

**RESEARCH BRIEF**

July 8, 2015

**Hamna Ahmed,
Asha Gul,
Saheem Khizar,
Simon Quinn, and
Kate Vyborny**

Women's Inclusion in Pakistan's Local Support Organizations

Introduction

The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, in collaboration with its partners, supports the mobilization and development of local organizations run by citizen volunteers to address local needs. These organizations are started at the neighborhood level, and then federated up to form representative volunteer bodies representing larger areas. Third Tier Organizations, also known as Local Support Organizations,¹ cover the Union Council, an area with average population 30,000. There are now over 1,000 LSOs active across Pakistan. These organizations are active in health, education, micro finance, human rights, infrastructure, and other sectors.

PPAF is collaborating with a joint research team from Lahore School of Economics, Oxford University, and Duke University, to study the activities of these LSOs and how they can be supported to represent their communities and expand and improve their activities. In Autumn 2014, the team conducted a survey of 850 LSOs (including all except the most recently formed). The survey gathered data in a meeting with each LSO's Executive Body on its governance, activities, and plans for the future, as well as characteristics of the EB members. Data on village characteristics and LSO activity in that village were also collected from one local contact in each village in every UC. In a randomly-selected subset of 150 UCs, a representative sample of households was also interviewed to gather data on perceptions of the LSO and household-level assistance from the LSO.

This is one of a series of briefs analyzing findings from the LSO baseline survey. In this brief, we discuss the inclusion of women in LSO activities. Section 2 discusses women's involvement in LSO governance, including membership and active participation in the General Body and Executive Body. In Section 3 we discuss the inclusion of women and girls as beneficiaries of LSO activities, and whether women's involvement in governance is correlated with serving more women.

LSO EB members were generally aware of PPAF's involvement in the survey, and know about PPAF's preference for women's inclusion. This can create some bias in reported data, towards over-reporting women's involvement; we observed in the field that some LSOs encouraged women to participate on the day of the survey who appeared not to have been involved in the past. The survey questionnaire and field protocol were specifically designed to minimize this, for example by separating women and men into small groups for discussion of individual involvement, asking questions about specific activities and events rather than general questions on involvement, and direct observation of attendance and participation in the meeting when the survey took place. To the extent that this bias may remain, it means that these results will under-state differences between men and women, so we are confident that differences between men and women shown here are at least as large as the data show.

¹ The two terms are generally used interchangeably; we use the term LSO in these briefs.



Governance

Looking at LSOs across the country, we can see that women's representation varies greatly (Figure 1). About 25% of LSOs have all-female Executive Bodies, while just under 20% of LSOs have all male EBs, with the rest falling somewhere in between. The LSO's General Body, which meets typically once or twice a year to give overall direction to the organization and elect the EB, tends to include more women than the EB. This variation reflects the fact that PPAF's Partner Organizations organized COs, VO and LSOs under different conditions in different areas. In some areas, specific objectives were set for women's involvement in governance. In others, LSOs were formed before women's involvement was emphasized. In others, LSOs were formed as a part of the process of a PO reducing sta involvement in an area.

Inclusion of women varies dramatically by region (Figure 2). LSOs with Women-only EBs are all located in Sindh and Punjab, in part reflecting deliberate efforts by PPAF and POs to organize women's-only LSOs in recent years in these areas. Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir have mixed-gender LSOs with a significant amount of women's representation - almost 90% have at least one woman on the EB, while in half the LSOs in this region, women comprise at least a quarter of EB members.

Traditionally socially conservative provinces Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have much less women's representation, with more than 40% of LSOs having no women on the EB.

Women are less active than men in governance. Women are somewhat less likely to attend EB meetings (Figure 3), and speak somewhat less frequently in the discussion when they do attend (Figure 4). In mixed LSOs, women are less represented in office than men, especially as president / head (Figure 5). At the GB level, attendance is equally high for men and women (Figure 6); this likely reflects the lower commitment level required for participation in the GB, since it meets much less frequently.

