

Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA)

Promoting Human Rights for Rural Communities

Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) works for the rights of rural populations. We facilitate villagers' access to information on human rights, women's empowerment and good governance. We advocate that rural development needs must be viewed as basic human rights protections. We provide advocacy training to rural groups and facilitate global linkages to expand support for universal standards on civil, political, economic and social rights. PODA supports the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and works locally to promote MDGs. Realizing that rural women face additional gender-based exclusions, PODA uses the 'Gender and Development' (GAD) approach that analyzes power relations between men and women and seeks to involve men in facilitating strategic solutions to gender inequality.

Women-led community members established PODA as a non-profit organization. In 2003, a field project was started in Potohar region of Pakistan. In such areas, the denial of basic development needs leads to human rights violations. PODA educates villagers and policy makers about this critical link and provides hands-on training and mentoring to rural men and women to improve their access to basic human rights and social services. More than 70 per cent of Pakistan's population lives in rural areas but their issues are neglected. Over 50 percent of rural population is female, yet their voices remain unknown. PODA works to make these voices heard at all levels. We seek support in building villagers' capacity to articulate local needs, prioritize advocacy and realize sustainable solutions that promote human dignity and diversity.

GOALS:

- ? **Promoting gender-equality and women's leadership as essential for rural development**
- ? **Advocating for democratic and accountable governance structures in rural areas**
- ? **Building the capacity of rural civil society groups to promote and protect human rights**
- ? **Mentoring rural youth by modern education to support local progress and global peace**

PODA achieves its goals through following **PROGRAMS:**

Fifty-One percent (51%):

Rural women, although majority in population, have the lowest access to education, health, employment and training and face various forms of violence. PODA provides training to rural women to examine gender discrimination in social practices and state policies. We facilitate new approaches to resolving gender inequality in society. This project builds the capacity of rural women to advocate for their human rights by working on issues such as access to legal rights, social services and gender-specific budgets locally.

Civil Initiatives by Villagers Inspiring Change (CIVIC):

To build the capacity of village community groups, PODA facilitates information on law, citizenship rights and responsibilities. We create awareness about human rights and educate villagers about the 'Decentralization' governance system in Pakistan that facilitates villagers' participation in local development through Citizen

Community Boards (CCB). We provide hands-on training to villagers to start CCBs locally to work on priority needs in concrete ways.

Life-skills Education & Arts Program (LEAP): Due to lack of government social services for rural youth, most young villagers are often forced to live a life with lower expectations and unmet needs. PODA supports rural youth to reach their potential by turning youth ideas into action. We facilitate youth meeting forums in our village office and incubate their creative projects for six or more months to provide step-by-step training in office skills and project management. These projects include; adult literacy, sports for village children, organic agriculture, environmental protection, arts and crafts, children's human rights, income generation and communication skills. PODA also provides career counseling to youth and helps to link them with national and international groups working on democracy and global peace issues.

Growing Rights of Women (GROW): Rural women participate in all forms of agriculture work in Pakistan yet they are neither considered farmers nor have full access to their property rights. To empower rural women, we work at grassroots level to reach women in isolated villages and to help them organize as collectives of women farmers. We facilitate monthly meetings locally to provide timely information to women farmers about agriculture, economy, law, citizen's rights, women's economic rights and access to loans and markets. PODA also works with women farmer networks in other countries and hosts events to recognize the contributions and achievements of women to promote women farmers' leadership locally.

Key Achievements During 2003:

- ? Facilitated a successful yearlong advocacy effort by residents of five villages, convincing the district government education department to add a middle school program to the area's only primary school for girls. The new middle school will open its doors to rural girls in March 05.
- ? Initiated an informal education project for out-of-school village girls to learn writing and income generation skills by recycling paper to make Kashmiri papier-mâché arts & crafts.
- ? Mobilized over 100 men and women from 10 villages to participate in a 'Village Development Plan' to identify local needs and design advocacy projects to work with local policy makers.
- ? Initiated a project on women's human rights to increase awareness in rural areas about the need to identify and document violations against women as first step towards advocacy.
- ? Organized monthly discussion groups to initiate 'Women Farmers Collectives' for sharing information on women's economic rights and facilitate events & discussions.