

Aawaz II

Inclusion, Accountability, Reducing Exploitation

Accelerating Social Change & Inclusion

A Case for Youth Engagement

Case Study

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Acronyms

AAC	Aawaz Aagahi Centre
ACA	Aawaz Change Agent
ADP	Annual Development Program
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
CFC	Citizen Facilitation Centre
CNIC	Computerised National Identity Card
CP&WB	Child Protection & Welfare Bureau
CPU	Child Protection Unit
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DF	District Forum
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Baseline Survey
KII	Key Informant Interview
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LG	Local Government
MIS	Management Information System
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NYDF	National Youth Development Framework
PF	Provincial Social Cohesion and Inclusion Forums
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
P&D	Planning & Development
RM	Religious Minority
RP	Resource Person
SAP	Social Action Project
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures VF Village Forum
GF	General Forum

Executive Summary

Introduction

Pakistan's demographic profile, with nearly two-thirds of its population under thirty years of age, offers a critical opportunity to strengthen inclusive governance and social change. Despite being central to Pakistan's demographic and social fabric, young people, particularly young women, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and minority youth, remain largely excluded from formal decision-making and community governance structures. Weak institutional pathways, limited access to services, and persistent social norms around child marriage, gender-based violence (GBV) and exclusion, continue to constrain meaningful youth participation. Aawaz II, funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and implemented by the British Council in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), seeks to reshape this landscape by empowering youth, alongside women and other vulnerable groups, to become active agents of social change at the community level.

This in-depth case study examines the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model, assesses its outcomes and explores its relevance for long-term integration into government systems. The model is embedded within a multi-tiered governance structure comprising Village Forums (VFs), Aawaz Aagahi Centres (AACs) and District Forums (DFs). Trained youth volunteers, Aawaz Change Agents (ACAs), operate within these structures as community facilitators and mobilisers. Through awareness-raising, referrals, mediation and Social Action Projects (SAPs), they address harmful social norms around child marriage, GBV, disability inclusion and interfaith harmony, following a sequence of training, mobilisation, social action plans (SAPs), community dialogue and referrals ultimately contributing to community-level change.

This case study goes beyond documenting activities to assess whether the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model has achieved its core objectives in practice, namely, strengthening youth leadership, enabling behaviour change, addressing discriminatory norms and practices and fostering social inclusion. The analysis is guided by social capital and empowerment theories, which help explain not only what has changed under the model, but how and why these changes have occurred and what this means for long-term institutionalisation.

Key Findings

Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Interviews across five districts of Punjab and KP indicate consistent positive outcomes.

- Youth-led social actions demonstrated tangible social norm shifts, including preventing child marriages, improved understanding of GBV, strengthened interfaith relations, and increased inclusion of marginalised groups. Between May 2020 and December 2025, the youth led change related actions reached over 86,000 people, reflecting strong community acceptance and outreach.
- ACAs reported substantial gains in leadership, confidence and communication skills, enabling constructive engagement with elders, religious leaders and vulnerable groups. These gains were consistently linked to structured training, mentoring and formal roles provided through Aawaz II.
- Communities increasingly recognised ACAs as credible and trusted actors, gaining legitimacy among elders and local authorities. This legitimacy was reinforced through repeated engagement, visible problem-solving outcomes and endorsement by respected community and religious figures.
- Critical connective pathways were also established between communities and state institutions. Although direct engagement between youth and government officials remains inconsistent, ACAs played a pivotal role in guiding community members, especially vulnerable groups, and facilitating access to essential

services such as Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) registration and enrolment in the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

Challenges

Despite this progress, significant challenges persist, including a lack of formal recognition for youth roles, resource limitations and cultural resistance, particularly concerning discussions of GBV and the inclusion of transgender persons. However, these barriers were actively mitigated through the sustained support of AACs and VF members, strategic collaboration with community elders, including religious leaders and the legitimacy provided by structured community platforms. These findings demonstrate that youth can function as credible and effective civic actors when provided with structured roles, institutional linkages and sustained support. This has important implications for government systems seeking low-cost, community-embedded approaches to promoting inclusive participation, social change and access to services.

Outcomes

Measured against the case study's objectives, the evidence indicates that the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model largely succeeded in positioning youth as leaders, mobilisers and community change agents. The pattern of change observed in this case study aligns closely with social capital and empowerment frameworks. Structured participation enabled ACAs to build confidence and legitimacy (psychological empowerment), while sustained engagement across community, religious and institutional spaces strengthened bridging and linking social capital, enabling youth to influence sensitive social norms, particularly around child marriage, GBV awareness and interfaith relations. Together, these dynamics explain why youth engagement under Aawaz II moved beyond awareness-raising to influence both community norms and citizen-state interactions, while also clarifying why gains remain fragile in the absence of stronger

institutional recognition and protection, particularly for PWDs and transgender persons. Gaps in the consistency of institutional engagement, highlights where community-led change requires stronger formal anchoring to be sustained and scaled.

Recommendations

The Aawaz II Youth Engagement model aligns closely with existing provincial and district governance systems, with its multi-tiered design reflecting administrative structures, its training modules complementing government capacity-building efforts and its referral mechanisms addressing key service delivery gaps. Building on these strengths, the recommendations provided translate evidence from this case study into practical pathways for government uptake that focus on reinforcing existing systems rather than creating parallel ones.

1. An important step for uptake is the formal recognition of youth civic roles. Positioning youth not only as beneficiaries of youth programmes but as recognised civic actors within community governance structures would strengthen legitimacy, improve consistency and create clearer institutional space for sustained youth participation. This requires integrating ACAs and Youth Mobilisers into existing 'Community and Social Mobiliser' roles within Social Welfare departments and embedding them within district-level committees on child protection, interfaith harmony and human rights.
2. Strengthening referral and coordination mechanisms that link communities to documentation, social protection and protection services is essential to sustaining and scaling the gains of the Aawaz II model. This requires the establishment of standardised, cross-departmental referral protocols integrated into district Social Welfare, Child Protection & Welfare Bureau (CP&WB), Local Government (LG) and police systems. Designating a Referral Coordination Officer within the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC), supported by a mobile-based referral logging system

operated by ACAs and Youth Mobilisers, would improve case tracking and follow-up. Institutionalising monthly multi-institution outreach camps (NADRA, BISP, Social Welfare, CP&WB), with ACAs supporting community mobilisation and pre-registration, would further ensure targeted access for marginalised groups.

