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AAWAZ II PROGRAMME

NATIONAL LEARNING EVENT

22 October 2025

PROCEEDINGS REPORT

BRITISH COUNCIL

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AAWAZ II PROGRAMME

NATIONAL LEARNING EVENT

22 October 2025

PROCEEDINGS REPORT



An Aawaz II Programme Village
Forum meeting in progress

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Women in Umerkot, Sindh, come together under the beautiful bright sky for a bonfire where community level issues of violence against women and girls are openly discussed, plans are made, and hope is rekindled, through the Aawaz II Programme.



Preface

This report is compiled by the OPM Independent Feedback, Operational Review and Monitoring (I-FORM) team, contracted by the UK FCDO for the Aawaz II programme. The Project Director is Fayyaz Mohammad, the Project Manager is Nadia Casans, the Team Lead is Vaqar Ahmed, and the Deputy Team Lead is Bushra Siddiqui. The lead author of this report is Atif Masud, and the reviewer is Faiqa Ahmad.The contact point for this work is Vaqar Ahmed (v-vaqar.ahmed@opml.co.uk).

A National Learning Event (NLE) was held in Islamabad to reflect on the achievements of the Aawaz II Programme, share lessons learned, and explore ways to collectively sustain its legacy. This event built upon valuable discussions and insights gathered from provincial workshops in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh, and Punjab, which took place in August and September 2025. It brought together government representatives, implementing partners (IPs), and civil society leaders to review progress across the key thematic priorities of the Aawaz II Programme.

We acknowledge the valuable contributions of our IPs — the British Council, CARE, UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNDP — as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) and government counterparts, whose collaborative efforts and continued commitment made this national event possible. The NLE provided the guidance and commitment of government and partners to anchor Aawaz II interventions within national and provincial frameworks, charting a pathway for the responsible and sustainable exit of programme interventions.

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Executive Summary

The Aawaz II Programme, a cornerstone of the UK's development partnership with Pakistan, is entering its final phase. Over the last several years, Aawaz II Programme has shown how inclusive, rights-based approaches can transform lives — primarily when communities, civil society, and government institutions work in partnership. The programme has created safe spaces for women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and minorities to voice their concerns, report grievances, and influence local decision-making. Its work on early child marriage, gender-based violence (GBV), social inclusion, child protection, and countering hate speech directly contributes to the objectives. It aligns with Pakistan's constitutional and international commitments.

This NLE, held on 22 October 2025, served a critical dual purpose: to celebrate these collective achievements and to catalyse their sustainability. It was a platform that highlighted and showcased transformative models developed, ranging from District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) and Anti-Rape Crisis Cells (ARCCs) to community-led early warning systems and inclusive birth registration campaigns. These successes, in a deeply challenging operating context, offer invaluable lessons for future programming.

The learning event brought together government representatives, IPs, development partners, and civil society to review progress on key themes, including social inclusion, GBV, birth registration, child protection, and social cohesion. This gathering was not only a reflection on a decade of work but also a forward-looking session. It directly addressed the core recommendation from the Annual Review for a "sustainability and responsible exit." Partners of the Aawaz II programme critically examined lessons learned from both supply-side (system strengthening) and demand-side (community empowerment) initiatives. This included an honest discussion of ongoing gaps, challenges, and risks to progress, which helped in formulating a realistic and actionable path forward.

Aligned with the Annual Review's guidance, this event focused on four core objectives:

a. Catalyse Sustainability Planning: To secure concrete, high-level government buy-in and commitments for adopting and resourcing key Aawaz II models, including community-based early warning systems, directly addressing the review's sustainability imperative.
b. Showcase Evidence for Influence: To present a synthesis of Aawaz II's evidence on what works in changing behaviours, strengthening systems, and preventing conflict, providing a robust base for policy influencing and future programming as recommended by the review.
c. Facilitate Cross-Provincial Learning: To provide a platform for exchanging lessons between federal and provincial governments of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh, particularly on accelerating progress in Sindh and navigating political economy challenges, a key lesson highlighted in the review.
d. Structured Transition Roadmap: To coalesce stakeholders around a co-owned and actionable exit strategy, introducing clear next steps, responsibilities, and mechanisms for handover, fulfilling the review's recommendation for a coordinated and responsible exit.

A central challenge addressed during the NLE was how national and sub-national governments can allocate resources and assume ownership of Aawaz II initiatives to ensure their continuity. Through the opening and closing plenaries and five thematic sessions, NLE yielded concrete, actionable recommendations focused on evidence-based policy reform, institutional strengthening, participatory development, and the embedding of community structures into government systems.

The Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives committed to integrating the Aawaz II models for marginalised communities into URAAN Pakistan, the National Economic Transformation Plan. Additionally, the Minister for Human Rights recommended incorporating Aawaz II Forums and Aagahi Centres into District Social Welfare Offices, Human Rights Cells, and Local Government structures connected to the National Action Programme of the Ministry of Human Rights. This includes the involvement of Aawaz volunteers in District Human Rights and Criminal Justice Committees.

Additional recommendations included formalising multi-stakeholder collaboration between civil society, academia, and government, and transferring the Aawaz II knowledge repository (dashboard) to a credible academic or policy research institution for long-term hosting, learning, and evidence-based policy support.

More importantly, the NLE's proceedings will result in the following key outcomes:
- Assist in finalisation of the exit and sustainability of Aawaz II benefits plan;
- Identify actions required at the federal level and augment and reinforce the earlier agreed actions at the provincial levels;
- Secure federal government commitments to anchor key Aawaz II programme interventions within official frameworks and budgets.

The NLE served as a platform to consolidate lessons, share achievements, and chart a responsible exit from the programme. The event has also ensured the Government's strong commitment to facilitating institutional linkages, policy adoption, data-driven decision-making, and the required resource mobilisation to sustain Aawaz II interventions.
The consensual outcomes from this national dialogue will be instrumental in facilitating a responsible programme exit and ensuring that the benefits of Aawaz II are sustainably embedded within Pakistan's systems, reaffirming a lasting commitment to human rights, inclusion, and social cohesion.

Next steps

For sustainability and a responsible transition, the benefits of Aawaz II need to be embedded within public sector systems as part of an agreed plan involving three phases: consolidation (January 2026 – June 2026), transition (July 2026 – Jan 2027) and handover and institutionalisation (March 2027). To ensure that the transition from the Aawaz II programme to public ownership is smooth, the Ministry of Human Rights will coordinate the overall transition framework and ensure alignment with national rights and protection policies integrated with the Equity and Empowerment, Pillar 5 of the URAAN Pakistan National Framework of the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. the review's recommendation for a coordinated and responsible exit.

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List of abbreviations

AAC	Aawaz Agahi Centre
ACA	Aawaz Change Agent
ARC	Anti-Rape Centre
ARCC	Anti-Rape Crisis Centre
BC	British Council
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
BNRT	Birth Notification and Registration Tool
BR	Birth Registration
CBCPCs	Community-Based Child Protection Committees
CM	Child Marriage
CMR	Clinical Management of Rape
CNIC	Computerised National Identity Card
CP	Child Protection
CP-CMRS	Child Protection Case Management and Referral System
CPMIS	Child Protection Management Information System
CPUs	Child Protection Units
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CSO	Civil Society organisation
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
DF	District Forum
DHQ	District Head Quarter
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
ERM	Early Response Mechanism
EWS	Early Warning System
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GBV	Gender- Based Violence
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
HMIS	Health Management Information System
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
I- FORM	Independent Feedback, Operational Reviews, and Monitoring
IP	Implementing Partner
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KP-CPWC	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection Welfare Commission
LG&CDD	Local Government and Community Development Department (Punjab)
LGE&RDD	Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Department (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)

MoHR	Ministry of Human Rights
MoPD&SI	Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives
MNCH	Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NC	Neighbourhood Council
NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
NCRC	National Commission on Child Rights
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NGO	Non-Government organisation
NK	Nikah Khawans
NR	Nikah Registrars
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
P&D	Planning and Development
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
PWPA	Punjab Women Protection Authority
PSDP	Public Sector Development Programme
SBC	Social and Behaviour Change
SCPA	Sindh Child Protection Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIG	Special Interest Group
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SVRF	Sexual Violence Response Framework
SWD	Social Welfare Department
UC	Union Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VC	Village Council
VF	Village Forum
WDD	Women Development Department
WPCs	Women Protection Centers

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Aawaz II Programme is a UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)-supported initiative that aims to enhance the voices, choices, and control of women, girls, boys, youth, religious minorities, and other marginalised groups in Pakistan. Its objective is to protect these groups from exploitation and prevent discrimination and intolerance. The programme collaborated with federal and provincial governments in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh, working directly with local communities to promote and safeguard the rights of marginalised groups and help them exercise greater control over their own development.

For nearly a decade, the FCDO has supported reforms to promote voice and accountability across Pakistan. To mark this significant contribution and consolidate learning from the Aawaz II Programme, a series of provincial workshops was held in collaboration with key government counterparts, culminating in a National Learning Event (NLE) on 22 October 2025. These workshops and NLE covered the programme's core thematic areas.

The government-civil society discussions held during the NLE were designed to help shape the responsible exit of the Aawaz II Programme. A key focus throughout the proceedings was on identifying how national and sub-national governments in Pakistan can allocate resources and take full ownership to sustain the impactful work initiated under the Aawaz II Programme.

1.2 Aawaz II Programme NLE overview and objectives

1.2.1 NLE overview

Over the last eight years, Aawaz II Programme has shown how inclusive, rights-based approaches can transform lives, primarily when communities, civil society, and government institutions work in partnership. The programme has created safe spaces for women, youth, PWDs, and minorities to voice their concerns, report grievances, and influence local decision-making. Its work on early child marriage, GBV, social inclusion, child protection, and countering hate speech directly contributes to the objectives. It aligns with Pakistan's constitutional and international commitments.

This NLE, held on 22 October 2025, served a critical dual purpose: to celebrate these collective achievements and to catalyse their sustainability. It is a platform that highlights and showcases transformative models developed, ranging from DCPUs and ARCCs to community-led early warning systems and inclusive birth registration campaigns. These successes, in a deeply challenging operating context, offer invaluable lessons for future programming.

This event was not merely a reflection on a decade of work but a forward-looking session. It directly responded to the Annual Review's core recommendation for "sustainability and a responsible exit". The Aawaz II Programme partners critically examined the lessons for both supply-side (system strengthening) and demand-side (community empowerment) programmes. This included an honest discussion of persistent gaps, challenges, and risks to progress, ensuring a realistic and actionable path forward.

The ultimate aim is to translate this evidence and learning into concrete government commitments and a coordinated multi-stakeholder roadmap. By doing so, we will ensure that the programme's powerful legacy of increasing voice, choice, and control for the most marginalised is secured well beyond the end of FCDO funding. The five sessions of the NLE concentrated on the Aawaz II Programme's five thematic areas:

- Child Marriage
- Child Protection Systems (including Birth Registration, child labour surveys)
- GBV
- Social Inclusion (encompassing transgender rights, disability inclusion, and the protection of religious minorities)
- Safe Digital Environment, Tolerance and Social Cohesion (countering hate speech and disinformation)

To ensure focused and high-level dialogue, each session was structured as a panel discussion, chaired by either a senior government official responsible for that policy area or a civil society expert. This model was designed to promote ownership and ensure the continuity of programme outcomes. Participation in each session was limited to carefully selected stakeholders to maintain a strategic and productive atmosphere.