Women are more active in LSOs where they form the majority. In LSOs where women form the majority, the female EB members are much more likely to attend (Figure 7), and more likely to speak (Figure 8). More of the women in majority-female mixed LSOs hold some kind of office (Figure 9). Women in women's-only LSOs are the most likely to say that women are just as good as men, or better than men, at making decisions relevant for running an LSO (Figure 10), although more than 20% still say that men make better decisions. The greater participation of women in environments where they are more concentrated may simply reflect local culture: women in more progressive Union Councils are both more likely to join LSO EBs, and also more vocal. It might also be the case that women EB members feel more confident expressing themselves and contesting office when there are more women in the group.

Practical constraints limit regular participation, especially for women. Significant numbers of both men and women EB members report difficulty attending due to work and transport issues (Figure 11), but more women report difficulties overall. Transport issues are the leading cause of difficulty for women, and are reported much more frequently than domestic responsibilities or issues with permission leaving the village.

Figure 1:

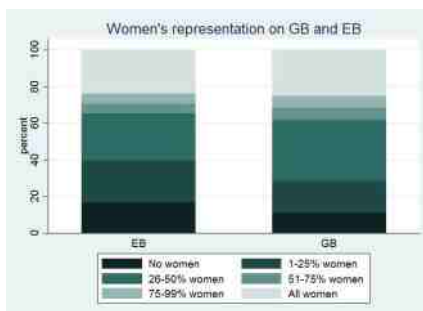


Figure 2:

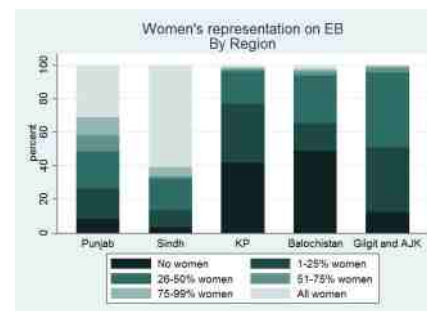


Figure 3:

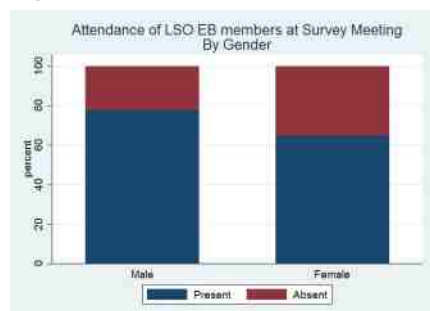


Figure 4:

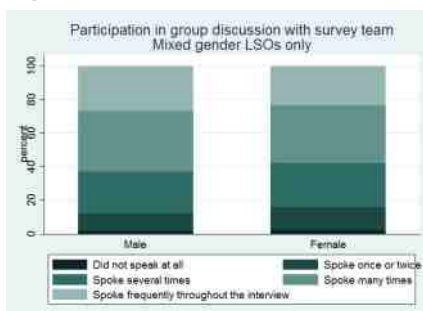
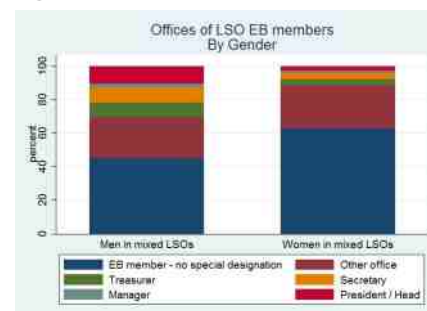


Figure 5:





Many EB members think improvement in women's participation could easily be improved. Figure 12 shows that while LSOs in more conservative provinces anticipate greater difficulty with this, in every province, at least 20% of LSO EBs in every province said it would be 'easy' or 'very easy' to get ten more women GB members actively participating. Similarly, Figure 13 shows that even in the EBs with less than a quarter women EB members, 40% said that it would be "easy" or "very easy" to get ten more women GB members actively participating.