3. Sustaining these approaches will require stronger policy alignment at both provincial and national levels. Revisions to the Punjab Youth Policy (2012) and KP Youth Policy (2016) should formally recognise youth volunteers and community-level youth engagement structures, including ACA and Youth Mobiliser roles, as part of provincial civic participation and social cohesion strategies. Similarly, updating the National Youth Development Framework (2019) to recognise structured, community-embedded youth governance models would help shift the focus of youth engagement from short-term volunteerism to sustained civic action.
4. Embedding youth engagement within monitoring and evidence systems is critical to sustaining these approaches. Integrating Aawaz II indicators, such as the number of youth-led community actions, referrals facilitated and prevention of child marriage and GBV, into departmental Management Information Systems (MIS) of Social Welfare, LG and Youth Affairs departments would enhance accountability and institutional learning. This should be complemented by targeted technical assistance to departments with weaker MIS capacity, supported by the Planning & Development departments and development partners, to ensure that youth engagement models demonstrated under Aawaz II are progressively institutionalised.

1. Introduction

With nearly two-thirds of its population below the age of thirty years, Pakistan's demographic profile presents a significant opportunity for inclusive governance and social transformation.¹ However, structural barriers, including unequal access to education and employment and limited institutional mechanisms for meaningful youth engagement, continue to impede young people's participation in governance processes. These constraints disproportionately affect young women and marginalised youth, reinforcing their exclusion from community level decision-making and leadership roles. The Aawaz II programme, implemented by the British Council in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), seeks to reshape this landscape by, particularly young women, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and other vulnerable groups, to become agents of social change at the community-level.²

This case study examines how the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model operationalises youth participation through structured community platforms and youth-led Social Action Projects (SAPs). It assesses the model's effectiveness in strengthening youth leadership, facilitating intergenerational and interfaith dialogue, and contributing to shifts in harmful social norms related to child marriage (CM), gender-based violence (GBV) and social exclusion. In addition, the case study considers the relevance of the Aawaz II model for integration into provincial and local government (LG) systems, drawing lessons for institutionalisation of inclusive youth engagement pathways in governance frameworks.

¹ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023). Pakistan Population and Housing Census 2023: Summary Results.
Govt. of Pakistan. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2023). State of World Population 2023. UNFPA

² Funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

1.1 Objectives, Approach and Methodology

Objectives

This case study examines how the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model enables youth to contribute to social norm change, community resilience and inclusive governance in Punjab and KP. The key objectives of the case study are to:

- Analyse how Aawaz II equips and positions youth as leaders, mobilisers and change agents within community governance structures, using a gender-responsive and intersectional lens.
- Examine the contribution of Aawaz II youth-led initiatives and analyse how these contributions build and utilise social capital (both bonding and bridging) to challenge harmful social norms and foster inclusion.
- Identify the factors shaping meaningful youth engagement in community-level governance and examine strategies, patterns of effectiveness, scalability, sustainability, and integration within provincial and LG systems.

1.2 Approach and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design, examining the experiences of selected Aawaz Change Agents (ACAs) as individual cases embedded within the wider Aawaz II Youth Engagement programme. Drawing on Robert K. Yin's multiple case methodology³ and Robert E. Stake's collective case study logic,⁴ the study analyses youth empowerment across village, district and provincial levels to identify common patterns, variations and enabling conditions. The methodology combines targeted desk review with qualitative data collection to examine empowerment pathways, gender and inclusion dynamics, SAP implementation and linkages with local governance and service delivery systems.

A structured desk review was conducted to establish the conceptual, policy and programmatic context of the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model. Sources reviewed included:

- Aawaz II programme documents, training materials, progress reports, Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Baseline Survey (2024) and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) records.
- National and provincial youth development frameworks.
- Studies on youth participation, civic engagement and social norm change in South Asia, especially Pakistan.

Primary qualitative data was gathered in Khanewal, Okara, Sahiwal, Abbottabad and Malakand through six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with ACAs, beneficiaries and community members, totalling 65 individuals (32 females, 32 males and 1 transgender person); and six Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with ACAs, Village Forum (VF) and District Forum (DF) members, Aawaz Aagahi Centre (AAC) staff and LG officials. Data collection focused on tracing ACA trajectories, SAP design and implementation and their engagement with community and institutional actors.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The Aawaz II Youth Engagement model is analysed through two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory, which explain how youth-led engagement contributes to social norm change, community cohesion and sustained participation in local governance. These frameworks inform the analysis of findings in this section by demonstrating how youth engagement functions through both community relationships and formal governance structures.

(i) Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, particularly as articulated by Robert Putnam, emphasises the role of networks, trust and norms of reciprocity in

enabling collective action.³ Aawaz II applies these principles through structured community and district platforms that enable youth to build both 'bonding capital' (within peer groups) and 'bridging capital' (across gender, faith and socio-economic divides). In this case study, the framework is used to interpret how ACA activities strengthen social cohesion and inter-group cooperation.

Recent literature on governance and civic participation reinforces the relevance of social capital theory for youth engagement in contexts characterised by low institutional trust and limited civic space. Studies show that youth-led initiatives are particularly effective in building 'bridging social capital' by connecting vulnerable groups with community leaders and public institutions, thereby strengthening trust, reciprocity and collective problem-solving.⁴ In settings such as Pakistan, where formal pathways for youth participation in governance remain constrained, these bridging functions are critical for enhancing social cohesion and improving citizen-state engagement, providing an important theoretical lens for understanding the outcomes observed under the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model.⁵

(ii) Empowerment Theory

Zimmerman's empowerment theory provides a complementary analytical lens for examining how youth participation in Aawaz II translates into agency and influence at multiple levels.⁶ In this case study, empowerment is analysed across individual, organisational and community levels.