1.2.2 NLE objectives

The NLE was designed to serve as a structured platform for a systematic review of the Aawaz II Programme interventions. The primary objectives were to:

a. **Catalyse Sustainability Planning:** To secure concrete, high-level government buy-in and commitments for adopting and resourcing key Aawaz II Programme models, including community-based early warning systems, directly addressing the review's sustainability imperative.

b. **Showcase Evidence for Influence:** To present a compelling synthesis of Aawaz II Programme's evidence on what works in changing behaviours, strengthening systems, and preventing conflict, providing a robust base for policy influencing and future programming as recommended by the FCDO annual review.

c. **Facilitate Cross-Provincial Learning:** To provide a platform for exchanging lessons between federal and provincial governments of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh, particularly on accelerating progress in Sindh and navigating political economy challenges, a key lesson highlighted in the review.

d. **Structured Transition Roadmap:** To coalesce stakeholders around a co-owned and actionable exit strategy, introducing clear next steps, responsibilities, and mechanisms for handover, fulfilling the review's recommendation for a coordinated and responsible exit.

A core focus was to identify practical transition pathways to sustain key interventions after the programme's conclusion, ensuring a lasting impact. The outcomes of the NLE will reinforce the contextual analysis and inform a set of actionable recommendations for a responsible exit and the sustainability of benefits.

1.2.3 Participants

The event brought together a curated group of key stakeholders to ensure diverse and expert perspectives. Participants included officials from relevant government ministries, departments, UN agencies, Aawaz II Programme IPs, thematic specialists, and CSO representatives, including policy research institutions.

To achieve its strategic aims, the event convened a diverse group of key decision-makers and influencers, including:

- **Senior Government Officials:** Federal Ministers, Members of the Senate, and Secretaries and senior representatives (Planning, Human Rights, Law, Social Welfare, Women Development, etc.).
- **Chairpersons of Key Commissions:** National and Provincial Commissions on Human Rights, Status of Women, and Child Rights.
- **Development Partners & Donors:** Representatives from bilateral and multilateral agencies.
- **Civil Society Leaders:** Directors of national NGOs, think tanks, and community champions from the Aawaz II Programme network, including PWDs and other special interest groups.
- **Academia & Media:** Leading researchers and senior journalists.

Critically, representatives from marginalised communities and networks—such as transgender individuals, PWDs, and religious minority groups—were integral participants, ensuring their perspectives directly informed the discussions. The NLE maintained an exclusive, working-level format to facilitate targeted dialogue with those directly responsible for sustaining outcomes beyond the programme's lifecycle.

1.2.4 Session structure and documentation

The thematic sessions followed a consistent structure. They began with an overview of Aawaz II Programme's work in the specific area, delivered by the lead IP. This included a summary of key activities, their relation to the programme's core objectives, and the most pressing provincial challenges they aimed to address. IPs highlighted tangible outcomes, emphasising how collaboration with provincial government counterparts enabled these achievements, and more importantly, proposed actionable recommendations for sustaining gains beyond programme closure. The British Council and CARE also contributed key perspectives on community engagement during the sessions.

These proposed actions were then refined through feedback from all participants in a collaborative discussion format. All outcomes were formally documented by rapporteurs using a standardised template. This NLE report, synthesised by OPM from the rapporteurs' notes, captures the proceedings and findings. It has been produced to effectively inform national-level policy discussions and decision-making following the NLE on 22 October 2025. The report has synthesised government commitments and the recommendations from the sessions into an action plan.

The report also delineates the next steps related to sustainability and a responsible transition to ensure the benefits of Aawaz II Programme are embedded within Pakistan's systems as part of an agreed plan involving three phases: consolidation (January 2026 –

June 2026), transition (July 2026 – Jan 2027) and handover and institutionalisation (March 2027). The report, along with government commitments and recommendations, will be shared with IPs to ensure structured follow-up and knowledge continuity; with relevant government entities to embed participatory approaches and institutionalise programme structures; and with FCDO to facilitate strategic dialogue to support inclusive growth and governance, women's empowerment, and minority rights.

2 Opening Plenary

The NLE was held at the Serena Hotel in Islamabad on 22 October 2025. The NLE commenced with an opening plenary session. This was followed by five thematic sessions based on the Aawaz II Programme thematic areas. The event then concluded with a closing plenary session.

Opening plenary proceedings

The plenary session included the following speeches, remarks, and presentations:

- Welcome Remarks by Rauf Khan, Country Director, OPM
- Opening Remarks by Jane Marriott, CMG OBE, British High Commissioner to
- Pakistan
- Presentation: Aawaz II Programme Achievements and Future Direction by Ali Naqvi, Deputy Head, Governance and Inclusion Group, British High Commission
- Keynote Address by Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhry, Federal Minister of Planning,
- Development and Special Initiatives
- Special Remarks by representatives of Aawaz II Programme IPs:
    - James Hampson (British Council)
    - Pernille Ironside (UNICEF)
    - Samuel Rizk (UNDP)
    - Gulnara Kadyrkulova (UNFPA)

They are summarised below.

2.1 Welcome remarks

Speaker: Rauf Khan, Country Director, OPM

The session began with welcome remarks from the OPM Country Director, who hosted the NLE. Distinguished guests attending the significant Aawaz II Programme NLE were greeted, and an overview of the event's background and objectives was provided.

The program's primary focus is on reducing harmful practices such as early and forced marriages, addressing GBV, improving child protection mechanisms, enhancing social inclusion for individuals with disabilities, and supporting religious, transgender, and ethnic minorities. Additionally, the initiative aims to promote safe digital environments by combating hate speech and misinformation through comprehensive digital literacy and community awareness initiatives.

Through partnerships with government institutions, CSOs, and community groups, the programme has reached the most vulnerable populations, created safe spaces for dialogue, fostered trust across various divides, and promoted inclusivity.

Participants learned that the NLE was built upon valuable discussions and insights gathered from provincial workshops held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Punjab during August and September 2025. These workshops provided opportunities not only to

review overall progress but also served as important forums for stakeholders at both community and provincial levels to share experiences, challenges, and aspirations, as detailed in the Consolidated Workshops Report.

Responsibility was highlighted as twofold: to consolidate these achievements and to ensure that gains are sustained long after the programme concludes. The provincial workshops have offered concrete recommendations – from evidence-based policy reform and institutional strengthening to government ownership and alignment with national policies, to enhancing local capacities and embedding community-based structures within existing systems.

The national forum is an opportunity to:

- Review and validate those recommendations;
- Identify what more needs to be done at the federal and provincial levels; and
- Seek the guidance and commitment of government and partners to anchor Aawaz interventions within national and provincial frameworks.

All participants were encouraged to collectively reflect on the lessons learned from the event's five thematic sessions. Most importantly, they were tasked with charting a pathway for the responsible and sustainable exit of Aawaz's thematic interventions by March 2027. These pathways will be summarised during the Closing Plenary session as Consolidated Reflections from Provincial Workshops and NLE.

At the conclusion, participants were invited to share their perspectives openly, contributing to the development of a roadmap that ensures continuity, sustainability, and lasting impact.



Rauf Khan, Country Director, OPM, delivering welcome remarks.

2.2 Opening remarks

Speaker: Jane Marriott CMG, OBE – British High Commissioner to Pakistan

The British High Commissioner to Pakistan highlighted the achievements of the FCDO-funded Aawaz II Programme, led by the British Council in collaboration with UN partners, government, and civil society. Areas of impact included birth registration, rape response mechanisms, grants for PWDs, and skills development initiatives.

The progress made under Aawaz II Programme has established a strong foundation for future collaboration and inclusive development. Inspiring stories were shared at Aawaz II Programme about individuals working in challenging contexts, demonstrating how one person's transformation can influence many others. The importance of continued learning and reflection on the process and outcomes was also emphasised.



Jane Marriott, British High Commissioner to Pakistan delivering opening remarks

2.3 Presentation by FCDO

Presenter: Ali Naqvi – Deputy Head, Governance and Inclusion Group, FCDO

The Deputy Head of the Governance and Inclusion Group, FCDO, focused on Aawaz II Programme's cumulative achievements in the implementing provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh, and emphasised responsible exit and the lasting impact of Aawaz II Programme. The programme's role in addressing the full spectrum of GBV was highlighted, as were opportunities for civil society-government collaboration and the importance of combating hate speech and disinformation affecting children and communities.



Ali Naqvi, Deputy Head, Governance and Inclusion Group, FCDO, delivering presentation of the Governance and Inclusion Group, FCDO

2.4 Keynote speech

Speaker: Prof. Ahsan Iqbal – Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives

The Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives expressed appreciation for the thematic areas of Aawaz II Programme and the significant impact of its interventions. Emphasising the importance of participatory governance, it was noted that community-level engagement through Aawaz II Programme structures exemplifies genuine inclusion and highlights the dangers of hate speech.

In sharing his personal experiences as a victim of hate speech underscored the critical role of inclusive governance in promoting social cohesion and the necessity to combat disinformation. The Aawaz II Programme, structured around four pillars—policy advocacy, institutional strengthening, evidence generation, and community engagement—was described as a model for participatory development, with a recommendation for alignment with government plans and policies.

For sustainable outcomes, it was proposed to incorporate Aawaz II Programme results, particularly for marginalised groups, under Equity and Empowerment: Pillar 5 of the URAAN Pakistan National Economic Transformation Plan. Integration of Aawaz II Programme forums and community dialogue platforms into local government and district development plans was encouraged. Additionally, provincial planning and development departments were urged to embed Aawaz II Programme learnings and structures into their Annual Development Plans (ADPs) to ensure the continuity of social cohesion and inclusion activities.

The need for formal multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms that involve civil society, academia, and federal, provincial, and local governments was emphasised to sustain inclusive development dialogue. Furthermore, the allocation of targeted resources under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to scale up proven Aawaz II Programme models, particularly in community peacebuilding, protection, and inclusion, was highlighted.

Concluding remarks reinforced the belief that "development should be by the people, for the people."



Prof. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives delivering keynote speech.

2.5 Special remarks

The country heads of Aawaz II Programme implementing partners gave brief remarks on their organisation's achievements and scope of work under Aawaz II Programme, which are mentioned below.

Speaker: James Hampson – County Director, British Council

The British Council Country Director shared that Aawaz II has reached 35 million people, creating safer, more inclusive communities. He appreciated the collective efforts of partners in empowering marginalised voices. He stressed that "remaining silent in the face of violence is no longer an option."

Speaker: Pernille Ironside – Representative, UNICEF

The Representative of UNICEF recognised Aawaz II as an exceptional initiative that has produced measurable social impact through strong partnerships. She highlighted birth registration and child identity as core to ensuring that "every child matters." She praised the new child protection policies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a step toward resilience and inclusive governance.

Speaker: Dr Samuel Rizk - Resident Representative, UNDP

The Resident Representative of UNDP noted that Aawaz II aligns closely with Pakistan's development priorities, particularly accountability, citizenship engagement, and information integrity. He mentioned the potential for an Aawaz III (follow-up) programme and stressed the importance of digital engagement and youth inclusion.

Speaker: Gulnara Kadyrkulova - Deputy Representative, UNFPA

The Representative of UNFPA appreciated the partnership under Aawaz II Programme, especially in addressing child marriage and related social norms. She highlighted the need to tackle hidden barriers and unaddressed structural inequalities.

3 Thematic Sessions

The NLE under the Aawaz II Programme was held in a hybrid mode on 22 October 2025 at the Serena Hotel, Islamabad.

The NLE addressed the programme's key thematic areas: child marriage, child protection systems (including birth registration, child labour surveys), GBV, social inclusion (transgender rights, disability inclusion, and protection of religious minorities), and safe digital environments (countering hate speech and disinformation).

Each session was structured as a panel discussion, chaired by either a senior government official responsible for the policy area or by a civil society expert in the field. After opening remarks from the Chair or the moderator, the lead IP presented the core objective, the principal achievements and the way forward. These presentations, moderated by a designated IP representative, emphasised tangible outcomes achieved through collaboration with provincial and federal government counterparts and included IP proposals to sustain gains beyond the programme's end. The British Council shared lessons from its community engagement work in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, while CARE shared its initial experience as the new community engagement IP in Sindh.

