

STORIES OF WOMEN WHO CHOSE TO RISE



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Across streets, crowded neighbourhoods, and behind closed doors where the struggles of working-class minority women often go unseen, a quiet revolution began in marginalized areas of Lahore and Gujranwala. *My Dream, My Business* (MDMB) is more than a project. It's a movement of women who rose when opportunity, mentorship, and rights aligned.

This collection of twenty impact stories highlights women - street vendors, single mothers, religious minorities, and those restricted by social norms - who stepped forward to earn, lead, and uplift their communities. From leatherwork businesses to home-based enterprises, digital design, and small ventures, these women transformed skills into income and income into empowerment.

MDMB did not only hand out help but it also built capacity. It shifted mindsets, equipped women with entrepreneurial tools, and grounded its work in rights-based empowerment. It created space for women to dream, act, and own their futures. These stories show that enterprise is not a privilege but a path to dignity, inclusion, and lasting change.

Within these pages are women who were once overlooked, now emerging as decision-makers, mentors, and catalysts for progress. Their journeys challenge assumptions and inspire action. This storybook is an invitation; to invest in women's potential and to see enterprise as a force for equality and justice.

This storybook reflects the power of collective commitment and purposeful collaboration. We gratefully acknowledge the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Pakistan for its generous support to the MDMB project, without which this publication would not have been possible. Sincere thanks are due to Saiqa Rani, Iqbal Haider Butt, Amber Bajwa, Minza Yaqoob, Minahil Aslam, Sahar Sohail, Ahmed Zafar, and Muhammad Shahbaz from Bargad team for shaping each story of this storybook with care. We are also deeply grateful for the guidance of Ms. Gulmina Bilal (Chairperson, National Vocational & Technical Training Commission), Ms. Salma Sadia Temur (Parliamentary Secretary, Women Development Department), Mr. Ahmed Khan (CEO, Punjab Skills Development Fund), Ms. Nabila Hakim Ali Khan (Ombudsperson, Punjab), and Ms. Sam Ali Dada (Convener, FPCCI Central Standing Committee on National Economic Policies & Reforms).

These twenty stories remind us: when a woman rises, everyone rises with her.

Sabiha Shaheen

Executive Director, Bargad

PREFACE



Some real-life stories are more inspiring than cinematic ones. These stories are often untold and slip into oblivion. When success is not celebrated, despondency creeps in. I am glad that Bargad has undertaken the documentation of successes to serve as reminders to all of us that if one is consistent, dreams turn into reality.

The inspiring women serve as role models for all of us regardless of our professions. These female trail-blazers have demonstrated that despite misogynistic mindsets, physical, social and economic challenges, leaders can pave the way not just for themselves but for others too.

I believe women are natural at entrepreneurship since women by nature are resilient, they can multitask and can adapt to changing circumstances. While these are characteristics of an enterprising entrepreneur, let us also remind ourselves that the one key characteristic that any entrepreneur needs is the ability to see and seize opportunities in life's various challenges. Women across ages and across the globe have shown that this is one trait that they have in abundance. So, whether it is Rafaqat Naz upgrading her toy stall to Iman setting up a candle business, we women light the way.

At the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC), we deeply value all trainees but especially women who partake in technical and vocational training. We attempt through our Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to certify their informally acquired skill, to offering free courses from conventional, industrial and IT trades to ensure that all Pakistanis but especially women are skilled for work of today and tomorrow. Through affirmative action initiatives of Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif #shefixes encouraging women to apply for conventional courses, NAVTTC is mindful of its responsibilities for a work ready youth.

We encourage amplifying partners in the private, public and development sector to work with us for a skilled Pakistan. While we all work together for this mutual goal, it is important to document inspirations and Bargad has taken the first step in this direction.

Thank you Bargad for introducing us to these inspirational women.

Upwards and onwards!

Gulmina Bilal Ahmad

Chairperson

National Vocational and Technical Training Commission

MESSAGE

The women featured in this book embody the spirit of resilience and enterprise. My Dream, My Business is a remarkable initiative that aligns with Chief Minister Punjab's vision of empowering women through skill development and economic inclusion. Such efforts pave the way for a more equitable and progressive Pakistan.