At the individual level, empowerment is reflected in increased confidence, skills and self-efficacy, developed through ACA training. Organisational empowerment is evident in the assignment of meaningful roles within structured community and early response

3 Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster

4 Woolcock, Michael and Deepa Narayan. "Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research and Policy." *World Bank Research Observer* 15, no. 2 (2000): 225–249

5 Ibid at 15

6 Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). *Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis*

forums. At the community level, empowerment is observed through youth-led collective social action, referrals and engagement in local problem-solving. This framework is used to analyse how ACAs transition from programme participants to community actors capable of influencing local practices and institutions.

Contemporary scholarship on empowerment further underscores that participation alone does not automatically translate into agency or influence. Empowerment is shaped by the availability of enabling structures, recognition and supportive institutional environments.⁷ For young people, particularly young women, PWDs and transgender persons, empowerment processes are highly contingent on whether civic roles are legitimised and protected within formal systems. This perspective is especially relevant to the Aawaz II experience, where the provision of structured roles, mentoring and community platforms helped transform individual confidence into collective action, while also revealing the limits of empowerment in the absence of consistent institutional backing.

1.4 Challenges and Limitations of the Study

The study acknowledges limitations related to time, geographic scope and sample size and findings from primary data should, therefore, be interpreted as illustrative rather than exhaustive. Reliance on self-reported data introduces potential recall and attribution bias. However, triangulation across multiple data sources and respondent groups enhances the credibility and interpretive value of the findings. The study also recognises that group dynamics within FGDs, particularly entrenched gender and age hierarchies and differential confidence levels, may have shaped the extent to which respondents felt able to speak openly. In addition, the positionality of field facilitators, including their perceived authority and relative outsider status, may have influenced disclosure among some participants. These factors can particularly affect young women,

7 Yin, R. K. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications

persons with disabilities (PWDs) and minority youth, introducing social desirability bias and the potential suppression of participant perspectives. Mitigation measures included the use of trained facilitators, youth-only and female-only FGDs where appropriate and systematic triangulation across respondent categories.



2.Context and Problem Statement

With nearly 29% of the population between the ages of 15 and 29 years, Pakistan's demographic transition presents both an opportunity and a challenge.⁸ Despite their demographic significance, youth remain underrepresented in formal decision-making processes and community institutions. The Human Development Report (2022) highlights persistently low youth participation in civic, political and community initiatives,⁶ reflecting a gap between demographic potential and institutional inclusion. This trend is echoed in the Aawaz II KAP Baseline Survey, where fewer than 10% of young respondents reported knowledge of protection services or confidence in engaging state institutions. Such exclusion weakens social cohesion and increases youth vulnerability to marginalisation, misinformation and localised conflict.⁹

In Punjab and KP, several youth-related structures such as District Youth Committees, LG youth representatives and programmes under provincial Youth Affairs departments, exist at community and LG levels. These mechanisms are, however, often under-resourced, limited in outreach and weakly coordinated with district administrations. Most initiatives prioritise skills development, sports and short-term participation over civic engagement and social inclusion. In many rural and peri-urban settings, decision-making remains dominated by older male elites, leaving few structured spaces for sustained youth leadership or dialogue. As a result, youth engagement is mostly symbolic, with particularly limited pathways for young women, PWDs and minority youth to exercise meaningful leadership or influence.

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (2022). Pakistan National Human Development Report: Unleashing the Potential of a Young Pakistan. UNDP

⁹ Aawaz II Programme (2024). Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Baseline Survey. British Council

2.1 Government Youth Empowerment Model in Pakistan

Pakistan's youth empowerment framework, with strong commitments to inclusion, participation and social cohesion, is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). However, Implementation of these commitments remains inconsistent, with youth engagement largely confined to programme-based initiatives and limited institutionalisation of youth roles within governance, conflict prevention or community dialogue. Inclusion of young women, PWDs and transgender youth remains weakly operationalised, highlighting a persistent gap between policy intent and operational practice.

2.2 National and Provincial Policy Frameworks

Youth empowerment in Pakistan is guided by the National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) (2019) and provincial youth policies of Punjab and KP, formulated after adoption of the 18th Constitutional Amendment. NYDF structures youth priorities around the '3 Es' of Education, Employment and Engagement, while acknowledging the role of youth in broader governance and development objectives.¹⁰

The Punjab Youth Policy (2012) emphasises education, skills development, entrepreneurship, sports and volunteerism, with stated commitments to participation and cohesion.¹¹ The KP Youth Policy (2016) has a comparatively broader conceptual framework and explicitly links youth engagement with peacebuilding, social cohesion and democratic participation. It envisages youth councils, volunteer platforms and youth roles within local bodies, positioning young

¹⁰ Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, National Youth Development Framework (NYDF) (Islamabad, 2019)

¹¹ Government of Punjab, Youth Affairs, Sports, Archaeology and Tourism Department, Punjab Youth Policy 2012 (Lahore, 2012)

people as contributors to community stability, tolerance and civic life.¹²

2.3 Key Focus Areas and Interventions

Government-led youth empowerment initiatives at federal and provincial levels primarily focus on enhancing employability, promoting entrepreneurship and skills development and facilitating youth participation in education and sports. These interventions position youth mainly as beneficiaries of service delivery programmes or cash grants, rather than effective actors within community governance or service delivery systems.

At the federal level, youth empowerment is largely channelled through the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, which focuses on business and agricultural loans, skills development, entrepreneurship and digital access to opportunities through the Digital Youth Hub.¹³ Provincial youth empowerment initiatives broadly mirror this economic and service-oriented focus. In Punjab, youth-related programming led by the Youth Affairs & Sports Department includes skills development and entrepreneurship support initiatives, province-wide sports competitions and festivals and youth volunteer mobilisation for public awareness and social campaigns.¹⁴ In KP, youth empowerment initiatives led by the Sports & Youth Affairs Department and the Directorate of Youth Affairs also focus on skills training, internships, sports development and volunteerism, complemented by youth councils and engagement platforms established under the KP Youth Policy framework.