Open discussions enabled participants to raise queries and provide constructive feedback on activities, informing future improvements and sustainability, which was responded to by the IP technical experts. All five sessions concluded with the Chair's closing remarks, highlighting the government's commitment and session recommendations to sustain the ongoing Aawaz II Programme interventions and their responsible exit.

Workshop proceedings

3.1 Session 1: Strengthening child protection systems

Chair: Ayesha Raza Farooq, Chairperson, National Commission on Child Rights (NCRC)

Presenters: Jennifer Melton, UNICEF and Arshad Mehmood, British Council

Moderator: Farrah Ilyas, UNICEF

3.1.1 Opening remarks

The Chair opened the session by welcoming all participants and emphasised the significance of strengthening child protection systems across Pakistan. She highlighted that ensuring every child's right to grow up free from violence, neglect, and exploitation lies at the heart of NCRC's mandate.

It was stressed that children constitute nearly 47% of Pakistan's population (approx. 112 million), representing both the nation's greatest potential and responsibility. Yet, millions remain deprived of fundamental rights, 26 million are out of school, half of all children under five face malnutrition, and many experience violence and exploitation. It was stressed that issues such as child labour, child marriage, corporal punishment, trafficking, and abuse are deeply interconnected and therefore require a holistic,

system-based response. The current status of child protection systems in Pakistan is presented below.

Birth registration: Only 42% of children under five are registered, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and legal identity. NCRC's advocacy has driven significant progress, including the formation of Provincial Steering Committees on CRVS, Punjab's declaration of 2024 as the "Year of Birth Registration," Sindh's 90-day fee waiver, and NADRA's development of the Birth Notification and Registration Tool (BNRT). Birth registration is now a national policy priority, with ongoing efforts to integrate databases and simplify registration processes.

Child protection systems and case management: Despite a strong legislative framework, enforcement and coordination are weak. Punjab's Child Protection Bill is finalised but awaits enactment, while all provinces have approved policies. There is a crucial need for functional Child Protection Units (CPUs) in every district, along with interoperable case management systems and sustainable financing. Positive progress has been made, including the establishment of over 40 operational CPUs, the rollout of the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) across provinces, and the active Helpline 1121. Integrating these mechanisms into government systems is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability.

Child labour: Pakistan now has comprehensive national data, with recent surveys supported by UNICEF, which reveal that 8.6 million children aged 5-17 are engaged in labour, including over six million in Punjab alone. These findings will inform provincial action plans and the establishment of multi-sectoral Child Labour Councils to oversee implementation. NCRC's draft Prohibition of Child Labour in Domestic Work Bill, 2024 was highlighted, which seeks to ban employment of children under 16 in domestic work and classify related offences as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable. The Bill is currently under review by the Ministry of Interior before submission to the Cabinet.



Ayesha Raza Farooq, Chairperson, National Commission on Child Rights delivering opening remarks during the session on Strengthening Child Protection Systems.

3.1.2 Technical and community engagement presentations

UNICEF presentation on strengthening child protection systems

Under Aawaz II Programme, UNICEF is strengthening child protection and promoting child rights across Pakistan through five focus areas:

1. Evidence: Child Labour Surveys
2. Enabling Environment: Policies and reforms
3. Child Protection Systems: Response services for survivors
4. Birth Registration
5. Justice for Children

Achievements:

National Level:

- National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Policy approved and under rollout
- Birth Notification and Registration Tool (BNRT) deployed across multiple provinces

Punjab:

- Child Protection Policy approved by the Cabinet
- Comprehensive Child Protection Bill finalised (pending enactment)
- Child Labour survey was completed and disseminated
- 3.5 million births registered (2018-2021)
- Fee waivers introduced for one year
- Integration of NADRA and Health Information and Service Delivery Unit (HISDU) systems, 4,500 health facilities now capturing birth data in real time
- Strengthened Child Protection Case Management and Referral System (CP-CMRS) and helpline 1121. Six new DCPUs have been established

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

- Child Protection Policy finalised and pending approval
- Child Labour Surveys completed and disseminated
- Expanded protection network: 21 DCPUs, 19 District Child Protection Committees (DCPCs), over 270 Community-Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPCs) and active CP Helpline 1121

Sindh:

- Child Protection Policy finalised (under approval)
- Fee waivers introduced for one year

- CMRS and CP Helpline 1121 rolled out with a technical working group, and a training package was provided
- Functional DCPUs were established in three pilot districts
- BNRT is operational in 34 health facilities

Government commitments for sustainability

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

- Provincial child protection roadmap for financial sustainability (endorsed June 2025), sustaining 21 DCPUs and expanding to five additional districts
- Child Labour Policy updated using survey evidence
- PKR 250 million increase in Grant-in-Aid; PKR 120 million allocated for a model CPU in D.I. Khan; land allocated for four new DCPUs

Punjab:

- CP Policy approved, CP Bill ready for enactment
- CPWB endorsed the CMRS package and notified the Provincial CP Technical Working Group (TWG)
- PKR 108 million is allocated for new CPUs in six districts

Sindh:

- CP TWG revamped and District Coordination Committee Terms of Reference updated (2024)

Plan for responsible exit

UNICEF suggested the following key actions to ensure a responsible exit of Aawaz interventions.

- Advocacy for approval of key frameworks:
    - Policies: Child Protection and Child Labour
    - Bill: Child Protection Bill (Punjab)
    - Rules: Birth Registration
- Ensure public funding for implementation of action plans and the interoperable birth registration system
- Institutionalise capacity-building initiatives within public and private institutions for long-term sustainability
- Transition planning with clear timelines for relevant provincial departments/commissions to retain key initiatives (tools, SOPs, coordination mechanisms, DCPUs)
- Develop provincial sustainability pathways for government ownership and scale-up of the CP-CMRS

British Council presentation on child protection

Under Aawaz II Programme, the British Council is focusing on pathways to create awareness and behaviour change, citizen-state engagement, budgetary allocation, and referrals as key components of the Child Protection System. British Council partners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab are working on various child protection themes, including birth registration, prevention of child marriages, and promotion and protection of the rights of children belonging to vulnerable groups such as the girl child, children with disabilities, and children from religious minorities.

Achievements:

Policy advocacy and integration

- Pre-budget consultations with the Finance and P&D Departments for increased budgetary allocation for the Child Protection System
- Inclusion of Child Protection Officers as District Forum (DF) members in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-CPWC is a member of PF Punjab, with Deputy Chief Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CPWC as the Chair of Aawaz Provincial Forum Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Lobbying with the LG&CD Department for the waiver of BR fees in Punjab

System strengthening

- Aawaz II Programme volunteers, partners, and forum members notified to DCPCs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; and as members of CPCs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and some districts of Punjab, e.g. Hafizabad

Behaviour change

- Awareness and behaviour change in communities and capacity building of volunteers about child protection issues, including prevention of child abuse and child marriage, and promotion of birth registration
- Linkages and referrals of Aawaz Aagahi Centres with the CPUs
- Promoting behaviour change regarding the importance of birth registration, especially for girls, children from religious minorities, and children with disabilities. Camps in collaboration with the Village Council (VC) and the Neighbourhood Council (NC), focusing on registration of religious minority children
- Promoting Model Villages - Shanti Nagar (Khanewal) and Muqaddas Colony (Toba Tek Singh) – with 100% Birth registration

Government commitments

- The Ministry of Human Rights will lead and coordinate the transition process ensuring that Aawaz II Programme's community structures and knowledge systems continue beyond 2027
- Aawaz II Programme trained AAC resource persons and volunteers to be notified as members of the CBCPCs (where not included so far)
- Community engagement and awareness raising about child protection issues, including prevention of child abuse and child marriage, and promotion of birth registration.

Plan for responsible exit

The British Council suggested the following key actions to ensure a responsible exit

- Engagement with the Chairperson CPWB Punjab and Chief Child Protection Officer Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CPWC for respective provincial Child Marriage Restraint Acts
- Aawaz II Programme trained volunteers, including those from religious minorities, to be notified as members of the CBCPCs in close coordination with Aawaz II Programme Partners with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CPWC and CPWB Punjab
- Community-Based AACs to engage and coordinate with the concerned government departments, such as CPUs, for strengthening the Child Protection System in the community, and also work with the Union Councils and VCs for birth registration of the children from vulnerable groups
- Pre-budget consultations to lobby for enhanced allocations for child protection mechanisms (P&D and Finance Departments)

3.1.3 Open discussion

The open discussion yielded several critical insights from participants and responses from the technical experts of IPs:

- **Smaller scale of Sindh compared to other provinces:** A representative of the Sindh Home Department noted that the programme scale in Sindh appeared smaller compared to other provinces. The department's commitment to long-term collaboration was reaffirmed. The UNICEF representative acknowledged the Sindh Home Department's support and explained that the programme had achieved more in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as Sindh was added later. The need for expansion in Sindh was emphasised and it was agreed that birth registration is the foundation for ensuring every child's right to services.
- **Data on gender gap in birth registration:** A PWD representative highlighted that the presentation lacked data on the gender gap in birth registration and requested information on how PWDs benefited from the programme in all provinces. The British Council highlighted that its work focuses on inclusion, particularly for girls, transgender persons, and PWDs, and shared examples of villages achieving 100% birth registration through British Council interventions, as well as community structures that enable local voices to be heard at provincial forums.
- **Importance of engaging corporate partners**: A representative from Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi shared several suggestions, emphasising the importance of engaging corporate partners to ensure sustainability. It was further added that out-of-school children should be the focus to ensure long-term impact and enhance outreach through localised implementation at the village council level.

3.1.4 Closing remarks

The Chairperson of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) acknowledged that Pakistan has made commendable progress in developing policies and laws related to child protection. However, it was emphasised that there remain critical areas requiring continued focus and investment, particularly in institutional strengthening and ownership of child protection systems at all levels.

3.1.5 Session recommendations

1. **Institutionalise and Create Ownership:** Federal and provincial governments must take full responsibility to sustain progress on the CP CMRS and birth registrations.
2. **Harmonise Laws and Policies:** Provincial laws should be aligned, particularly regarding the legal age of marriage, to effectively prevent child marriages, especially the 18-year age limit for child marriage.
3. **Strengthen Legal Identity:** The registration and legal identity of children and their integration with the health system are essential components for a more cohesive protection framework. Birth registration is necessary to integrate every child into government systems and ensure effective monitoring and service delivery.
4. **Improve Data and Research:** Evidence-based decision-making is crucial for advancing child protection rights and preventing abuse. Establishing comprehensive child protection databases is vital for transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making.
5. **Strengthen Multisectoral Coordination:** Child protection is a cross-sectoral responsibility that extends beyond the mandate of any single department. Stronger integration among departments is needed to deliver more effective, community-centred child protection services.
6. **Improve Inclusion and Participation:** Efforts must be made to ensure meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities, minority communities, and transgender individuals at all levels.

3.2 Session 2: Addressing child marriage

Chair: Umme Laila Azhar, Chairperson NCSW

Presenters: Dilshad Pari, UNFPA and Rafat Yasmin, British Council

Moderator: Saliha Ramay, UNFPA

3.2.1 Opening remarks

The moderator welcomed participants and introduced the topic of child marriage as a critical and fundamental human right and development concern in Pakistan. She acknowledged the ongoing national and provincial commitments to addressing child marriage through legislation, institutional strengthening, advocacy, and community engagement.

3.2.2 Technical and community engagement presentations

UNFPA presentation on child marriage

The UNFPA delivered a technical presentation outlining the challenges and achievements of its child marriage initiatives in Pakistan. UNFPA is working in ICT, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab in partnership with the Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Law & Justice, NCSW, Council of Islamic ideology, Parliamentary Bodies, Provincial UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Child protection (Provincial),

Social Welfare (Provincial), Local Government & Community Development (Provincial), CSOs, and UN Agencies.