Ahmed Khan
CEO
Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF)



Salma Saadia Temur
Parliamentary Secretary
Women Development Department, Punjab

These stories are a testament to how skills can unlock potential and transform lives. My Dream, My Business reflects the true impact of inclusive training—where women not only earn, but lead. At PSDF, we proudly support such initiatives that drive sustainable empowerment and economic growth.

MESSAGE

This booklet is a powerful reminder that when women are given opportunity, they claim their space with dignity and purpose. My Dream, My Business has enabled women to challenge barriers, assert their rights, and lead with confidence. Their journeys are not just inspiring—they are a blueprint for justice and equality.



Sam Ali Dada
Convenor Central Standing Committee of FPCCI
on National Economic Policies and Reforms

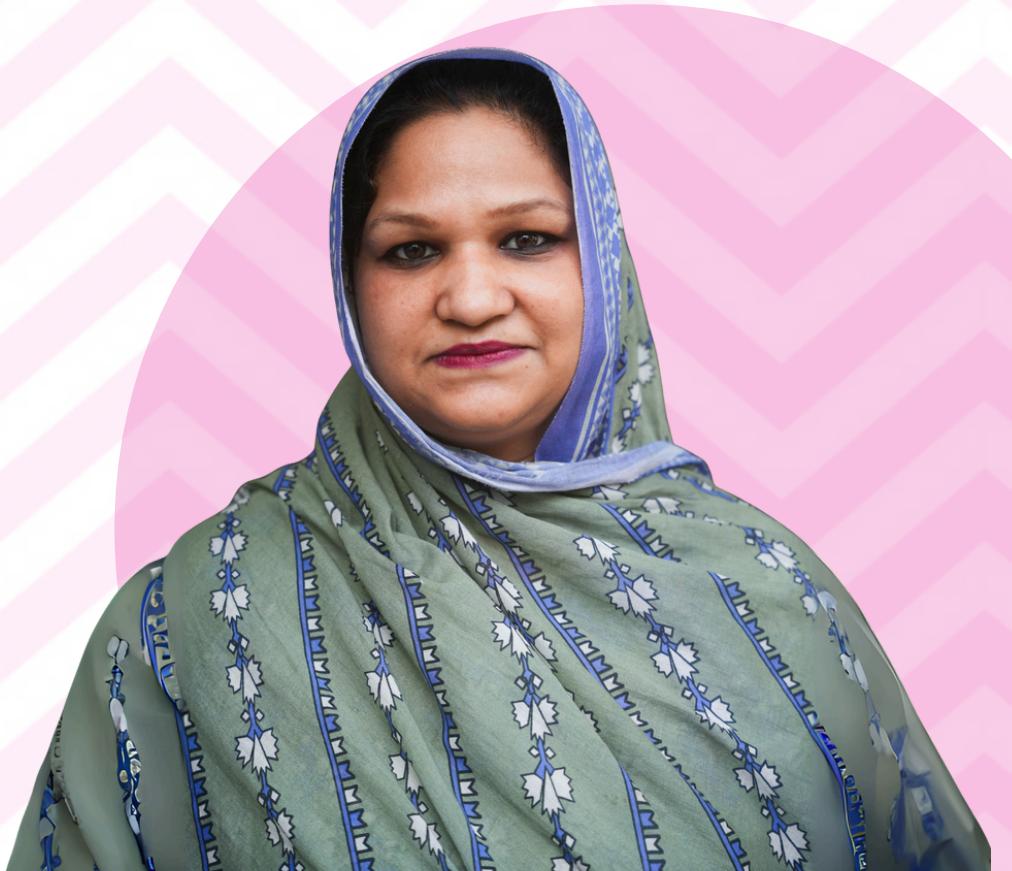


Nabila Hakim Ali Khan
Ombudsperson, Punjab

I am pleased to see women entrepreneurs' stories documented in this booklet. I've seen firsthand how women turn challenges into thriving ventures. We're not just building businesses—we're shaping futures, creating jobs, and transforming communities. Our journeys prove that when women lead, economies grow. Let us continue to support, celebrate, and invest in women-led ventures—for a prosperous and empowered tomorrow.