While national and provincial policies reference youth roles in social cohesion, peacebuilding and inclusion, these dimensions are less

¹² Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sports, Tourism, Culture, Archaeology, Museums and Youth Affairs Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Youth Policy 2016 (Peshawar, 2016)

¹³ Government of Pakistan, Prime Minister's Office. Prime Minister's Youth Programme: Overview. Islamabad, 2023. <https://pmyp.gov.pk>.

¹⁴ Government of Punjab, Youth Affairs and Sports Department, Annual Performance Report (Lahore: Government of Punjab, various years)

consistently reflected in programme design, with youth engagement related to tolerance, interfaith harmony and conflict prevention largely remaining conceptual. Similarly, youth-focused interventions offer limited operational pathways for the meaningful participation of vulnerable youth and rarely position youth as facilitators of dialogue or mediators of local tensions.¹⁵ The absence of clear budgets, implementation responsibilities and monitoring frameworks further constrains effectiveness and sustainability of youth engagement initiatives.



¹⁵ Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), A Study of Youth Policies in Pakistan (Islamabad: PILDAT, 2020)

3.Aawaz II Youth Engagement Model

Against this backdrop, the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model offers a complementary approach by positioning young people not only as beneficiaries of development programmes but also as active civic actors capable of facilitating dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, supporting community governance and connecting citizens with public institutions. The model is grounded in evidence that young people are uniquely positioned to influence social norms, strengthen social cohesion and support local governance. Lessons from the Aawaz I programme reveal that youth volunteers are effective mobilisers, regularly identifying early signs of GBV and child marriage and demonstrating a greater willingness than community elders to engage across gender, religious and social divides.¹⁶

Global research further underscores youth potential in peacebuilding and behaviour change, highlighting openness to new ideas, strong peer influence and ability to strengthen cross-community trust.¹⁷ National socio-economic trends also support the need for a structured youth engagement model, with Pakistan facing persistent youth unemployment (above 12%), high youth 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) rates, especially among young women and low trust in state institutions.¹⁸

3.1 Institutional Architecture

The Aawaz II Youth Engagement model is anchored in a multi-tiered community governance structure that embeds youth participation within established community forums and district coordination

¹⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Department for International Development (DFID) (2018). Aawaz Programme: Aawaz I Endline Evaluation. Government of the United Kingdom

¹⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020). Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice. OECD Publishing

¹⁸ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023). Labour Force Survey 2022–23. Government of Pakistan.

mechanisms. The programme operates in 37 districts (23 in Punjab and 14 in KP), providing an extensive platform for youth-led engagement and social norm change.

At the community level, 1,116 VFs with 27,005 members serve as inclusive platforms that bring together youth, women, PWDs, religious minorities, elders and community leaders. VFs function as primary spaces for dialogue, identification of community priorities and early monitoring of GBV, child marriage, exclusion and community tensions. These forums support the trained ACAs in implementing small-scale social change projects, facilitate community discussions, mobilise peers and meet duty bearers. During the programme duration, the 21,182 ACAs (over 50% women and 573 transgender persons), have been trained.

AACs (370) operate as the programme's hub for information, referral and community support. These centres provide safe and accessible spaces for reporting concerns, facilitating referrals and linking community initiatives with protection and service delivery mechanisms. For ACAs, AACs function as a learning and coordination centre offering regular feedback, mentoring and technical support.

Thirty-seven District Forums (DFs), with 893 members, provide an institutional linkage between community platforms and district and LG administrations. DFs include representatives from district line departments,¹⁹ VFs and youth representatives and review escalated cases, provide referrals, monitor district-wide trends and support advocacy on issues emerging from community engagement.

Together, these interconnected structures enable youth to move beyond awareness-raising by linking community mobilisation with referral pathways, institutional engagement and local decision-making processes.

¹⁹ For example, Punjab Human Rights & Minorities Affairs Department (KP's Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Human Rights Department), Social Welfare Departments, District Police Offices, Health Departments, School Education Departments and LG institutions

3.2 Identification, Training and Mobilisation of Youth Volunteers

Youth volunteers form the backbone of the Aawaz II model, with ACAs and AAC Resource Persons (RPs-some of whom are youth) serving as frontline mobilisers, facilitators and community advocates. Volunteers are identified through community nomination processes that prioritise gender balance and the inclusion of PWDs and minority youth, ensuring diverse representation among ACAs. Following selection, ACAs participate in a structured four-day training programme focused on facilitation, leadership, behaviour change, conflict sensitivity, prevention of GBV, child marriage and referral pathways. These trainings equip ACAs to engage effectively across gender, religious and social divides. Specialised modules strengthen their role in raising early warnings if risks are identified and reporting to relevant VF members or community leaders.

This process supports the transition of youth from passive recipients of information into capable community actors able to engage elders, religious leaders and district officials. Mobilisation by ACAs includes awareness campaigns, peer education, community dialogues, referrals, documentation support and the design and implementation of SAPs. Their presence across villages and neighbourhoods makes them critical to the model's ability to reach diverse community groups and sustain behaviour change efforts. Table 1 depicts the sequential pathway through which youth are identified, trained and mobilised as ACAs, leading to community engagement, SAPs and institutional referrals.



Table 1: ACA Training and Mobilisation Pathways	
Inputs (Foundational Stage)	Process + Outcomes
Identification & Selection - Community nomination of youth for training (VFs) - Gender and social inclusion criteria	Design & Implementation of SAPs - Issue identification - SAP planning and execution
Training & Capacity Development - Leadership & facilitation - Inclusion, prevention of child marriage and GBV - Referral pathways	Community Dialogue & Early Response - Awareness sessions - Facilitated dialogue
Mobilisation within Communities - Embedding in VFs - Support from AACs	Referrals & Institutional Linkages - Escalation via AACs & DFs - Referrals to government departments
	Observed Outcomes - Youth leadership - Improved access to services - Shift in social norms

3.3 Youth-led Social Action Projects

SAPs are the primary mechanism through which ACAs apply their training to address locally identified concerns. SAP priorities are identified through consultations with VFs, AAC staff, families, teachers, religious leaders, youth groups and vulnerable individuals, ensuring alignment with community needs and addressing distinct

barriers faced by women, PWDs, transgender persons and minority groups.