The UNFPA team shared insights on the issue of early child marriage in Pakistan. They reported that 18% of girls marry before the age of 18, while 5% of boys marry before that age. Additionally, 4% of girls are married before the age of 14.

Challenges:

- Child marriage is a complex social and legal issue requiring multi-sectoral interventions. Key challenges included poverty, access to education, traditional and social customs, religious interpretations, and stakeholders.

Achievements:

- UNFPA's work is structured across three pillars:
    i. **Policy Assistance:** Advocacy leading to the ICT Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025; National Framework on Ending Child Marriage and provincial Action Plans; advocacy and engagement with religious leaders, media, parliamentarians, and community influencers for legislative reform; and development and operationalisation of provincial action plans on ending child marriage.
    ii. **Institutional Strengthening:** Capacity building of over 1,400 Nikah registrars & nearly 300 local government officials, and the development of a certification criteria and oversight mechanism for NRs.
    iii. **Evidence Generation:** Include studies: Political Economy Analysis, Narrative on the Health Consequences; Advocacy package (Policy Brief and Advocacy Note, situational analysis, case law, and Islamic jurisprudence interpretation) and Profiling Study of NR and UC/VC Secretaries.

Government commitments for Adoption/Resourcing key Aawaz II Programme models/initiatives

- Operationalise Provincial Action Plans
- Integrate Capacity Building into Government Systems
- Institutionalisation of the Oversight Mechanism
- Strengthen Nikah Registration and Marriage Documentation Systems

Key messages:

- Key messages for the NLE called for standardising the marriageable age across provinces; all the relevant services such as health, social services, GBV services, education and economic opportunities should be responsive to the need of children, especially those married under the age of 18; the process of Nikah should be standardised; and Criminal Justice Actors (police, prosecutor and lawyers) should be sensitised and capacitated on child marriage legislations, case laws and their role in its effective implementation.

Exit, sustainability and transition:

Concrete suggestions for sustainability included:

- Finalisation of Rules, SOPs, Guidelines

- Institutionalisation of Oversight Mechanism
- Sustain capacity & knowledge development and utilisation
- Formalise Multi-Sectoral Coordination on prevention and response to child marriage initiative
- Advocacy initiatives through social media
- Integration of child marriage with case management
- Strengthening the capacities of Law Enforcement Agencies
- Monitoring for Sustainability and Exit Plan

British Council presentation on child marriage

The British Council delivered a community engagement presentation for preventing harmful practices, including child marriage. The British Council interventions cover 37 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab and are implemented through partnerships with local CSOs.

The key components include the formation of Village Forums and Aagahi Centres, and the mobilisation of youth volunteers (Aawaz Change Agents) to raise awareness about the consequences of child marriage.

Achievements:

- Support to lawmakers and government bodies (Child Protection Commissions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab) in advancing child marriage legislation
- Facilitated policy dialogue with Women Parliamentarians and Social Welfare Departments (SWDs)
- Advocacy for inclusion of religious minority marriages (Hindu and Christian) in marriage registration systems
- Resulted in Punjab's Hindu Marriage Rules (2023) and strengthened collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)

Government commitments:

Discussions and thematic consultation held with the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau and the Commission in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for

- Sustaining community engagement (continued linkages of government services with Aawaz II Programme forums)
- Inclusion of community members in DCPUs and committees
- Inclusion of vulnerable groups in CPUs (inclusion of women, transgender persons, and religious minorities)

Linkages between village forums and Aagahi Centres, focal persons of Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forums, with the representation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-CP&WC and LGE&RDD.

Lessons learned:

- The importance of consistent government coordination and community sensitisation for long-term behavioural change.
- Addressing cultural and legislative barriers together for sustainable prevention.

Challenges:

- **Data Gaps**: Marriage registration remains incomplete in several provinces (particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Sindh), affecting evidence accuracy.
- **Legislative Disparity:** Different marriageable ages across provinces (16–18 years) hinder standardisation.
- **Religious Sensitivity:** Child marriage bills are frequently referred to the Council of Islamic Ideology, slowing progress.

Exit, sustainability & transition:

- Sustainability lies in institutionalising interventions, embedding training and legal oversight within government systems.
- Partnerships between research institutions and civil society should continue to strengthen data collection and evidence-based policy.
- Future programmes should ensure alignment of federal and provincial laws to standardise the marriage age at 18 nationwide.

Key quotes

- "Child marriage is not only a social issue but a health risk with far-reaching consequences."
- "Sustainability will come only when institutional structures, not just projects, carry this work forward."
- "We must move towards a whole-of-society approach; legislation, institutional capacity, and social norm change together."



Rafat Yasmin, Advisor Gender and Social Inclusion, British Council, delivering her presentation on Child Marriage.

3.2.3 Open discussion

The open discussion clarified several operational points:

- The discussion centred on the implications of child marriages, legislative reforms, capacity building of duty bearers, community awareness, and behavioural change for the prevention of child marriages.
- UNFPA moderator outlined the structural frameworks and partnerships established to address child marriage, emphasising multi-stakeholder collaboration and institutional strengthening.
- UNFPA presenter shared findings that highlighted significant protection gaps and the need for stronger referral pathways for survivors. She shared alarming statistics, noting that 18% of girls are married before reaching adulthood, and 4% before adolescence, which exposes them to severe vulnerabilities. The importance of interventions like the Aawaz Programme to prevent child marriages, given their devastating health implications were underscored.
- There was an emphasis placed on institutional capacity building, evidence-based research, and legislative reforms, stressing that social norms change, and practical information, education, and communication (IEC) initiatives are essential to mobilise communities and influence policy.
- British Council presenter shared community engagement models implemented with provincial and district partners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, demonstrating positive outcomes and behavioural shifts within communities. Attention was drawn to the challenges faced by minority groups, particularly religious minorities, in the context of child marriage and legislative protection.
- An emphasis was placed on males, particularly within youth engagement, as critical to influencing social norms and highlighted the role of CPCs and Aawaz Forums at the union council level in raising awareness in communities. She advocated for policy adoption, behavioural change campaigns, and state ownership of community-based interventions. She also presented the British Council's Behaviour Change Tracker, detailing its application in monitoring progress through quantitative and qualitative surveys.
- Ombudsperson Khyber Pakhtunkhwa pointed to the absence of marriage registration systems, lack of disaggregated data, and the exclusion of non-Muslim girls from current protection frameworks and highlighted the need for improved inter-provincial coordination.
- A Human Rights Activist stressed the importance of impact tracking and continuous research to inform future programming.

3.2.4 Closing remarks

- In her closing remarks, the Chair called for a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach to prevent and respond to child marriage through institutional strengthening, policy coherence, social norm transformation, and robust legislative measures.

- Reflecting on Aawaz's journey, there was emphasis placed on standardising the legal age of marriage, strengthening case management systems, and ensuring a transition toward institutionalised government ownership.
- The role of the Aawaz Provincial Forum was acknowledged in shaping provincial-level advocacy, reaffirming NCSW's commitment to multi-sectoral coordination, capacity building of law enforcement and protection systems, and harmonised legal frameworks across provinces.
- The NCSW's resolve to work for the rights and empowerment of women and girls in Pakistan was affirmed, in close collaboration with the government, civil society, and development partners, to build a safer and more inclusive future for all.

3.2.5 Session recommendations

- **Standardise the legal age:** The legal age of marriage should be standardised across all provinces.
- **Promote evidence-based research:** Evidence-based research should be promoted, and harmonised data systems should be developed to inform policy decisions.
- **Establish cross-provincial learning:** Cross-provincial learning mechanisms should be established for learning lessons and the adoption of successful models and practices across implementing provinces, as well as benefiting Balochistan.
- **Ensure transition dialogue:** Frequent and structured dialogues with government stakeholders should be maintained to develop a transitional plan for policy adoption.
- **Continue awareness and behaviour change campaigns:** The community-level awareness and behaviour change campaigns should be continued as they lead to positive outcomes, including demand generation.
- **Establish clear referral pathways for survivors:** Clear and accessible referral pathways for survivors should be established for effective use of available services.
- **Integration of child marriage:** For the prevention of early child marriage, information about child marriage prevention must be integrated into education, poverty alleviation, and social protection programmes.
- **Continue Policy dialogue and advocacy:** The policy dialogue and advocacy with lawmakers and institutions should be maintained, as it is a prerequisite for policy adoption and influence.
- **Integration of Aawaz-trained volunteers:** Aawaz-trained volunteers should be integrated into district-level committees for utilising their proven skills in early warning and conflict-prevention.
- **Integration of Aawaz's best practices:** Aawaz's best practices must be integrated into national and provincial action plans for embedding its proven community structures into government systems.

3.3 Session 3: Combating hate speech and disinformation for safe digital spaces

Chair: Kaiser Ishaque, Head of the Domestic Governance Unit, UNDP

Presenters: Usman Zafar, UNDP and Zara Mazhar, Centre for Excellence in Journalism-Institute of Business Administration (CEJ-IBA) Karachi

Moderator: Ali Haider, Governance Advisor FCDO

3.3.1 Opening remarks

The moderator opened the session by emphasising the urgency of addressing online hate speech and misinformation that extends beyond social media into all digital platforms. Chat groups, online media outlets, and gaming applications were highlighted, and the real-world consequences of online hate, quoting the assassination attempt on Minister Ahsan Iqbal, underscoring how digital incitement can translate into physical violence. The internet's borderless nature was underscored as a driver of global disinformation, illustrated by incidents such as social media outrage following an India–Pakistan cricket match that escalated into riots in the UK, and more recently, digital misinformation around regional conflicts that evolved into an intense online disinformation war. It was stressed that women and marginalised groups, including religious minorities, face disproportionate levels of online abuse, making digital safety and dignity a priority for inclusive governance.

The moderator introduced the presenters and the chair and framed the session as an opportunity to discuss sustainable models for countering disinformation beyond the life of the current programme.



Ali Haider, Governance Advisor, FCDO delivering opening remarks on Combating Hate Speech.

3.3.2 Technical presentations

The UNDP representative delivered a technical presentation on the Safe Digital Environment Programme, launched in March 2023, to combat online disinformation and hate speech.

Strategy: UNDP's approach is structured across three interconnected components:

i. **Policy Support:** Strengthening national frameworks and policy making through evidence-based research and engagement with parliamentarians and government institutions on online safety, disinformation, and digital rights.
ii. **Technical Assistance:** At the core of this pillar is iVerify Pakistan, a fact-checking and verification initiative. UNDP is implementing iVerify Pakistan in partnership with CEJ-IBA Karachi, providing technical guidance and capacity building for fact-checking and verification.
iii. **Digital Literacy:** Promoting responsible online engagement and digital ethics through literacy initiatives, community outreach, and awareness campaigns to promote safer, more inclusive digital spaces. This includes educating the media, students, women, and other key segments of society on how to verify information online and stay safe.

Challenges and way forward:

- UNDP highlighted "trigger events" that generated disinformation surges, including the 9th May riots (2023), the 2024 general elections, and regional conflict-related narratives.
- Identified trends, such as declining trust in media, politicised narratives, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated deepfakes, and gender-based disinformation.
- Stressed sustainability through multi-sectoral collaboration with media, academia, telecoms, and civil society to ensure fact-checking becomes institutionalised in Pakistan's governance landscape.

Presentation on iVerify Pakistan

The CEJ-IBA representative delivered a technical presentation on iVerify Pakistan, highlighting the following facts:

- iVerify Pakistan model is a team-based verification system that monitors, analyses, and verifies digital content daily through a fact-checking process: identifying leads, verifying claims with conclusive evidence, and classifying them as true, false, misleading, or unproven.
- iVerify has tracked approximately 864 claims to date, with over 50% verified or under investigation as most claims are false or misleading, reflecting politicised discourse.

Challenges and way forward:

- Challenges include rapid spread of misinformation versus slower verification pace; rise of AI-generated deepfakes; online gendered harassment discouraging women's participation and persistent echo chambers amplifying disinformation.
- Fact-checking is a collaborative effort requiring media, government, and citizens to collectively safeguard information integrity.

