat was a bit annoyed that DBA has not been consulted earlier in the initial phase and already there were lawyers on board with DLAC. The president also mentioned that DTC through one of its project was providing money to DBA’s account benefitting all lawyers equally.

#### Future Recommended Actions:

* Joint Networking Meetings may be convened on specific issues/topics/ themes and relevant departments invited in those meetings e.g. separately on GBV, PWDs and minorities.
* When a meeting on minorities may be convened representative minority families may be invited to ensure their representation and their awareness so that minority cases may come to DLAC.
* Minutes of the meeting with some specific decisions taken by the government departments may be circulated by DLAC
* Quarterly one/ two pages update on the activities of the center may be circulated to all its stakeholders whether civil society or government departments. INP may facilitate in this regard.

#### Guidelines for further preliminary Joint Networking Meetings:

* The whole team going for the meeting should sit together to discuss what they are going say at the meeting. The center coordinator should have information concerning cases of its center as the number is few.
* The initial introduction of the project to be presented by INP after introduction of participants.
* It should be highlighted that DLAC has a team of highly qualified professional team of coordinator, counselors (psychologists) and panel of lawyers.
* INP to be emphasized as consortium and working with in other districts with similar expertise.
* There is a difference between conducting meetings with NGOs and government departments.
* The NGOs are easier to convince and to coordinate and collaborate. Ask them to share their material/ brochures etc on projects relevant to access to justice.
* The government departments are difficult to convince. In dealing with them you have to be proper and be prepared for giving updates.
* The DLAC update is provided by the center coordinator and the cases or success stories should be on fingertips.
* Highlight that the center is providing legal aid and inform them about toll-free helpline number, walk-in visitor/ victims.
* Every government department inquires as to what you require from them. Be specific and tell them that policies/ laws/ procedures are developed and implemented by the government and this work requires the constant support and collaboration of their department. It has to be a public-private coordination. Inform them about the next meeting that may be held soon and invite them to visit the center. Be specific as they have pre-conceived notions about NGOs.
* If any of the team members either from INP or DLAC has ever worked for the government then provide that information.
* Don’t tell them about the procedures/ methods that the cases are first referred to INP for approval and then taken up by DLAC. This gives an idea that in cases of emergency, there might be unnecessary delays.
* Avoid mentioning US funding or any other funding source. Emphasize the respective district organization and its role.
* As an example the President District Bar Association Swat was a bit annoyed that DBA has not been consulted earlier in the initial phase and already there were lawyers on board with DLAC. The president also mentioned that DTC through one of its project was providing money to DBA’s account benefitting all lawyers equally. **How to respond?** Inform them that this is the first joint networking meeting and being convened with DBA to have their support. There are various different modalities of different projects and over here lawyers are providing their time and services free of cost at the center being paid only for court cases. Emphasize their important and ask them to provide guidance to the center.