Figure 6:

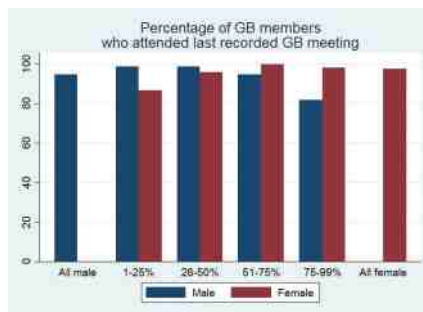
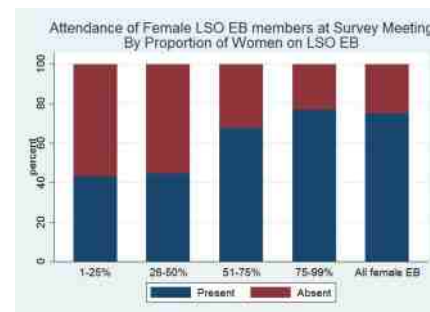


Figure 7:



Women EB members come from similar or poorer households as their male counterparts. One possibility is that for a woman to manage to be represented, she must have some compensating advantage; this suggests women from wealthier households would be represented on LSO EBs. But we do not have evidence for this. Women EB members are just as likely to live in kacha houses as men EB members, and in fact more likely in Sindh and Balochistan - Figure 14.

Figure 8:

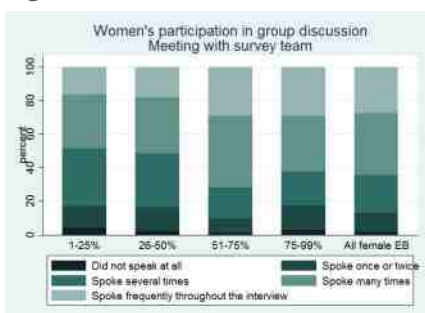


Figure 9:

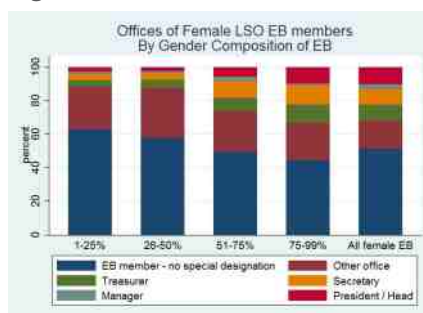


Figure 10:

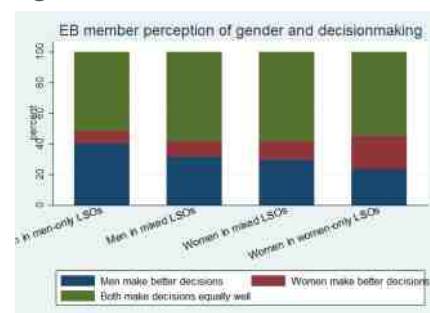


Figure 11:

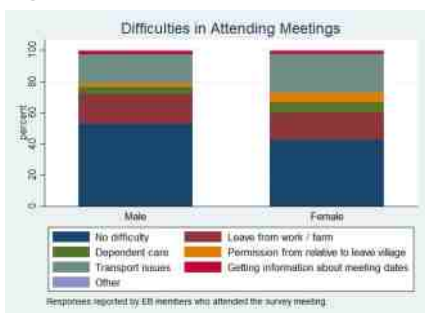


Figure 12:

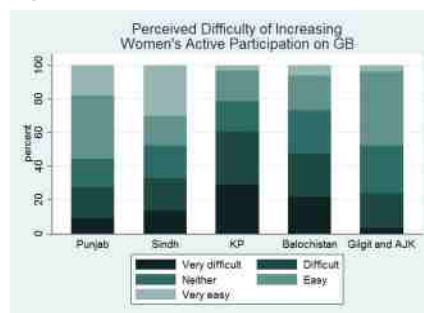


Figure 13:

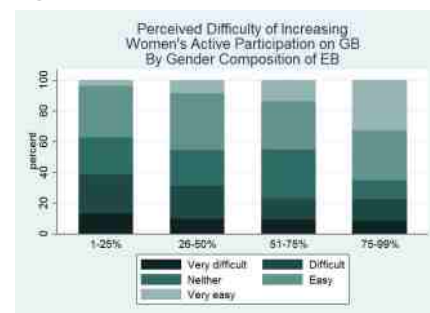


Figure 14:

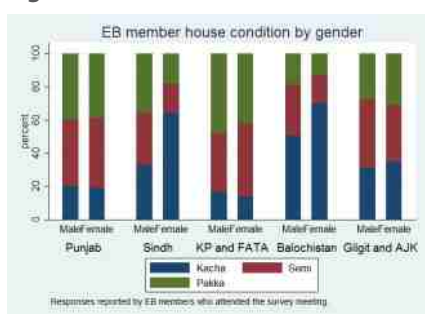


Figure 15:

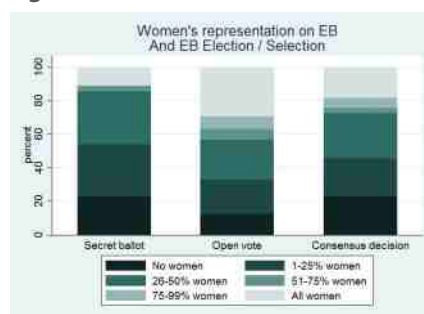
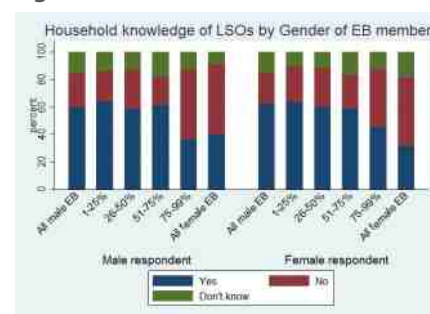
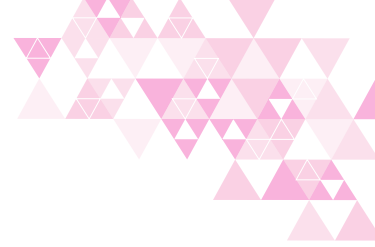


Figure 16:





No clear evidence of a connection between governance procedures and female representation. Elections by more democratic procedures, such as secret ballot, might be expected to lead to greater numbers of women represented on the LSO EB. However, LSOs which use secret ballot actually have fewer women on their EBs (Figure 15). This does not necessarily mean that the secret ballot does not help make elections fairer, including for women. For example, if secret ballot is only used if more than one person is nominated, this might simply reflect women holding back from running in more competitive situations.

LSOs with more women are less well known in the community. Figure 16 shows evidence, from a household survey in the LSOs' UCs, that LSOs with the most women tend to be least well known in their communities - even among female respondents. This surprising finding might suggest that women even in leadership roles in rural Pakistan are less able than men to effectively promote their organizations' work publicly.

Activities and beneficiaries

LSOs tend to be more inclusive of women (and girls) as beneficiaries than in their governance. Figure 17 shows that the vast majority of LSOs have at least 25% of their direct beneficiaries as women, with a significant number having a majority of women among their beneficiaries.

Figure 18 shows that regional patterns are mostly similar to those in governance: KP and Balochistan LSOs' activities tend to directly benefit men more, while activities in Punjab and Sindh are more directed towards women. Figure 19 shows the breakdown of the gender of beneficiaries by sector. Microcredit and livelihoods programs are most heavily targeted at women, which in part is because of rules imposed by PPAF itself. Agriculture, dispute resolution and sporting/cultural activities tend to be more targeted at men.

LSOs with more women in governance do more work targeted at women. Figure 20 shows that LSOs with more women on their EBs have more women as direct beneficiaries. Part of this occurs through project choice. Figure 21 shows the activities of LSOs that are led by men-only, mixed or women-only EBs. EBs with more women's involvement are more active in health, education, microcredit, livelihoods and human/legal rights, while those with only men's involvement are more involved in infrastructure and sporting/cultural/entertainment activities.