3.3.3 Open discussion

The open discussion revealed a strong consensus on the urgency of addressing online risks. Key highlights included:

- **Online spaces of toxicity and misogyny:** Participants observed that social media platforms are not only channels for misinformation but also spaces of toxicity and misogyny. They highlighted the prevalence of hate speech and the deliberate construction of misleading narratives. They suggested conducting fact-checking and digital literacy training for social media influencers, given their potential to amplify credible information and promote sustainability of fact-checking initiatives.
- **Accountability and credibility:** Participants raised the question of accountability and credibility, asking whether any mechanism exists to verify iVerify's own fact-checks, "Who will watch the watchdog?"
- **Embedding media literacy:** Participants emphasised the importance of embedding media literacy and fact-checking education within school and university curricula to equip young people with the ability to identify credible journalism and detect AI-generated content.

Achievements & impact:

- Participants recognised iVerify Pakistan as a credible national model for combating disinformation through institutional partnerships
- Participants commended UNDP and CEJ's collaboration for setting an evidence-based standard in digital verification practices
- The Safe Digital Environment Programme was acknowledged as a key contributor to strengthening public trust and digital ethics
- There appeared to be a firm commitment from participants around sustainability, inclusivity, and educational integration, which demonstrated growing national ownership of digital integrity initiatives

Challenges & lessons learned:

- Persistent toxicity and misogyny on digital platforms remain a challenge, with misinformation increasingly targeting women and marginalised voices.
- Limited verification capacity across media houses and the absence of institutionalised fact-checking in mainstream journalism.
- Fast-paced online content circulation outstrips the ability of verification teams to respond effectively.
- Emerging threats include deep fakes and AI-manipulated visuals that blur the line between real and fake content.
- The need for broader collaboration among government, academia, and private tech actors to ensure data transparency and effective response mechanisms.

Key quotes

- "We have witnessed numerous instances where online hate speech has translated into real-world violence — a stark reminder that digital discourse has tangible, sometimes tragic, consequences." - Ali Haider, FCDO
- "Institutionalising fact-checking and promoting digital literacy are essential steps toward building inclusive, democratic, and rights-based digital spaces in Pakistan." - Kaiser Ishaque, UNDP Pakistan

- "Combating disinformation cannot be the responsibility of a single institution; it requires collective vigilance across government, media, and civil society." - Usman Zafar, UNDP
- "Fact-checking is not just about exposing falsehoods, it's about restoring public trust in information and promoting a culture of digital responsibility." - Zara Mazhar, Team Lead, iVerify Pakistan, CEJ-IBA
- "Embedding media literacy in our education system is the only sustainable solution to misinformation." - Participant

3.3.4 Closing remarks

The chair thanked the moderator, presenters, and participants for an insightful discussion, emphasising that combating hate speech and disinformation is essential for building inclusive, democratic, and rights-based digital spaces. Drawing from the session discussions, several key reflections and priorities were outlined:

- Suggested embedding fact-checking systems like iVerify into national governance mechanisms and ensuring regulatory collaboration with Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), and Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to ensure continuity beyond project cycles.
- Emphasised empowering citizens, especially youth and women, through digital literacy and responsible online behaviour, building on UNDP's SDEP framework to strengthen public resilience against misinformation.
- Highlighted parliament's key role in shaping inclusive, ethical digital spaces and encouraged collaboration with the Parliamentary Caucus to advance legislation and awareness on misinformation, hate speech, and digital ethics, while recognising that parliamentarians themselves are often targets of online abuse.
- Underscored collaboration between government, media, academia, and tech platforms for innovation in digital safety, with inclusion of women and minorities at the centre and mentioned UNDP's collaboration with the Ministry of Human Rights in developing a national strategy on technology-facilitated GBV.
- Proposed enhanced coordination among development partners, civil society, and government institutions through a national mechanism to ensure coherence, shared accountability, and sustainable progress and reinforced the need for collective action to make Pakistan's digital transformation resilient, inclusive, and respectful.

3.3.5 Session recommendations

1. **Embed fact-checking mechanisms:** The participants suggested embedding fact-checking mechanisms within national regulatory frameworks (PEMRA, PTA, ECP) to ensure institutional sustainability.
2. **Embed digital literacy:** The participants suggested embedding digital literacy, ethics, and media accountability modules within education systems for long-term impact.
3. **Partnerships with social media influencers**: The participants encouraged partnerships with social media influencers to amplify verified information and positive narratives.

4. **National coordination platform**: The participants advocated for a national coordination platform connecting parliament, civil society, academia, and development partners for coherence and accountability.
5. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration**: The session contributors highlighted that sustainability must be grounded in government ownership and multi-stakeholder collaboration beyond project cycles.

3.4 Session 4: Strengthening community and institutional responses to GBV

Chair: Abdul Khalique Sheikh, Secretary, Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR)

Presenters: Saliha Ramay, UNFPA and Yasmin Zaidi, British Council

Moderator: Dilshad Pari, UNFPA

3.4.1 Opening remarks

The session moderator began with an overview of the GBV landscape in Pakistan, noting that existing national statistics cover only a limited scope for women aged 15-49. In contrast, the experiences of younger girls and older women remain undocumented. This partial data underscores the need for a comprehensive national survey to accurately report on violence against women and fulfil SDG 5 commitments. Under the Aawaz II Programme , UNFPA's focus has been on domestic and sexual violence, along with disability inclusion as a cross-cutting priority.

3.4.2 Technical and community engagement presentations

UNFPA presentation on GBV

Strategy:

The UNFPA presenter explained that Aawaz II Programme focuses on three main areas: developing policies, laws, and action plans; strengthening institutional responses; and generating evidence. While Pakistan has strong legislative frameworks in place, their implementation is weak. This is largely due to delayed SOPs, insufficient budgets, and inadequate enforcement.

Achievements:

- Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act Rules and the Punjab Empowerment of Persons with Disability Act Rules 2022; SOPs for Dar-ul-Amans, Safe Houses, One-Stop Protection Centre, Women Protection Centers aligned with Interagency GBV case Management guidelines; Multi-sectoral Coordination Mechanism for Prevention and Response to GBV (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Sindh); Monitoring Mechanism for the implementation of Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act; Multi-sectoral Training of Criminal Justice System Actors: Capacity building of nearly 300 Criminal Justice and related professionals; and establishment of the model Anti-Rape Crisis Cells.

- GBV case management courses initiated at Lahore College of Women and Peshawar University: evidence generation, SOPs, training, and institutional strengthening efforts.



Saliha Ramay, Technical Specialist GBV, UNFPA delivering, presentation

Government commitments:

- Sindh allocated resources for the establishment of One Stop Protection Centre (OSPCs) in other districts (PC-1 amount PKR 748 million)
- Bolo helpline Khyber Pakhtunkhwa institutionalised under regular resources
- Scale up of Anti-Rape Crises Centres (ARCC)
- Scale up of Women Protection Centres and allocation in ADP 2025-26
- Notification of SOPs, Rules for the Women Protection Authority
- Notification of the Rules of the Punjab Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2022
- Uptake of GBV Database for Women Shelters
- MoHR to support the standardisation of the GBV Helplines SOPs, data collection, and monitoring mechanism

British Council presentation on preventing GBV

The British Council presentation focused on community engagement to change knowledge and attitudes towards GBV.

Strategy:

BC operates in 37 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab through over 1,000 community forums and 48,000 volunteers. The strategy utilised positive messaging through media, empowered women to claim their rights, leveraged peer influence among men and youth, and conducted pre-budget citizen consultations.

Achievements:

Community mobilisation led to increased awareness and demand for services and referral mechanisms, and local partners' mobilisation has been instrumental in linking survivors to government services and helplines. Significant achievements included a 40% increase in knowledge and attitudes, direct reach of 294,076 individuals, and media reach of over 10 million. Collaboration was maintained with key government departments, including Social Welfare and the Planning and Development Departments.

Cross-provincial learnings:

This programme played a crucial role in cross-provincial learning. For example, the assessment conducted at PIMS Hospital, Islamabad, to establish survivor centres and incorporate international legal practices was replicated in Punjab, with limited provisions for the changes required in each province.

Government commitments:

- Aawaz II Programme trained volunteers (women, youth, men, vulnerable groups) inclusion in government committees and link to trained resources on Early Warning and Response for prevention of GBV (notification by SWD, LG&CDD/ LGE&RDD)
- Aawaz II Programme referral mechanism linking it with Union Council offices, District Protection Units, Dar ul Amans, Tahaffuz Markaz and police stations (LG&CDD, SWD, PWPA, Police)
- MoUs between CSOs and government departments with Aawaz II Programme local partners (Tahaffuz and Meesaq Centres) in Punjab and local educational institutions (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Punjab)
- Provincial coordination and engagement with civil society and government policy actions through the Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forum (SWD)
- Pre-budget citizen consultations in districts and at the provincial level to ensure community priorities are reflected in resource allocation, measured through gender budget tagging
- Use of positive messages (videos, posters) developed by the programme

Committed resources:

- Space in District/Tehsil offices for community meetings
- Letter to district offices to engage with Aawaz volunteers
- Engage volunteers in any outreach initiatives and relevant sessions by the departments

Challenges:

Primary challenges identified were societal lack of awareness of forms of GBV and inadequate implementation of the Punjab Women Protection Authority Act, 2016 and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Act, 2021.

Way forward and key messages:

To ensure sustainability, the British Council recommended notifying Aawaz II Programme volunteers in government committees, institutionalising referral

mechanisms, and formalising partnerships through MoUs. A key message was the need for enhanced provincial coordination with civil society.

3.4.3 Open discussion

The open discussion yielded several key insights and suggestions as participants reflected on both the progress and gaps under the Aawaz II Programme Programme.

- **Positive community response to sensitive GBV topics:** A partner from the Maher Foundation shared that initial apprehension about community response to sensitive GBV topics had diminished over time. Communities were now more receptive to behaviour-change messages when appropriately framed.
- **Consistent investment in Awareness campaigns**: The discussion underlined that consistent investment in behaviour change communication leads to readiness and acceptance among communities.
- **Inclusive Mechanisms:** Participants highlighted the plight of the transgender community. A representative from the Jodh Society noted that between 2015 and 2023, 91% of reported killings of transgender individuals remained unaddressed, with minimal government response. The call was made for stronger accountability and inclusion mechanisms for the transgender community within the GBV framework.

Challenges:

- Despite the existence of strong legislation, the absence of effective implementation frameworks remains a significant challenge
- Rules, SOPs, and dedicated budgets are often missing, hindering the impact of otherwise progressive laws
- Limited data collection also restricts accurate reporting and planning

Lessons learned:

- A key lesson learned is the importance of building trust within communities and using culturally sensitive messaging to encourage open dialogue on GBV. The Aawaz II Programme Programme demonstrated that when communities are involved through awareness and volunteer engagement, prevention efforts become sustainable and impactful.

Exit, sustainability & transition:

- As Aawaz II Programme nears closure, participants expressed concern over maintaining its legacy. The discussion emphasised the need to institutionalise successful interventions and integrate them into government mechanisms, particularly through the Ministry of Human Rights.
- The sustainability of community mobilisation and volunteer networks was identified as a critical area requiring continued support.

Key quotes:

- “Prevention is the ultimate solution -- it is not a low-hanging fruit; it requires long-term commitment.”
- “People are ready if you message it correctly; people are ready if you invest in behaviour change.”

- "The laws exist, but what's often missing are the rules, SOPs, and the budget to make them work."
- "We need more champions in every department who understand and drive this cause forward."