Once priorities are set, ACAs design context-specific interventions addressing child marriage, GBV, interfaith harmony, harassment and community safety. Interventions include community dialogues, door-to-door engagement, peer education and referrals, with technical assistance provided by AACs and institutional coordination facilitated through DFs.

These youth-led SAPs reached over 86,381 people during the programme duration, demonstrating both the scale of mobilisation and growing community acceptance of youth-led initiatives²⁰

Table 2: SAP Beneficiaries (May 2020 to Dec 2025)

Total	Male	Female	Religious Minorities	PWDs	Transgender Persons
86,381	41,486	43,765	11,290	2,997	1,130

3.4 Scalability and Government Relevance

The Aawaz II Youth Engagement model aligns closely with provincial and LG systems, offering a practical and scalable framework for institutional adoption. Its multi-tiered structure is designed to mirror existing administrative layers and facilitate structured interaction with government systems, while ACA-led mobilisation, SAP implementation and referral functions address gaps in current youth engagement initiatives that prioritise economic participation over civic participation. Programme experience indicates that ACAs function as a low-cost and effective resource for community mobilisation, early risk identification and facilitation of service access. This positions the model as a practical complement to existing district level systems, with the potential for institutionalisation within the Youth Affairs, Social Welfare and LG departments²⁰

²⁰ Aawaz II Programme (2025). Annual Progress Report: July 2024 - March 2025. British Council and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

seeking scalable mechanisms to promote inclusive participation, social change and community resilience.²¹



²¹ Social Welfare & Baitul Maal Department; Local Government & Community Development Department in Punjab. Zakat, Ushr, Social Welfare, Special Education & Women Empowerment Department and Local Government, Elections & Rural Development Department in KP.

4. Key Findings

The findings from FGDs and KIIs across Punjab and KP reveal a consistent pattern of youth-led change, enhanced community trust, reduced harmful practices and a strengthening of social cohesion driven by the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model. The findings also reflect the model's intended ay of change, beginning with ACA training, followed by youth mobilisation and SAP implementation, which in turn create opportunities for community dialogue, referrals and shifts in social norms. The findings are interpreted through the complementary lenses of Social Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory, which provide the analytical framework for understanding the pathways through which change occurred.

4.1 Enhanced Youth Leadership, Confidence and Communication Skills

ACAs consistently reported increased confidence, communication skills and leadership capacity following Aawaz II training. These changes reflect individual-level empowerment, enabling youth to engage community elders, present evidence-based arguments and participate in forums previously dominated by older men. These gains were, however, not uniform across groups. Young women and minority youth described greater shifts in confidence as they participated in spaces from which they were historically excluded.

Training also shifted ACAs' attitudes on gender equality and inclusion, strengthening their credibility as mobilisers and reinforcing the values they promote within their communities. In districts such as Sahiwal and Malakand, ACAs, especially young women and minority youth, described leading dialogues on sensitive issues like child marriage and GBV, using facilitation techniques acquired during training. These changes demonstrate how the programme's capacity building components translate into agency, enabling ACAs not only to participate in community spaces but also to challenge role-based inequities by modelling inclusive norms and guiding collective problem-solving.

These findings indicate that the programme succeeded in positioning youth as credible leaders and change agents within community governance structures. The reported gains in confidence, communication and facilitation skills demonstrate clear progress across the intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural dimensions of psychological empowerment, showing that post-training trajectories moved beyond participation toward recognised leadership roles in community forums.

4.2 Changing Social Norms on Child marriage, GBV and Social Inclusion

Secondary literature on social norm change and civic engagement consistently highlights that behaviour change initiatives are more effective and sustainable when they are inclusive and led by actors who are closely embedded within the communities they seek to influence.²² Youth are particularly well positioned in this regard as they often occupy intermediary social positions and are able to engage both peers and elders, while being less embedded in entrenched power hierarchies.²³ In contexts such as Pakistan, where formal civic participation by vulnerable groups remains limited, youth-led approaches can help broaden participation, challenge exclusionary norms and strengthen trust between citizens and community institutions.²⁴ This underscores the importance of positioning youth not merely as beneficiaries of awareness initiatives but as active facilitators of dialogue, norm negotiation and collective problem-solving.

Across all five districts, youth-led mobilisation contributed to observable shifts in community attitudes on child marriage, GBV and inclusion. ACAs used evidence-based messaging, legal knowledge and alliances with religious leaders to influence household decision-

making and challenge discriminatory norms. These changes illustrate how bridging social capital enabled youth to engage groups traditionally resistant to behaviour change, while empowerment processes strengthened their ability to intervene in sensitive situations. Young women and religious minority ACAs reported particularly strong gains, noting that their credibility increased as communities saw the results of their actions.

Despite these advances, stigma toward transgender persons remains deeply entrenched and ACAs noted that inclusion-related activities continue to be the most challenging area of norm change. This limitation reflects not only attitudinal resistance at the community level but also broader structural and institutional constraints, including weak policy operationalisation, limited-service readiness for transgender inclusion and the absence of consistent protective mandates for youth engaging on highly sensitive identity-based issues. As a result, while bridging social capital enabled incremental shifts in household and neighbourhood attitudes, the experience suggests that sustained progress on transgender inclusion will require stronger institutional reinforcement alongside community-level mobilisation.

Overall, the evidence reports that youth-led initiatives made substantive progress toward influencing behaviour change and social inclusion, particularly on child marriage, GBV awareness and interfaith relations. These outcomes reflect the effective use of both bonding and bridging social capital as ACAs mobilised peer networks while also engaging elders and religious leaders to challenge harmful norms. At the same time, the persistence of stigma around transgender inclusion highlights the limits of social capital alone in contexts where institutional reinforcement remains weak.

²² UNDP. Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2019

²³ Ibid at 15

²⁴ UNDP. Human Development Report 2022: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2022



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- In Khanewal, a Christian female ACA explained that legal knowledge and facilitation skills strengthened her credibility when addressing child marriage and GBV despite facing initial resistance as a woman and that too from a religious minority.
- In Malakand, ACAs reported that elders now listen to them because they present facts rather than opinions.