**“Don’t wait for someone to allow you to dream.
Step forward. The world may not change
overnight, but you will.”**

Fyma



From silent struggles to a stronger self

In a small, tradition-bound community, **32-year-old Fyma**—armed with a master’s degree but limited opportunities—felt her potential slipping away. **A mother of two**, she managed home-based tutoring and piecemeal work, **never earning more than PKR 14,000 a month**. “I wanted to work, but didn’t know where to begin,” she recalled.

That changed when **Fyma discovered the My Dream My Business** (MDMB) project. She joined with hope but little expectation. What she found was transformation.

Through MDMB, Fyma gained **hands-on training in financial literacy, bookkeeping, business communication, and digital tools**. For the first time, she understood how to manage profit and loss, plan investments, and promote her work online. **“Before, I spent what I earned without planning. Now, I think like a professional,”** she said.

Fyma launched a small ladies’ clothing business with her new skills—and **her monthly income jumped to PKR 60,000**. The financial shift was significant, but the deeper impact was personal. With renewed confidence and family support, she now plans to expand her boutique and build a long-term business. **“I want to start small but grow strong. This time, I have a vision and a plan,”** she shared.

MDMB lit the path—Fyma walked it with purpose. Now, her journey inspires others to move from hesitation to hope, **from survival to leadership**.

“Yes, men support us — but women must learn to stand on their own feet.”

Sana



Threading change: Sana's journey to financial freedom

In the quiet streets of Green Town, Lahore, 37-year-old Sana Kashif lived a **life shaped by sacrifice and survival**. As a **Christian woman in a marginalized community**, her days revolved around raising children and managing on her husband's limited income. Dreams of independence felt distant. "**I had to ask my husband for every small expense**," she says.

That changed when she discovered the MDMB project through a neighbor. Initially joining to learn beauty services, her journey took a turn when a trainer noticed her **skill in crocheting**—a hobby she had never seen as a source of income.

MDMB gave Sana more than a skill; it gave her confidence and clarity. Through **sessions on budgeting, marketing, and customer engagement**—and with a toolkit in hand—Sana began creating handmade crochet items. Orders poured in, from local buyers and even international clients. In winter, her **income peaked at PKR 30,000**. This **financial independence** changed everything. Sana now contributes to household expenses, **supports her children's education**, and **stands tall** in family decisions. "Their appreciation gave me strength," she shares.

She took part in exhibitions like Future Fest, Don Bosco Job Fair, and Haryali Market—learning customer preferences, networking, and showcasing her work. Speaking at public those forums for the first time, she **inspired other women to pursue their dreams**.

Today, Sana dreams of taking her business online and **employing other women**.

Sana's journey is proof that with opportunity and belief, women can stitch together **dignity, resilience, and leadership—one thread at a time**.

“Bringing orders home invited criticism. Women are not supposed to do business here” she was told

Riffat



Riffat: Sewing strength into every stitch

In a conservative community where women are expected to stay behind closed doors, 41-year-old Riffat stood at a quiet crossroads. A **single mother** with limited education, she depended on her sewing skills to earn PKR 10,000–15,000 a month. With just a **basic machine** and **informal finishing work**, she struggled to support her children. “I had skills in my hands,” she said, “but no idea how to turn them into a business.”

Facing societal resistance and isolation, Riffat often hid her work.

Then came a turning point—Riffat joined the MDMB project. The training gave her tools, confidence, and clarity. “For the first time, I saw myself as a businesswoman,” she said. With the support of a professional Juki machine from MDMB, her income shot up to PKR 50,000 per month.

Riffat **began receiving bulk orders**—600 tote bags and 50 dupattas daily—for two brands. She trained a group of girls who now work with her, **multiplying her impact**. “I doubted myself in the beginning,” she said, “but now I’m leading.” She started speaking at forums, **advocating for women’s and minority rights**. “Even though I belong to the majority, I **raise my voice for others too**,” she said.

Riffat dreams of setting up a formal stitching unit at home and **creating employment for more women**. She seeks continued market linkages and support to grow further.

Her story demonstrates that when women are given tools and trust, **they don’t just rise—they carry others with them**. Riffat stitched a future for herself—and left the seams open for others to follow.