3.4.4 Closing remarks

The chair appreciated the depth of work achieved under the Aawaz II Programme. It was emphasised that its results demonstrate the lasting social impact that collaboration between government and partners can yield. The programme's impressive outreach across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was acknowledged, and it was noted that such initiatives complement governmental efforts by drawing attention to the unseen and unspoken dimensions of GBV. He remarked that these programmes sensitise institutions and individuals, allowing them to identify gaps and work toward real change, and shared his own experience of association and working with FCDO and UNDP, including the setting up of district human rights cells.

The importance of institutionalisation and sustainability was stressed, urging that the successful models and lessons from Aawaz II Programme be mainstreamed within the Ministry of Human Rights to ensure continuity and policy integration. He encouraged identifying departmental "champions" who can carry forward the cause within their institutions. "Money invested in awareness and sensitisation is never wasted—it produces champions who continue to advocate for human rights," he remarked.

He apprised that the MoHR is working on a strategy of engaging men and boys to combat GBV. Moving forward, the best way to institutionalise Aawaz interventions is as follows:

- MoHR can take proven initiatives of Aawaz II Programme and integrate them in the National Action Programme on Human Rights, which has an implementation committee and follow-up action, with representation from CSOs and relevant government departments.
- MoHR can set up and test a model in ICT, but it's up to the provinces to replicate it.
- MoHR is coordinating with the provinces and districts, but suggested that the District Human Rights Committees need to be made more vibrant. He also mentioned that the District Criminal Coordination Committees and the Provincial Criminal Coordination Committees can play an effective role in supporting the criminal justice system in addressing GBV.

3.4.5 Session recommendations

1. **Integration of the Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) curriculum:** Integrate the Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) curriculum into medical education across Pakistan to strengthen the health sector's response to sexual violence.
2. **Allocation of budget to sustain the DCPUs:** Allocate budget to fully maintain the DCPUs and core child protection functions beyond external funding.
3. **Allocation of budget to scale up of ARCCs:** Allocate budget for the scaling up of ARCCs and WPCs.
4. **Ensure accessibility of GBV essential services for PWDs:** GBV essential services should be accessible for PWDs.

5. **Allocation of budget for Implementation of SOPs and policy documents:** Although Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab governments have shown commitment and already notified some of the SOPs and policy documents, they must allocate budgets against these commitments for the SOPs and the rules to be implemented.
6. **GBV should be seen as a national issue with government ownership: GBV should be seen as a social, community-level and national issue which requires a shift from passive to active interventions,** including positive message dissemination and an extensive volunteer-based program to shift to the Government.
7. **GBV policy should address transgender concerns:** The existing GBV policy must also include transgender group. There is a dire need for shelter homes for transgender population, based on the example of District Vehari, where special beds in the DHQ hospital have been assigned for transgender persons under an MoU between a local NGO and the District Health Department.

3.5 Session 5: Promoting inclusion, tolerance and social cohesion

Chair: Fauzia Viqar, Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment

Presenters: Rafat Yasmin and Naveed Shinwari, British Council**;** Arif Tabassum, CARE

Moderator: Yasmin Zaidi, British Council

3.5.1 Opening remarks

The moderator opened the session with an overview of the British Council community engagement mandate and asked her colleagues to give their respective presentations, followed by CARE.

3.5.2 Community engagement presentations

British Council Presentation on Promoting Social Inclusion

Aawaz II Programme promotes inclusion and social cohesion by working directly with local communities across 37 districts. The first British Council presentation on community engagement involved their thematic area of promoting social inclusion.

Programme overview:

- Focuses on women, youth, religious minorities, transgender persons, and PWDs as key thematic groups.
- Over 28,000 trained volunteers from these groups are leading community forums and driving behavioural change around GBV, child marriage, and inclusion.
- Aawaz has established village forums, Aagahi Centres, and district forums that are inclusive and community-driven. These "safe spaces" allow vulnerable groups to meet, discuss issues, and connect with government officials.
- Transgender persons lead several Aagahi Centres; religious minority women and youth are taking voluntary actions promoting inclusion.

Disability inclusion achievements:

- Through Aawaz II Programme advocacy, Disability Rehabilitation Funds have been activated in provinces where they were previously underutilised.
- Disability boards have been strengthened, simplifying the process for obtaining disability certificates and identity documents.
- Introduced one-window services in several districts to ease access for persons with disabilities, especially women.
- Programme outreach has reached 14,000 women with disabilities, 4,000 individuals from religious minorities, and 560 transgender persons.

Policy influence and government coordination:

- Aawaz II Programme communities contributed recommendations for provincial budgets; over 40% were adopted in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa budgets.
- Recommendations included funding for services for PWDs, GBV survivors, and child protection mechanisms.
- Advocated for inclusion of vulnerable groups in government committees — child protection, women's protection, interfaith harmony, peace, and human rights.
- Continued collaboration with Union Councils and local government offices to improve birth registration, especially for children with disabilities, transgender persons, and minorities.

Government commitments:

- Inclusion and sustainability of Aawaz II Programme trained volunteers in relevant government committees in programme districts (Examples: Protection Committees for women and children, Interfaith Harmony and Peace Committees, Human Rights Committees, etc.)
- Sustainability of Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forums with government departments hosting the meetings on a rotational basis, such as Child Protection Commission/Bureau and PWPA, similar practice to be adopted for continuation of District Forums.
- Activation and regularisation of the Disabled Persons Rehabilitation (DPR) funds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab with inclusion of women with disabilities, religious minorities, and transgender persons.
- Sustained coordination between Tahaffuz and Meesaq Centres with Aawaz II Programme forums in Punjab and active coordination between Police and community members in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for redressal of issues.
- Sustaining coordination between UC offices and LGE&RDD officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and LG&CDD in Punjab for birth registration of vulnerable groups and redressal of child marriage.

Actionable plan for transition:

- Ensure mandatory community engagement is built into all government departments and schemes (e.g., local government, police, Tahaffuz centres, Meesaq centres).

- Sustain community-led referral mechanisms that link vulnerable groups with Dar-ul-Amans, CPUs, Khidmat Marakaz, and Union Councils.
- Leverage trained Aawaz II Programme volunteers — including women, transgender persons, and PWDs — to support government service delivery.
- Formalise MoUs between CSOs and government departments for coordination, follow-up, and accountability.
- Expand pre-budget consultations to the district level to ensure social inclusion remains part of local financial planning.
- Strengthen information sharing and media use for awareness, advocacy, and promoting inclusive government mechanisms.



Dr . Yasmin Zaidi, Team Lead, British Council delivering her presentation

British Council presentation on promoting social cohesion

The second British Council presentation on community engagement involved their thematic area of Promoting Tolerance and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces. It explained how communities in Aawaz II Programme districts are building trust, inclusion, and cooperation to counter social division and intolerance.

Challenges:

- Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa face stress on social bonds due to sectarian tensions, faith-based divisions, and local conflicts.
- In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, hybrid governance (jirga, hujra alongside formal systems) sometimes reinforces tribal or religious exclusion.
- In Punjab, institutional weaknesses and entrenched gender, caste, and biradri hierarchies sustain everyday inequality.

Programme interventions:

- Established over 300 community groups led by nearly 3,000 representatives (women, transgender persons, PWDs, religious minorities)
- Operate early warning and response systems that lead community dialogues and actions addressing conflict drivers
- Reached six million people through media outreach and nearly 250,000 through direct engagement; over 70,000 active participants in cohesion activities
- Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys show measurable improvement in community attitudes toward tolerance and inclusion

Integration with government structures:

- In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, focal persons collaborate with peace committees, interfaith groups, and dispute-resolution councils.
- In Punjab, early-warning focal persons now work within Meesaq Centres in four to five districts.

Actionable plan & responsible exit

- Focus on continuity, not closure — maintain links between community forums and government institutions
- Formalise partnerships between civil society and government to embed Aawaz community systems within official structures
- Continue regular interfaith dialogue and cross-community coordination to sustain tolerance and cooperation.
- Embed trained local focal persons and early-warning systems in district governance frameworks

Key quote:

"Social cohesion isn't a final goal – it's an ongoing process of negotiations between tradition and reforms, between faith and humanism, governance and community voice." - Participant

CARE presentation on promoting social cohesion and inclusion in Sindh

CARE International delivered a presentation on its community engagement strategy in Sindh and provided a progress update. CARE was awarded the community engagement contract last year and began implementation in 2025. The salient features of the presentation are outlined below.

Implementation strategy:

CARE International is operating in five districts of Sindh through four IPs: the Association for Water, Applied Education & Renewable Energy (AWARE), SAAMI Foundation, Indus Resource Centre, and HARI Welfare Association. Rozan and the Legal Aid Society (LAS) serve as their technical partners. CARE is employing a tested model of community engagement whose objectives are to build inclusive, peaceful, and tolerant communities.

Programme structure in Sindh:

- Established 75 village forums with 1,700 members — 60% of whom are women
- Established five district forums; process ongoing to form a provincial forum to connect community voices with policy-level dialogue
- Planning to set up 25 Aawaz Aagahi Centres to host community discussions and awareness activities
- 16 community members currently leading local dialogues on GBV, child marriage, and social cohesion
- Working with four community partners and four district partners to build long-term capacity and sustain connections beyond project timelines

Key lessons learned

- Inclusion is at the heart of Aawaz II Programme's approach
- Representation builds trust, so inclusion of women, minorities, and PWDs has been ensured, which enhances credibility and participation
- Smaller group sessions led by female mobilisers help women express themselves confidently
- Religious minorities have stronger representation but need more apparent linkages with district and provincial mechanisms
- In some areas, communities initially struggled to understand that Aawaz focuses on knowledge, connection, and empowerment rather than material benefits

Social cohesion and behaviour change:

- Progress on tolerance and behaviour change is gradual but visible
- Dialogues have encouraged open discussions on child marriage, GBV, and discrimination
- Some forums have developed local action plans to sustain progress beyond awareness-raising
- Behaviour change is most effective when awareness leads to concrete community action

Sustainability

- Continue engagement through village and community forums, special interest groups, and inclusion efforts for women, minorities, and PWDs.
- Expand child marriage prevention and GBV response through stronger referral systems
- Roll out social and behaviour change (SBC) campaigns in each district.
- Strengthen provincial-level dialogues linking communities and service providers to influence policy in Sindh
- Ensure sustainability by enabling government ownership and partner capacity-building beyond 2027

Key quote

"Inclusion and tolerance take time — they grow with trust, participation, and persistence. We're still in early stages, but the direction is clear, and the change has already begun." - CARE.

3.5.3 Open discussion

During the open discussion, the participants stressed the following points:

- Building social cohesion requires both strong institutions and community ownership.
- Social inclusion is an ongoing process, balancing tradition and reform, faith and humanism, governance, and community voice.
- The enduring task is to nurture empathy, dialogue, and inclusion as everyday practice, not just programme outcomes.

3.5.4 Closing remarks

The chair's closing remarks centred on two interlinked themes — social inclusion and social cohesion. She described that inclusion enables cohesion, and both are mutually reinforcing: inclusion means everyone has a voice and is part of decisions that affect them. Pakistan remains a heterogeneous society where exclusion persists based on gender, socio-economic status, geography, and disability. Vulnerable or marginalised groups must be actively included in community, organisational, and government decision-making.

When these groups are included, decision-making and outcomes improve — as seen in examples from Aawaz II Programme and other initiatives. She regretted that inclusion is still not a policy or institutional priority for many decision-makers. Tokenism often replaces genuine participation, with the same voices repeatedly engaged for years, and there appears to be a lack of will to reform processes and regulatory frameworks that can embed inclusion meaningfully.

Brazil's participatory budgeting was cited as increasing citizen involvement and access to essential services (e.g., clean water, sanitation). She expressed optimism that Aawaz II Programme offers local evidence of improved service delivery when citizens, especially marginalised groups, are involved in dialogue. However, she noted that representation from transgender communities and other marginalised voices still requires strengthening.

She concluded by emphasising that inclusion, cohesion, and reform require commitment, coordination, and respect for community voices and urged stakeholders to move beyond "business as usual" and adopt inclusive, community-led approaches for sustainable social change.