Figure 17:

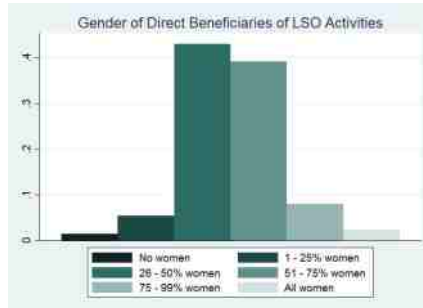


Figure 18:

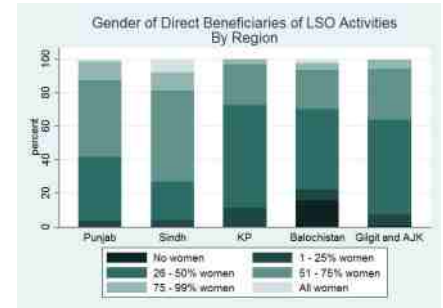


Figure 17:

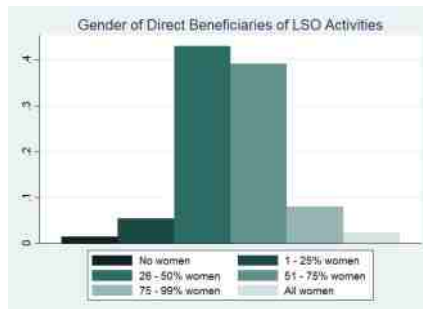


Figure 18:

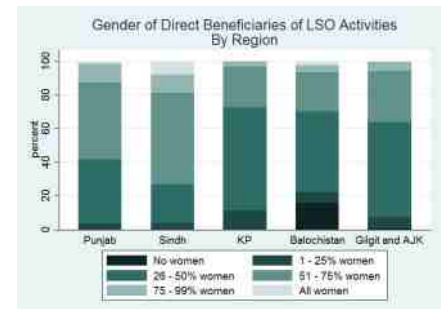


Figure 19:

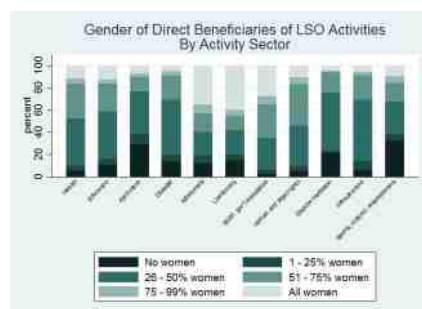


Figure 20:

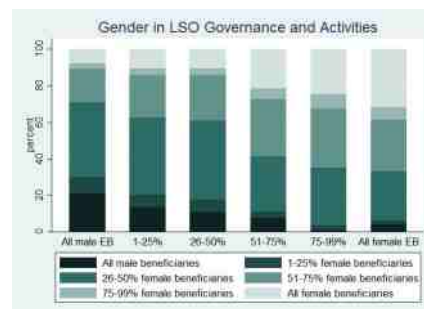
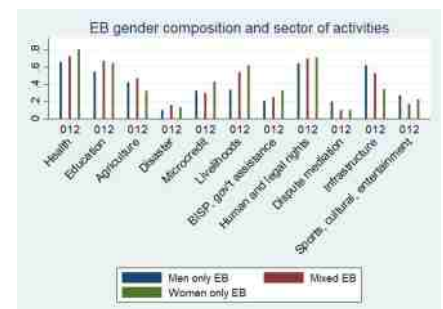


Figure 21:





Women's Inclusion in Pakistan's Third Tier Organizations (TTOs)



Conclusion

The findings in these briefs provide a useful, detailed snapshot of the state of LSOs across the country. They do not show cause and effect relationships. For example, we know that LSOs that currently have more women on the EB serve more women beneficiaries, but we do not know whether encouraging LSO EBs to include more women would necessarily lead to serving more women beneficiaries.

To help address these and other questions useful for PPAF's work with LSOs, PPAF and the research team are building on the baseline survey by collaborating on a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT). This project is testing out several new ways for PPAF to engage with LSOs, and establish their impact.

One of the key features of this trial is that LSOs in the treatment groups are asked to submit regular reports on either women's active participation in the EB and GB, or on women beneficiaries of LSO activities. Some LSOs will be offered the opportunity to be publicly recognized if they are among the top improvers in terms of women's inclusion and other performance measures. The findings from this research can help guide PPAF practices in the future, to help build on the existing foundation of LSO organization and achievements, and serve some of the poorest communities in Pakistan better in the future.