“I don’t just want to succeed for myself—I want other women to see that they can stand tall, too.”

Rafagat



Rafaqat Naz: Unmarried, unafraid, unstoppable

In the crowded streets of Green Town, Lahore, 42-year-old Rafaqat Naz has quietly been reshaping what strength looks like. **A Christian woman** with less than matric-level education, Rafaqat made an unconventional choice early in life—**she decided not to marry**, instead dedicating herself to caring for her late brother’s children. It was a choice that drew skepticism and criticism, especially from a society that often equates a **woman’s worth with her marital status**. To make ends meet, she took jobs in factories, braving **long hours for meager wages**. Later, she began selling toys from small stalls in the local bazaar. It wasn’t easy—each day came with new challenges, from **religious discrimination** to **gender bias**. But her quiet resolve never wavered.

The turning point came when she joined the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project through Bargad. For the first time, Rafaqat wasn’t just surviving—she was being seen, supported, and believed in. The business training gave her tools she had never had before—**financial planning, pricing, customer engagement, and product selection**. During a hands-on session, she developed a business plan that became her roadmap.

Using the MDMB toolkit and her own savings, Rafaqat upgraded her toy stall. Sales grew, and so did her confidence. Today, she earns between 40,000–45,000 PKR a month—enough to run her household, pay bills, and fund her nieces’ education. One is now in university, proudly supported by her aunt.

Rafaqat has become more than a businesswoman. She’s a **mentor to younger women**, an **advocate in her community**, and a voice for **religious and gender minorities**.

Her journey is not just a story of income—it’s a **story of purpose, dignity, and leadership** that refuses to yield.

“They didn’t want me to work—just because I’m a woman. But I never gave up.”

Shahida



From street stalls to self-worth: Shahida's bold rise

At 42, Shahida Bhatti—living in a **Christian-majority area of Green Town**, Lahore—carried the full weight of her family's survival. As the sole breadwinner in a household of four, she took on whatever she could find: plastic utensil stalls, switch assembly, spice packaging. Still, she lacked the tools to build something lasting. “I didn’t know how to manage things professionally,” she says. Worse, she faced resistance from her own family.

Shahida’s breakthrough came when Bargad invited her to the MDMB project, recognizing her past peacebuilding work. “I had the will,” she says, “but MDMB gave me direction.” **Training in savings, business planning, and record-keeping transformed her approach.** With a startup toolkit, she expanded her utensil business.

Her income soared—from PKR 10,000 to over PKR 45,000 a month. With savings, she bought a rickshaw—renting it out to support another family too. “Now I run my home—and I save.”

Shahida now sells at Sunday markets, **speaks at public events, and mentors other women.** “People who once dismissed me now ask for advice—including my family.”

She has visited women’s rights institutions as Ombudsperson Office Punjab, Meesaq Centre and Women Development Department through MDMB and actively **guides others** toward legal and support services. “I’ve even taken cases forward myself.”

Her next goal: owning a shop. “If someone helps me, great. If not, I’ll still do it—I believe in myself.” Her message echoes loudly: “Don’t wait. Stand tall—and lift others as you rise.”

“Rights are not handed over—they must be claimed”

Rukhsana



Rukhsana's rise: From service to self-reliance

At 49, Rukhsana Fakhar—a Christian woman from Green Town, Lahore—had never earned an income of her own. With only a primary education and living in a household of 21, her life revolved around church work and community service. **“I served with heart,” she said, “but there was no money in it.”**

That changed when she joined the MDMB project. Invited to form a women’s group, Rukhsana’s leadership stood out. She was offered the chance to start her own business—a possibility she had never imagined. With humility and courage, she stepped in.

Through MDMB’s hands-on training, Rukhsana **gained skills in financial planning, leadership, communication, and business development.** With a toolkit in hand, she launched an undergarments business—but quickly expanded into toys, makeup, blankets, and clothing using her own savings.

Her income grew from PKR 8,000 to over PKR 30,000 a month. More importantly, she gained **confidence, autonomy, and the ability to support her family** and save for herself. “Now I manage my needs and help my household too,” she says with pride.

Rukhsana now sets up stalls at exhibitions, **mentors other women**, and **speaks at public forums**. She faces no resistance—only growing respect for her contributions.