3.5.5 Session recommendations

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/Punjab

- **Ensure mandatory community engagement and outreach targets:** Ensure mandatory community engagement and outreach targets in all government programmes. These include provincial SWDs, women, children, and HR

commissions; PWPA; Meesaq and Tahafuz Centres; Local Government Departments; and Auqaf and Religious/Minority Affairs Departments.

- **Institutionalise community-led referral mechanisms:** Institutionalise community-led referral mechanisms and link them with government structures (VCs/UCs, CPUs, Dar-ul Amans, Khidmat Markaz, Police).
- **Include trained volunteers in government-notified committees:** Include trained volunteers (youth, women, minorities, vulnerable groups) in government-notified committees on Early Warning & Response for prevention.
- **Formalise partnerships for effective outcomes:** Sign MoUs between CSOs and government departments to leverage trained resources for behaviour change.
- **Strengthen provincial coordination:** Strengthen provincial coordination between civil society and government through platforms such as Provincial Forums by SWDs and other relevant departments.
- **Ensure Continuation of pre-budget citizen consultations:** Pre-budget Citizen Consultations have proven very successful at the district and provincial levels in articulation of citizens' demands and should be continued to ensure community priorities are reflected in resource allocation.
- **Inclusion of trained resources in the District Committees:** Include Aawaz's trained resources on Early Warning & Response for prevention of Child Marriage, GBV, intolerance, and to promote interfaith harmony and social cohesion in the District Committees.
- **Government-led messaging and campaigns on social inclusion:** The Government should launch messaging and campaigns on social inclusion through the Information Departments, focusing on youth and other groups.

Sindh

- **Deepen representation of marginalised groups:** Deepen representation of women, minorities, and PWDs in forums and ensure their active voice in decision-making.
- **Strengthen child marriage prevention efforts:** Strengthen child marriage prevention efforts through community action plans and advocacy with district/provincial administrations.
- **Strengthen referral pathways:** Build stronger referral pathways for survivors of GBV, trafficking, and other abuses, linking communities with government and non-government services.
- **Expand awareness campaigns:** Expand awareness campaigns to directly address intolerance, child marriage, and minority rights using local languages and mixed media.
- **Institutionalise findings into provincial policies:** Institutionalise Referral Pathways, EWS findings into provincial policies for sustainable conflict prevention and inclusion.
- **Use Provincial Policy Dialogues to amplify grassroots concerns:** Use Provincial Policy Dialogues as a platform to amplify grassroots concerns on social inclusion, child protection, and minority rights.
- **Capacity strengthening of local partners for sustainability:** To ensure ownership and continuity beyond 2027, establish Provincial Forum and community structures at the centre and strengthen the capacity of local partners to lay down a strong foundation for resilience and long-term impact.

4 Closing Plenary: Building a Roadmap for Aawaz II Programme Transition

The National Learning Event concluded with a closing plenary session.

Closing plenary proceedings

The closing plenary included the following speeches, remarks, and presentations:

- Consolidated Reflections from Provincial Workshops and NLE by Dr Vaqar Ahmed, Team Leader, Aawaz II Programme Programme's I-FORM
- Keynote Remarks by Sam Waldock, Development Director, UK FCDO Pakistan
- Closing Address by Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Human Rights

The speech, remarks and presentation are described below.

4.1 Consolidated reflections from provincial workshops and NLE

Presenter: Dr Vaqar Ahmed, Team Leader, Aawaz II Programme Programme I-FORM, OPM

Dr Vaqar Ahmed reflected on Aawaz II Programme's decade-long approach to bridging the gap between the state and citizens, institutionalising advocacy, and building mechanisms for conflict pre-emption — the core of its theory of change. He highlighted the programme's focus on vulnerable groups, particularly women, girls, and survivors of violence.

He outlined three key focus areas for children's protection:

1. Institutionalised collaboration with child protection departments.
2. Strengthening information and data management systems.
3. Improving birth registration frameworks and government ownership.

The child labour survey, replicated across provinces, was cited as evidence of embedding sustainable models within government systems. The discussion included the "digital citizenship" component, which engages communities, policymakers, and parliamentarians in the fight against hate speech and misinformation through tools like iVerify. Emphasis was placed on the importance of a responsible and structured exit that maintains institutional reforms, human capacity, and government stewardship.

He shared that the Aawaz II exit plan, developed with government partners, focuses on ensuring financial and operational responsibility, transitioning smoothly to government systems, and embedding durable frameworks into provincial action plans and promoting cross-sector collaboration — especially with media and academia.

He concluded his presentation with the remark that "donor-supported programmes must leave a legacy of ownership, capacity, and policy continuity."



Dr Vaqar Ahmed, Team Leader, I-FORM, presenting consolidated reflections from Provincial Workshopsand NLE.

4.2 Keynote remarks

Speaker: Sam Waldock, Development Director, UK FCDO Pakistan

The Development Director, UK FCDO Pakistan, thanked partners and stakeholders for their shared commitment to tackling GBV, child marriage, child protection, and social exclusion. He acknowledged that the session was both a celebration of achievements and a reflection on the future, with a focus on sustainability and national ownership.

He described Aawaz II Programme's tangible legacy, including:

- Women's protection centres and crisis response mechanisms in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- CPUs established across provinces.
- These services are lifelines that must be maintained and expanded nationwide.

He praised Aawaz's community engagement model, in which communities act as agents of change rather than mere beneficiaries. He encouraged institutionalising pre-budget consultations and community-led early warning systems to strengthen governance, commended the ICT Child Marriage Restraint Act (age 18 for boys and girls) as both a legal necessity and a moral imperative, and urged other provinces to adopt similar laws.

Punjab's new disability law was recognised as a model of compassion and inclusion, serving as an example for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to replicate. There is a strong need to tackle digital disinformation through media literacy and critical thinking, with a suggestion to integrate these concepts into university programs.

He expressed gratitude to all partners and government colleagues, noting that Aawaz II Programme has shifted mindsets, built partnerships, and laid the groundwork for lasting, sustainable change.



Sam Waldock, Development Director, UK FCDO Pakistan, delivering keynote remarks.

4.3 Closing address

Speaker: Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Human Rights

The Federal Minister for Human Rights praised Aawaz II Programme as a programme grounded in reality, bringing the voices of vulnerable groups to government. He described Aawaz II Programme as an example of "seeing is believing", showing how listening to communities leads to real results.

He reflected on Pakistan's progress since the 1990s — many laws passed, though implementation gaps remain. He acknowledged that the government often struggles to showcase achievements due to weaknesses in data and mapping.

The collaboration among federal and provincial governments, civil society, and development partners received praise. Yet there is a strong call for service delivery to extend beyond conference halls and to directly engage communities. This endeavour should be treated as a shared national mission, emphasising the importance of placing the right individuals in the right roles.

Provinces were urged to accelerate the passage of child marriage legislation, with Sindh and Islamabad cited as positive examples. He advocated for the rights of PWDs and religious minorities, emphasising that Pakistan belongs to all citizens and that laws must be implemented, not just enacted.

The Ministry of Human Rights' readiness to lead and coordinate the transition process was affirmed, ensuring the Aawaz community structures and knowledge systems continue to serve the people beyond 2027. He called on all relevant ministries and provincial departments, civil society, academia, and community leaders to join hands in implementing the proposed roadmap and converting Aawaz II Programme's achievements into permanent institutional practice.



Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Human Rights, delivering the closing address

5 Recommendations and Commitments

5.1 Recommendations for sustainability under Aawaz II Programme themes

The thematic sessions yielded recommendations on government priorities to facilitate a successful and responsible exit from Aawaz II Programme interventions. These recommendations are listed below under the respective Aawaz II Programme thematic area.

5.1.1 Child protection systems (including child registration)

1. **Institutionalise and create ownership:** Federal and provincial governments must take full responsibility to sustain progress on the CP CMRS and birth registrations.
2. **Harmonise laws and policies:** Provincial laws should be aligned, particularly regarding the legal age of marriage, to effectively prevent child marriages, especially the 18-year age limit for child marriage.
3. **Strengthen legal identity:** The registration and legal identity of children and their integration with the health system are essential components for a more cohesive protection framework. Birth registration is necessary to integrate every child into government systems and ensure effective monitoring and service delivery.
4. **Improve data and research:** Evidence-based decision-making is crucial for advancing child protection rights and preventing abuse. Establishing comprehensive child protection databases is vital for transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making.
5. **Strengthen multisectoral coordination:** Child protection is a cross-sectoral responsibility that extends beyond the mandate of any single department. Stronger integration among departments is needed to deliver more effective, community-centred child protection services.
6. **Improve inclusion and participation:** Efforts must be made to ensure meaningful inclusion of persons with PWDs, minority communities, and transgender individuals at all levels.

5.1.2 Child marriage

1. **Standardise the legal age:** The legal age of marriage should be standardised across all provinces.
2. **Promote evidence-based research:** Evidence-based research should be promoted, and harmonised data systems should be developed to inform policy decisions.
3. **Establish cross-provincial learning:** Cross-provincial learning mechanisms should be established for learning lessons and the adoption of successful models and practices across implementing provinces, as well as benefiting Balochistan.

4. **Ensure transition dialogue:** Frequent and structured dialogues with government stakeholders should be maintained to develop a transitional plan for policy adoption.
5. **Continue awareness and behaviour change campaigns:** The community-level awareness and behaviour change campaigns should be continued as they lead to positive outcomes, including demand generation.
6. **Establish clear Referral Pathways for survivors:** Clear and accessible referral pathways for survivors should be established for effective use of available services.
7. **Integration of child marriage:** For the prevention of early child marriage, information about child marriage prevention must be integrated into education, poverty alleviation, and social protection programmes.
8. **Continue Policy dialogue and advocacy:** The policy dialogue and advocacy with lawmakers and institutions should be maintained, as it is a prerequisite for policy adoption and influence.
9. **Integration of Aawaz-trained volunteers:** Aawaz-trained volunteers should be integrated into district-level committees for utilising their proven skills in early warning and conflict-prevention.
10. **Integration of Aawaz's best practices:** Aawaz's best practices must be integrated into national and provincial action plans for embedding its proven community structures into government systems.

5.1.3 Gender-based violence

1. **Integration of the CMR curriculum:** Integrate the CMR curriculum into medical education across Pakistan to strengthen the health sector's response to sexual violence.
2. **Allocation of budget to sustain the DCPUs:** Allocate budget to fully maintain the DCPUs and core child protection functions beyond external funding.
3. **Allocation of budget to scale up of ARCCs:** Allocate budget for the scaling up of ARCCs and WPCs.
4. **Ensure accessibility of GBV essential services for PWDs:** GBV essential services should be accessible for PWDs.
5. **Allocation of budget for Implementation of SOPs and policy documents:** Although Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab governments have shown commitment and already notified some of the SOPs and policy documents, they must allocate budgets against these commitments for the SOPs and the rules to be implemented.
6. **GBV should be seen as a national issue with government ownership: GBV should be seen as a social, community-level and national issue which requires a shift from passive to active interventions,** including positive message dissemination and an extensive volunteer-based program to shift to the government.
7. **GBV policy should address transgender concerns:** The existing GBV policy must also include transgender population. There is a dire need for shelter homes for transgender population, based on the example of District Vehari, where special

beds in the DHQ hospital have been assigned for transgender persons under an MoU between a local NGO and the District Health Department.