“Before the training, we could not speak in front of elders. Now we guide youth and families with confidence because we know what to say and how to say it. Even as girls, they listen to us.”

- ACA, Khanewal, Female, Christian, Age: 21



4.3 Improved Social Harmony and Interfaith Relations

ACAs strengthened relations between Muslim and Christian communities by facilitating dialogues, resolving minor disputes and promoting regular interaction. Their neutrality and consistent engagement made youth-led spaces more approachable for groups who often hesitate to participate in traditional forums, such as Christian households and young women, allowing them to voice concerns more openly. While stigma against religious minorities and uneven power relations persist, youth-led initiatives helped reduce stereotyping and model more respectful cross-community engagement.

These experiences show that youth engagement contributed meaningfully to strengthening social cohesion, especially by reducing mistrust and increasing interaction across faith lines. In doing so, the programme advanced its objective of using youth-led action to foster social harmony, even though deeper structural inequalities between majority and minority groups continue to shape the limits of this progress.

4.4 Increased Community Trust and Legitimacy of Youth Leaders

A consistent pattern across districts is the growing legitimacy of ACAs as credible actors in community problem-solving. Through repeated engagement, respectful conduct and visible results, particularly around preventing child marriage, supporting documentation and mediating tensions, youth shifted community perceptions from initial scepticism to acceptance. Elders who once viewed ACAs as inexperienced increasingly consulted them on issues involving young people or emerging disputes. Female ACAs reported greater acceptance over time, though they continue to navigate gendered constraints. This rise in trust demonstrates how structured roles, training and regular interaction enabled ACAs to transition from peripheral actors to recognised contributors within local decision-making spaces.

The growing acceptance of ACAs illustrates that one of the programme's key enabling conditions for meaningful youth engagement, 'community trust,' was established in practice. Legitimacy was built not through formal authority but through consistent problem-solving and visible results, confirming that trust functions as a critical pathway for youth influence in conservative community governance settings.

4.5 Youth-led SAPs and Community Engagement

SAPs functioned as the primary mechanism through which ACAs translated training into actionable community change. Through SAP implementation, the model's intended sequence becomes visible; training equips ACAs with skills, mobilisation activates them within communities and SAPs create systematic opportunities for dialogue, problem-solving and referrals that contribute to norm change.

In all districts, ACAs demonstrated adaptive leadership, identifying locally relevant issues, mobilising diverse groups and applying training-based approaches to address concerns such as child marriage, GBV, bullying, documentation barriers and interfaith tensions. SAPs also enhanced youth visibility and reinforced community trust in their problem-solving role. Engagement was, however, not uniform across groups. ACAs noted that addressing sensitive issues, particularly transgender inclusion and GBV, required sustained effort due to deeply embedded stigma. Despite such challenges, SAPs consistently generated small but meaningful shifts in attitudes and behaviour, illustrating how youth-led action functioned as both a learning process and a vehicle for norm change.

In practice, SAPs emerged as one of the most effective mechanisms for translating youth engagement into tangible outcomes, offering clear lessons on what enables community-level change; locally grounded issue selection, alliance-building with elders and service providers and sustained follow-up through community platforms. These patterns confirm that where these conditions are present, youth-led action can move beyond awareness-raising to produce observable norm shifts.



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- In Sahiwal, ACAs visited mosques and churches to engage imams and priests.
- In Okara, improved day-to-day relations in mixed-faith neighbourhoods were reported, attributing this to ACA-led awareness sessions and dispute resolution support.
- In Khanewal, religious leaders formally requested ACAs to co-facilitate awareness sessions on child marriage after observing their effectiveness in stopping early marriages.
- In Okara, families who initially discouraged girls from participating later encouraged them to attend VF meetings after witnessing their role in resolving documentation and identification issues.
- In Sahiwal, elders increasingly relied on ACAs to intervene in youth disputes, noting that their messages “resonate more effectively with the boys of the community.”
- Female ACAs in Malakand reported enhanced acceptance over time, with community members requesting their participation in discussions involving adolescent girls.

“This was the first time Muslim clerics came to the church for Christmas. The youth convinced both sides that it was for peace, and everyone welcomed it.”

- ACA, Sahiwal, Female, Christian, Age 21.



4.6 Linkages with Government Institutions

Engagement under the Aawaz II programme created pathways for youth to support communities in accessing government services. While direct engagement with government authorities remained limited, ACAs played a key role in guiding community members through administrative processes and addressing information gaps and lack of confidence in approaching state institutions. These efforts reflect early forms of linking social capital, with youth acting as connectors between communities and service providers.

District patterns varied with districts such as Okara and Abbottabad showing greater openness to ACA involvement, while Khanewal and Malakand, exhibited more traditional hierarchies that constrained direct youth-institution engagement. Overall, these experiences indicate emerging, though uneven, youth empowerment at organisational and community levels.

These findings note that while youth engagement with government institutions under Aawaz II remains uneven, the programme has made meaningful progress toward strengthening community-state linkages. The experience of ACAs as intermediaries demonstrates the emerging value of linking social capital in low-trust governance environments. At the same time, these findings reflect gaps in existing youth frameworks in Punjab and KP, where engagement remains oriented toward employability and sports, with limited institutional pathways for sustained civic participation. The Aawaz II model illustrates how trained youth volunteers can function as a low-cost, locally embedded resource to complement the work of Youth Affairs, Social Welfare and LG departments, offering a practical pathway for strengthening youth civic participation without creating parallel structures, provided clearer mandates and formal recognition mechanisms are in place.

4.7 Challenges Faced by Youth Change Agents

Despite successes, ACAs encountered structural and social

constraints that shaped the extent of their influence. Early resistance from elders, gendered expectations and social hierarchies often limited the space ACAs could initially occupy, particularly on sensitive issues such as GBV and transgender inclusion. Over time, however, continuous support from AACs and DFs, collaboration with religious leaders and repeated community engagement helped youth overcome many of these barriers.