Today, she’s **more than a breadwinner—she’s a leader, peacemaker, and role model** for economic empowerment. Her message is clear: “Work hard, stand tall, and never give away your power entirely.”

Rukhsana’s story is proof that with the right opportunity, women of any age or background can lead, grow, and **transform communities**. MDMB lit the spark. She turned it into a steady flame.

**"I used to think design was just art, but now I know—
it's power, especially when it helps a woman tell her
story."**

Alishba



Alishba: From student to digital enabler

In the narrow lanes of Nishat Colony, Lahore, 22-year-old Alishba stood apart—not because she spoke the loudest, but because she dreamed differently. A B.Ed (Hons) graduate from Lahore College for Women University, she had always been driven by more than just a degree. **She wanted to create.** To build something that spoke to who she was—and what other women could become.

Alishba's journey took a new turn when she joined the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project. The program exposed her to the world of **graphic design through a professional course** at Don Bosco Technical Institute. It wasn't just about learning new tools; it was the beginning of **finding her voice through visuals**. Alishba began using her talent to **support other women entrepreneurs**—designing logos, digital posts, and branding kits for home-based businesses. Slowly, she built her own clientele. Every poster she created, every business page she launched, was more than a project—it was a step toward **visibility for women** who, like her, had once felt invisible.

The real turning point came when her designs started circulating widely on social media. More women reached out—not just for visuals, but for guidance. Alishba became a silent partner in dozens of micro-enterprises, enabling them to compete in a digital marketplace.

Today, Alishba **earns her own income, supports her family, and mentors young girls** in her community. Her next dream: to open a small creative studio employing women designers from underserved areas.

Her story shows what happens when skill meets purpose. Alishba isn't just designing graphics—she's designing a more inclusive future, one screen at a time.

"This project didn't just help us earn – it helped us rise"

Qman



Candle by candle, Iman lit her way

At 19, Iman, a student from a minority-populated area near Jail Road, Lahore, dreamed of easing her **family's financial burden and paying for her education** at Kinnaird College. Creative and self-taught, she had long excelled in school art competitions. One day, she asked herself, "Why not turn my creativity into decorative candles?" That question sparked her **entrepreneurial journey**. Iman brought her idea to the MDMB team, who responded with mentorship, hands-on training, and a startup toolkit. She learned how to create a business plan, manage finances, and market her work effectively.

With these tools and her artistic touch, Iman launched her **home-based candle brand**. Her holiday-themed designs quickly **attracted customers**. "My first earnings were over PKR 50,000 during Christmas," she shares. Her social media following grew, and soon she was showcasing her work at events like the Expo Center, Haryali Market, and local church stalls.

Despite facing seasonal market dips and the social challenges of being a **young Christian female entrepreneur**, Iman stayed committed. "With MDMB and my family's support, I took a chance—and God helped me through." Now she mentors 4–5 girls from similar backgrounds, teaching candle-making and encouraging education. She plans to expand her brand and **launch a clothing line** for sustainable income.

Iman's journey is proof that creativity, when empowered with knowledge and support, can light the way for others. Projects like MDMB must continue—to transform talent into opportunity, and dreams into livelihoods.

“When I received my first paycheck, I didn’t just feel happy—I felt seen.”

Aqsa



Aqsa's Story – From homebound hope to the sales floor

In the modest neighborhood of Rahwali Sharqi, Gujranwala, 21-year-old Aqsa carried a dream larger than her circumstances. A quiet, determined girl with an FA degree, she lived a **life centered around home**—helping her mother with chores and giving free tuition to neighborhood children. Her world was small, but her hopes were not.

Despite financial challenges, Aqsa never complained. She simply wished to ease her family's burden and prove that she, too, could contribute. Her chance came when she joined the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project. At first, she was hesitant, unsure if anything would change. But the project's inclusive environment, community meetings, and **mentorship sessions lit a spark**. With each session, Aqsa grew more confident. She learned how to build a resume, apply for jobs, and communicate professionally—skills that had once felt out of reach. Encouraged by her mentors, she applied to the Jinnah Welfare Society and Chase Up Super Store. Then came the call. Aqsa was **selected for a position as a salesgirl at Chase Up**. It was more than a job—it was her first step outside the home into a world she had only imagined. **Her income now helps cover household expenses** and her younger siblings' needs. More importantly, it has transformed her **sense of self-worth**.