5.1.4 Social inclusion

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/Punjab

1. **Ensure mandatory community engagement and outreach targets** in all government programmes. These include provincial SWDs, women, children, and HR Commissions; PWPA; Meesaq and Tahafuz Centres; Local Government Departments; and Auqaf and Religious/Minority Affairs Departments.
2. **Institutionalise community-led referral mechanisms** and link them with government structures (VCs/UCs, CPUs, Dar-ul Amans, Khidmat Markaz, Police).
3. **Include trained volunteers in government-notified committees** (youth, women, minorities, vulnerable groups) in government-notified committees on Early Warning & Response for prevention.
4. **Formalise partnerships for effective outcomes:** Sign MoUs between CSOs and Government Depts to leverage trained resources for behaviour change.
5. **Strengthen provincial coordination** between civil society and government through platforms such as Provincial Forums by SWDs and other relevant departments.
6. **Ensure Continuation of Pre-budget Citizen Consultations:** Pre-budget Citizen Consultations have proven very successful at the district and provincial levels in articulation of citizens' demands and should be continued to ensure community priorities are reflected in resource allocation.
7. **Inclusion of trained resources in the District Committees:** Include Aawaz's trained resources on Early Warning & Response for prevention of Child Marriage, GBV, intolerance, and to promote interfaith harmony and social cohesion in the District Committees.
8. **Government-led messaging and campaigns on social inclusion:** The Government should launch messaging and campaigns on social inclusion through the Information Departments, focusing on youth and other groups.

Sindh

1. **Deepen representation of marginalised groups**; women, minorities, and PWDs in forums and ensure their active voice in decision-making.
2. **Strengthen child marriage prevention efforts** through community action plans and advocacy with district/provincial administrations.
3. **Strengthen referral pathways:** Build stronger referral pathways for survivors of GBV, trafficking, and other abuses, linking communities with government and non-government services.
4. **Expand awareness campaigns** to directly address intolerance, child marriage, and minority rights using local languages and mixed media.
5. **Institutionalise findings into provincial policies:** Institutionalise Referral Pathways, EWS findings into provincial policies for sustainable conflict prevention and inclusion.

6. **Use Provincial Policy Dialogues to amplify grassroots concerns** as a platform to amplify grassroots concerns on social inclusion, child protection, and minority rights.
7. **Capacity strengthening of local partners for sustainability:** To ensure ownership and continuity beyond 2027, establish Provincial Forum and community structures at the centre and strengthen the capacity of local partners to lay down a strong foundation for resilience and long-term impact.

5.1.5 Safe digital environment, tolerance, and social cohesion

1. **Embed fact-checking mechanisms:** The fact-checking mechanisms should be embedded within national regulatory frameworks (PEMRA, PTA, ECP) to ensure institutional sustainability.
2. **Embed digital literacy:** The digital literacy, ethics, and media accountability modules should be embedded within education systems for long-term impact.
3. **Partnerships with social media influencers**: The partnerships with social media influencers to amplify verified information and positive narratives should be explored.
4. **National coordination platform**: A national coordination platform connecting parliament, civil society, academia, and development partners should be established for coherence and accountability.
5. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration**: The sustainability must be grounded in government ownership and multi-stakeholder collaboration beyond project cycles.

5.2 Government commitments

Aawaz II Programme IPs have received the following commitments from the provincial and federal governments for the adoption/resourcing of key Aawaz II Programme models/initiatives, which are reflected against the respective thematic area.

Provincial governments commitments

5.2.1 Child protection

UNICEF

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

- Provincial CP Roadmap for financial sustainability (endorsed June 2025), sustaining 21 DCPUs and expanding to five additional districts
- Child Labour Policy updated using survey evidence
- PKR 250 million increase in Grant-in-Aid; PKR 120 million allocated for a model CPU in D.I. Khan; land allocated for four new DCPUs

Punjab:

- CP Policy approved, CP Bill ready for enactment
- CPWB endorsed the CMRS package and notified the Provincial CP TWG

- PKR 108 million is allocated for new CPUs in six districts

Sindh:

- CP TWG revamped and District Coordination Committee Terms of Reference updated (2024)

British Council

- Notification of Aawaz volunteers as members of the DCPCs (Punjab CPWB and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CPWC)
- Aawaz II Programme trained AAC RPs and volunteers to be notified as members of the CBCPCs (where not included so far)
- Community engagement and awareness raising about child protection issues, including prevention of child abuse and child marriage, and promotion of birth registration

5.2.2 Child marriage

UNFPA

- Operationalise provincial action plans
- Integrate Capacity Building into Government Systems
- Institutionalisation of the Oversight mechanism
- Strengthen nikah registration and marriage documentation systems

British Council

Discussions and thematic consultation held with the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau and the Commission in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for

- Sustaining community engagement (continued linkages of government services with Aawaz II Programme forums)
- Inclusion of community members in DCPUs and committees
- Inclusion of vulnerable groups in CPUs (inclusion of women, transgender persons, and religious minorities)
- Linkages between village forums and Aagahi Centres, focal persons of Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forums, with the representation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CP&WC and LGE&RDD

5.2.3 Gender-Based Violence

UNFPA

- Sindh allocated resources for the establishment of One Stop Protection Centre (OSPCs) in other districts (PC-1 amount PKR 748.403 M)
- Bolo helpline Khyber Pakhtunkhwa institutionalised under regular resources.
- Scale up of ARCCs
- Scale up of WPCs and allocation in ADP 2025-26
- Notification of SOPs, Rules for the Women Protection Authority

- Notification of the Rules of the Punjab empowerment of persons with Disabilities Act, 2022
- Uptake of GBV Database for Women Shelters
- MoHR to support the standardisation of the GBV Helplines SOPs, data collection, and monitoring mechanism

British Council

- Aawaz II Programme trained volunteers (women, youth, men, vulnerable groups) in government committees and linked to trained resources on Early Warning and Response for prevention of GBV (notification by SWD, LGE&RDD/LG&CDD)
- Aawaz II Programme referral mechanism linking it with Union Council offices, DPUs, Dar ul Amans, Tahaffuz Markaz and police stations (LG&CDD, SWD, PWPA, Police)
- MoUs between CSOs and government departments with Aawaz II Programme local partners (Tahaffuz and Meesaq Centres) in Punjab and regional educational institutions (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Punjab)
- Provincial coordination and engagement with civil society and government policy actions through the Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forum (SWD
- Pre-budget citizen consultations in districts and at the provincial level to ensure community priorities are reflected in resource allocation, measured through gender budget tagging
- Use of positive messages (videos, posters) developed by the programme

Committed resources

- Space in District/Tehsil offices for community meetings
- Letter to district offices to engage with Aawaz volunteers
- Engage volunteers in any outreach initiatives and relevant sessions by the departments

5.2.4 Social inclusion

British Council

- Inclusion and sustainability of Aawaz II Programme trained volunteers in relevant government committees in programme districts (Examples: Protection Committees for women and children, Interfaith Harmony and Peace Committees, Human Rights Committees, etc.)
- Sustainability of Aawaz II Programme Provincial Forums with government departments hosting the meetings on a rotational basis, such as Child Protection Commission/Bureau and PWPA, similar practice to be adopted for continuation of District Forums.
- Activation and regularisation of DPR funds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab with inclusion of WWDs, religious minorities and transgender persons
- Sustained coordination between Tahaffuz and Meesaq Centres with Aawaz II Programme forums in Punjab and active coordination between Police and community members in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for redressal of issues
- Sustaining coordination between UC offices and LG officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab for birth registration of vulnerable groups and redressal of child marriage

Federal government commitments

I. Federal Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives (MoPD&SI)

1. Integrate Aawaz social protection services, especially for marginalised groups, with Equity and Empowerment: Pillar 5 of the URAAN Pakistan, National Economic Transformation Plan for sustainable exit.
2. Integrate Aawaz Forums and community dialogue platforms into local government and district development plans.
3. Encourage provincial planning departments to embed Aawaz learnings and structures into their ADPs, ensuring continuity of social cohesion and inclusion activities.
4. Formalise multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms involving civil society, academia, and federal, provincial, and local governments to sustain inclusive development dialogue.
5. Allocate targeted resources under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to scale up tested models of Aawaz II Programme, especially in community peacebuilding, protection, and inclusion.
6. Hand over the repository of knowledge and lessons learning of Aawaz II Programme to a credible academic or policy research institution for long-term hosting and data-driven policy support.

II. Federal Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR)

1. The Ministry of Human Rights will lead and coordinate the transition process ensuring that Aawaz II's community structures and knowledge systems continue beyond 2027.
2. Integrate Aawaz Forums and Aagahi Centres within District Social Welfare Offices, Human Rights Cells, or Local Government structures aligned with the National Action Programme of the MoHR, with inclusion of Aawaz volunteers in the respective government District HR Committee and Provincial and District Criminal Justice Committees.
3. Provincial Planning and Development Departments should include the helplines and rights-based applications mechanisms and collaborate with the Ministry of Human Rights to create synergy and ensure funding continuity of social cohesion and inclusion activities.
4. The Ministry of Human Rights, in collaboration with the Planning Commission, could use these data insights to inform national policy on inclusion, protection, and social cohesion.
5. Institutionalise training modules, learning products, and communication materials developed by Aawaz II Programme into government training institutes.
6. Strengthen partnerships between provincial human rights departments, local governments, and CSOs to continue advocacy, awareness, and service linkage activities.

6 Conclusion: Transitioning Aawaz II Programme to Sustainable Public Ownership

As the UK FCDO's flagship social inclusion and protection programme in Pakistan, Aawaz II Programme will conclude in March 2027, having delivered demonstrable progress in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and ICT. The programme has strengthened community-led problem solving, expanded access to grievance redress and referral pathways, advanced gender equality and minority inclusion, and enhanced collaboration between citizens and district authorities. Crucially, it built local capacity and institutional linkages designed to endure beyond external funding.

Recognising that sustainability must be system-led, a structured transition process was initiated through three provincial workshops and culminated in a National Learning Event (NLE). The NLE brought together federal and provincial governments, civil society, academia, and development partners to validate a practical sustainability roadmap. The focus shifted from programme achievements to institutional absorption, budget anchoring, and policy alignment.

Stakeholders endorsed a set of actionable recommendations across four pillars:

1. **Policy Advocacy** – Integration of Aawaz II Programme social protection and inclusion mechanisms within federal and provincial policy frameworks, including alignment with Pillar 5 (Equity and Empowerment) of URAAN Pakistan.
2. **Institutional Strengthening** – Embedding Aawaz II Programme community forums, Aagahi Centres, and referral mechanisms within district social welfare, human rights, and local government structures.
3. **Evidence and Knowledge Transfer** – Formal handover of the Aawaz II Programme dashboard and research repository to a credible national institution to sustain data-driven policy engagement.
4. **Community Engagement**– Sustaining trained volunteers and community leaders through integration into district-level committees and protection systems.

The agreed **three-phase Transition Plan** provides a sequenced pathway to March 2027:

- **Phase I – Consolidation (Jan–Jun 2026):** Joint federal-provincial reviews to identify transition-ready interventions and initiate policy integration dialogues.
- **Phase II – Transition (Jul 2026–Jan 2027):** Gradual transfer of operational responsibilities to provincial departments, accompanied by targeted capacity building and data transfer.
- **Phase III – Handover and Institutionalisation (Mar 2027):** Formal government notifications, budgetary inclusion of selected interventions, dashboard transfer, and establishment of monitoring mechanisms within provincial systems.

The Ministry of Human Rights will coordinate the overall transition framework to ensure coherence with national rights and protection policies. Provincial departments will assume operational ownership of selected interventions, supported by clear administrative and budgetary commitments.

The NLE process has therefore shifted Aawaz II Programme from a donor-funded programme to a structured public systems reform effort. Sustainability will be measured

not only by continued service delivery, but by policy integration, institutional absorption, budget allocation, and functioning monitoring mechanisms within government.

Aawaz II Programme legacy lies in demonstrating that community-driven inclusion and protection models can be institutionalised within state systems. With coordinated transition planning and government ownership, the programme's gains on gender equality, child protection, minority rights, and safe digital environments are positioned to continue delivering impact well beyond March 2027.











AAWAZ II
PROGRAMME NLE HIGHLIGHTS














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