Key Constraints:

1. Resistance from elders who questioned youth credibility in addressing child marriage, GBV and community disputes.
2. Gendered mobility and participation constraints, particularly affecting young women in districts such as Abbottabad and Malakand.
3. Limited logistical support, especially transport, which reduced the frequency of follow-ups and outreach activities.
4. Lack of formal identification, which weakened ACAs' authority during interactions with external institutions.
5. Difficulty addressing sensitive topics, with stigma limiting community openness to discussions on GBV and transgender inclusion.
6. Unequal participation dynamics in group settings, where more vocal community members dominated discussions, reducing the space for youth to contribute fully.

The constraints documented above clarify why youth engagement outcomes have been uneven across contexts. Gendered mobility restrictions, social resistance to discussions of GBV and stigma surrounding transgender inclusion, highlighted the gendered nature of both opportunity and risk in youth activism. These findings underline that community-based gains in youth engagement can only be sustained and scaled if they are anchored within stronger institutional frameworks that provide protection, legitimacy and resources.

4.8 From Youth Engagement to Systemic Change: Linking Findings to Theory

The findings of this case study gain greater analytical clarity when viewed through the combined lenses of social capital and empowerment, which help explain not only what has changed under the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model, but how and why these changes have occurred. Together, these frameworks demonstrate the pathways through which youth engagement has contributed to social cohesion, norm change and strengthened citizen-state linkages.

From a social capital perspective, evidence shows that Aawaz II enabled young people to build both bonding and, more importantly, bridging capital across age, gender, religious and institutional divides. Through sustained engagement in VFs, AACs and DFs, ACAs helped establish trust, reciprocity and cooperation; key conditions for collective action. By supporting service access and navigating bureaucratic processes with marginalised groups, youth also assumed an intermediary role in the citizen-state relationship, highlighting the importance of linking social capital in low-trust governance contexts.²⁵

From an empowerment perspective, youth engagement under Aawaz II progressed across multiple levels. At the individual level, ACAs reported increased confidence, communication skills and self-efficacy, key elements of psychological empowerment. At the organisational level, empowerment was reinforced through the allocation of meaningful roles within recognised community platforms. At the community level, collective action through SAPs, mediation and referrals produced tangible outcomes in areas such as child marriage prevention, GBV awareness and interfaith relations. Gender norms, stigma and uneven institutional openness shaped who could participate and how safely, underscoring that empowerment

depends on enabling environments, not effort alone.²⁶

Overall, the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model operates through a reinforcing pathway. Structured participation builds empowerment; empowerment enables collective action; collective action generates social capital; and social capital strengthens trust, inclusion and citizen-state linkages. This pathway explains why youth engagement under Aawaz II moved beyond awareness-raising to influence both community norms and institutional interfaces and provides the analytical bridge to the recommendations that follow on formal recognition of youth civic roles, embedding youth within recognised platforms and strengthening coordination mechanisms that support inclusive participation.



²⁵ Aawaz II Programme (2024). Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Baseline Survey. British Council

²⁶ Aawaz II Programme (2024). Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Baseline Survey. British Council



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- In Sahiwal, an ACA-led SAP on child marriage prevention brought together parents, teachers and religious leaders, resulting in the postponement of an underage marriage after youth facilitated a dialogue on legal age and health risks.
- In Abbottabad, ACAs organised door-to-door sessions to help families navigate civic and special documentation challenges, enabling several PWDs to access registration services through AAC referral support.
- In Malakand, ACAs addressed peer bullying and exclusion by convening discussions with teachers and students, which reduced the targeting of a child with a disability.

“At first, the community questioned our ability to handle these matters. Once they saw the results of the SAP, they started seeking our support.”

- ACA, Abbottabad, Female, Muslim, Age 23

- In Abbottabad, ACAs guided families through CNIC and disability certificate procedures, coordinating with AACs to ensure successful registration.
- In Okara, local officials encouraged greater youth representation in school and hospital committees, indicating growing institutional willingness to engage ACAs in community-level governance.

“People come to us first because they don’t know how government offices work. If we explain the steps, they feel confident enough to go there.”

- ACA, Abbottabad, Female, Muslim, Age 21



5. Recommendations for Integration and Institutional Uptake

To sustain and scale the gains of the Aawaz II model, the recommendations presented below are grounded in the evidence on what works, where gaps persist and how government systems can realistically adopt and scale effective practices.

Evidence from Punjab and KP shows that the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model is generating tangible value that provides a strong foundation for institutional uptake. When youth are given structured roles, training and mentoring, they demonstrate increased leadership, credibility and problem-solving capacity, enabling them to engage meaningfully in community dialogue on sensitive issues such as child marriage, GBV and social exclusion. The embedding of youth within recognised community platforms has strengthened legitimacy and reduced resistance from elders while the experience also shows that trained youth volunteers can function effectively as connectors between citizens and the state, supporting access to documentation, social protection services, particularly for marginalised groups.

At the same time, findings also point to persistent constraints that limit the scale and sustainability of youth civic engagement. While youth policies in Punjab and KP prioritise skills development, sports and short-term volunteer initiatives, they provide few institutional pathways for sustained participation in community governance, social cohesion or service access. These challenges are compounded by uneven institutional linkages, often dependent on individual relationships rather than clear mandates and by enduring gendered and social barriers, particularly affecting young women and transgender persons, underscoring the need for stronger institutional backing to support inclusive youth leadership.

The following recommendations, are primarily address to provincial

and federal governments, and to existing and future programmes for integration. They draw directly from the findings of this case study and respond to gaps identified in existing youth engagement frameworks in Punjab and KP. They outline practical pathways for institutional uptake of youth civic engagement models that have already demonstrated effectiveness under Aawaz II.

5.1 Institutional Integration of Youth Structures

A. Formalise volunteer youth mobilisation roles

- Integrate ACAs and Youth Mobilisers into existing ‘Community and Social Mobiliser’ roles within Social Welfare departments to formalise youth civic engagement functions.
- Integrate ACAs and Youth Mobilisers into existing district-level committees (Child Protection, Interfaith Harmony, Human Rights, etc.).
- Issue government-endorsed identity cards to formalise ACA and Youth Mobiliser roles and legitimise engagement with service-delivery institutions²⁷ and community governance forums.