Her journey continues. Now, she hopes to pursue further education and **inspire other young women** in her area to chase their goals. Aqsa's story isn't just about employment; it's about **rising from the margins with dignity**. With the right support, she proved that even one opportunity can open many doors—and that sometimes, **the smallest steps become the most powerful milestones**.

**"I used to wait for someone to give me work. Now,
I create work."**

Martha



Martha: From poultry to progress

In a **low-income Christian neighborhood of Lahore**, 47-year-old Martha quietly stitched her days together—literally and figuratively. For years, she took embroidery work from households, **earning just enough to cover basic groceries**. A woman with talent and dignity, Martha was constantly overlooked—not because she lacked skill, but because **she was poor, marginalized, and a woman**.

“I loved my work, but I had no voice, no plan, no means to grow,” she recalls.

Living in **economic insecurity**, her life revolved around meeting daily needs. The idea of owning a business was foreign. That changed when she heard about the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project. Skeptical but hopeful, she joined the sessions through her local community network. What began as curiosity turned into commitment. Through training, Martha **learned the basics of business planning, budgeting, and customer engagement**—concepts she had never been exposed to before. For the first time, someone asked her what she wanted for herself.

Emboldened, Martha pivoted from home-based embroidery to poultry farming—a skill she had only casually explored. She bought hens, started selling eggs and meat locally, and reinvested her small earnings into her venture.

Now earning between PKR 15,000 to 20,000 monthly, Martha proudly contributes to household expenses and supports her children’s education. Her home, once fragile with uncertainty, now buzzes with hope—and hens. Martha’s journey proves that no background is too humble, and no start too late. With support and self-belief, a woman once hidden in plain sight can rise—and help others rise with her.

“I always thought I was too late to start. But starting is never late—it’s what changes everything.”

Musarat



Musarat: The revival of a forgotten skill

In the narrow lanes of Batapur, Lahore, 46-year-old Musarat quietly lived with a skill that had long gone unrecognized. A **Christian woman and mother**, she **knew how to stitch shoe uppers and jackets** using a joki machine—a talent passed down through years of home-based labor. But societal prejudice and religious discrimination confined her to the margins. **“People saw my faith before they saw my skill.”**

For years, Musarat’s talent remained dormant, **buried under cultural restrictions**, limited mobility, and a lack of resources. She wanted to contribute but didn’t know where to begin. That changed when she heard about the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project from her church network.

Curious, Musarat attended the sessions. **The exposure was transformative.** For the first time, she was not just seen, but heard. She learned about women’s economic rights, business planning, and customer dealing. The MDMB team provided her with a joki machine—a gesture that felt like a spark in a long-dark tunnel. She **began taking local orders**, first cautiously, then with growing confidence. Within months, she was earning up to PKR 30,000 per month, **buying groceries, supporting her children’s schooling**, and—perhaps most significantly—being included in family decisions. “When you earn, your voice starts to count,” she smiled.

Musarat’s impact didn’t stop at income. She **started conducting informal sessions in her church** on legal awareness, women’s property rights, and public support services. Her shop is now a small hub of learning, laughter, and leadership.

Musarat is no longer just a skilled stitcher—**she is a mentor, a role model, and a reminder that women don’t just need opportunity—they need someone to believe they can lead it.**

“I may still be home, but now I’m building something real—on my terms.”

Neha



Neha Amanat: Breaking barriers, building dreams

In the modest lanes of Nowshera Sansi, Gujranwala Neha Amanat—a young graduate full of ambition—lived within the quiet confines of tradition. Though she had the education, drive, and confidence to succeed, she faced a powerful barrier: **she wasn't allowed to work outside her home.** Bound by conservative family norms, Neha's dreams remained suspended in silence. But dreams, when nurtured, find a way to break through. Neha's turning point came with her participation in the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project. She attended the Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop—her first exposure to a space of ideas, mentorship, and encouragement. **Surrounded by other women with similar stories and challenges,** she found strength in shared experience. Through the sessions, Neha realized that even if she couldn't leave her home, **she could bring her dream inside.**

The idea to open a home-based grocery store began as a small spark during one of the sessions on local enterprise development. She **received mentoring, feedback on her business plan,** and emotional support from MDMB mentors. Her family, initially skeptical, began to see her determination and agreed to support her initiative. Neha **set up a modest grocery corner in her home.** With each sale, her confidence grew. During a toolkit distribution event organized by MDMB in Gujranwala, her initiative stood out. Impressed by her commitment, she was gifted a full set of grocery supplies to expand her business.