B. Embed Aawaz II forums within existing frameworks

- Convert AACs into local information and referral hubs under district Social Welfare offices or expand the mandate of existing Citizen Facilitation Centres (CFCs) to perform equivalent functions, including community outreach and grievance referral.
- Designate a trained ‘Inclusion and Referral Focal Person’ within each Citizen Facilitation Centre.
- Adopt the VF model and create government-led community forums under LG departments, linking them to district grievance

²⁷ For example, NADRA, Social Welfare departments, BISP, District Police Offices and Women Protection institutions

and service delivery mechanisms.²⁸

- Formalise DFs as ‘District Social Cohesion and Inclusion Committees,’ chaired by the DC and integrated into existing district coordination meetings.

5.2 Referral Pathways and Service Access

These actions build on evidence that youth have functioned effectively as low-cost connectors between communities and service providers.

A. Establish standardised referral mechanisms

- Develop a unified, cross-departmental referral protocol for community-identified cases.
- Integrate referral protocols into district Social Welfare, Child Protection & Welfare Bureau (CP&WB), LG and police systems.
- Assign a Referral Coordination Officer within the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC), responsible for case tracking, follow-up and cross-departmental coordination.

B. Digitise case and referral tracking

- Explore the feasibility of a mobile-based referral logging system operated by ACAs and Youth Mobilisers.
- Generate and share automated referral reports with the DC office and district Social Welfare offices.

C. Institutionalise joint service outreach camps

- Conduct monthly multi-department outreach camps (NADRA, BISP, Social Welfare, CP&WB).

²⁸ Punjab: DC Complaint Cells, CFCs (e-Khidmat Marakaz), District Child Protection Units (CPUs), Meesaq and Tahaffuz Centres; KP: DC Public Grievance Cell, CFCs, District Dispute Resolution Cells, CPUs etc.

- Designate District Social Welfare Officers as convenors.
- Task ACAs and Youth Mobilisers with community mobilisation and pre-registration, ensuring targeted outreach to vulnerable groups.

5.3 Capacity Development

Findings show that training and mentoring were central to youth effectiveness, underscoring the importance of institutionalising these functions within government systems.

A. Adopt ACA training modules

- Adopt Aawaz II youth training modules within provincial government training programmes, covering communication, facilitation, inclusion, conflict resolution, child marriage and GBV prevention, and the Early Warning System and Early Response Mechanism (EWS-ERM).
- Integrate the modules into in-service training of Social Welfare, LG and Youth Affairs staff.

B. Establish a youth social innovation fund

- Establish a Youth Social Innovation Fund within the Annual Development Plans (ADPs) of the Social Welfare or Youth Affairs departments.
- Allocate micro-grants (PKR 50,000–100,000) using the SAP model.
- Prioritise initiatives on child marriage and GBV prevention, inclusion, interfaith harmony, digital safety and local conflict resolution.

5.4 Policy Alignment and Provincial Uptake

To address the current lack of formal recognition of youth civic roles,

policy frameworks must move beyond viewing youth engagement primarily through an employability and sports lens.

A. Update national and provincial youth policies

- Revise Punjab Youth Policy (2012) and KP Youth Policy (2016)²⁹ to formally recognise youth volunteers and community-level youth engagement structures, including ACA and Youth Mobiliser roles, as part of provincial civic participation and social cohesion strategies.
- Update NYDF (2019) to recognise structured, community-embedded youth governance models.

B. Establish provincial oversight mechanisms

- Constitute Provincial Social Cohesion and Inclusion Forums (PFs) under Social Welfare departments, with representation from Youth Affairs, LG, Human Rights, Planning and Development departments and civil society.
- Mandate PFs to set annual provincial priorities and review district-level data.
- Conduct annual evidence-based reviews chaired by Social Welfare departments.

5.5 Sustainable Financing and System Integration

A. Financial integration

- Transition from ADP-funded pilots to regular recurrent budget lines within Social Welfare, Youth Affairs and LG departments.

²⁹ A National Adolescent and Youth Policy is in the final stages, after extensive consultations. The KP Youth Policy 2026 is also being modeled on the same with its 4 E's framework of Education, Employment, Engagement, Environment. Available at <https://kpyouthaffairs.gov.pk/media/6018/draft-of-revised-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-youth-policy-2026.pdf>

B. Budget lines for community engagement

Allocate dedicated budget lines to support:

- a. Youth Mobiliser and community outreach functions
- b. Community and district forums
- c. Referral coordination systems
- d. Micro-grants for youth-led initiatives

5.5 Data, Monitoring and Evidence Integration

Stronger evidence systems will support the institutionalisation of youth engagement models demonstrated under Aawaz II.

A. Integrate Aawaz II indicators in government Management Information Systems (MIS)

- Integrate Key Performance Indicators (e.g. the number of youth-led community actions, referrals facilitated, and child marriage and GBV cases prevented) into departmental Management Information Systems (MIS).

B. Strengthen monitoring systems.

- Provide technical assistance to departments with limited MIS capacity through Planning & Development departments and development partners.

6. Conclusion

Evidence from Punjab and KP reveals that the Aawaz II Youth Engagement model has created meaningful and measurable shifts in community behaviour and social norms. It has enabled young people, especially women, minority youth and PWDs, to emerge as credible leaders through facilitated dialogue, prevented early marriages, supported referrals and improved interfaith relations. These outcomes demonstrate the value of providing youth with defined roles, practical tools and sustained mentoring.

However, the findings also highlight persistent constraints, including resistance from elders, gendered mobility barriers, stigma against PWDs and transgender persons and uneven institutional coordination. These challenges underscore the need for clearer departmental mandates, stronger LG linkages and consistent support to sustain youth-led efforts.

Collectively, these findings indicate that the Aawaz II model is a low-cost, community-anchored approach that aligns well with provincial and district government systems. Integrating its core elements into existing government structures would help sustain programme gains and provide a scalable pathway for inclusive youth leadership and community resilience beyond the lifetime of the programme.

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