Now, her home is a place of business, connection, and pride. She manages inventory, serves customers, and is recognized by name in her neighborhood.

Her story is proof that even within boundaries, bold steps can be taken. With courage and the right support, women like Neha turn walls into windows of opportunity.

"I didn't just start a salon. I started a new chapter in my life."

Nadia



Nadia: A mother's journey to independence

In the quiet streets of Nowshera Sansi, Gujranwala life took a sharp turn for Nadia—a mother of three—**when her husband suddenly left**, abandoning his responsibilities and leaving her to face the crushing weight of single-handedly raising a family. With **no income, no legal support**, and only sporadic help from her own struggling parents and brothers, Nadia stood at a crossroads. The fear of rising inflation and mounting expenses threatened to consume her. But Nadia **refused to surrender**.

She began working at her sister's small beauty parlour. The **income was meager, the hours were long**, and the balance between motherhood and **survival was exhausting**. Yet with every passing day, Nadia honed her skills, slowly regaining confidence that life had once drained from her.

A breakthrough came when she attended a legal awareness session under the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project. There, for the first time, she **learned she had a legal right to claim child support**. That spark of knowledge lit a fire of self-worth and motivation. More than just legal guidance, the MDMB platform gave her mentorship, emotional strength, and practical advice.

Driven by this new sense of direction, Nadia began saving every rupee she could. Months of careful planning and sheer willpower culminated in her opening **her very own beauty parlour**—aptly named “Bargad,” a symbol of strength and shelter. She invested in quality products and created a warm, safe space where women in her community could feel beautiful and heard.

Today, Nadia **runs a thriving business**. Her children go to school. She pays her bills with dignity. And more than anything, she feels whole. Nadia's journey proves that when knowledge meets resilience, transformation is not only possible—it's unstoppable.

“Don’t wait for someone to rescue you. Be your own revolution.”

Roma



Roma Shamshad: From volunteer to voice of change

In the vibrant yet unequal landscape of Bahar Colony, Lahore, 23-year-old Roma Shamshad walked a path many feared—being a young, **Christian woman navigating discrimination and economic uncertainty**. A bachelor's student at Kinnaird College, Roma supported her family through volunteer work, unsure of how to turn her potential into stability.

Her turning point came when she crossed paths with the My Dream, My Business (MDMB) project while volunteering with Bargad. Through MDMB's training, Roma sharpened her communication skills, **learned workplace professionalism, and gained job readiness**—all areas she had struggled to access on her own. Encouraged by mentors, Roma applied to Loyola Hall Research and Spirituality Center. She interviewed confidently and was hired as a librarian with a monthly salary of 36,000 PKR. The moment marked her **professional and personal transformation**.

From the hush of volunteering to the empowerment of a stable career, Roma now contributes to her siblings' education and household finances. **Her voice, once doubted, now commands respect in her family and community.** “They don’t just see me as a girl anymore,” she says. “They see me as someone who stands on her own.” Roma doesn’t stop at her own success—she actively shares job opportunities with other young women, **mentoring those who feel lost or underestimated.** Her next goal? A master’s degree and, eventually, her own business.

Roma’s story is not just about employment—it’s about **rewriting narratives**. With courage, training, and opportunity, she transformed from a volunteer into a community catalyst—proving that when a woman rises, she carries others with her.

“Every woman has something inside her. She just needs the right moment and the right push to rise.”

Asma



Asma: From school maid to 'Hawa Mein Udaan'

In the bustling streets of Lahore, 34-year-old Asma quietly supported her six-member household as a school maid, earning a mere 8,000 PKR a month. **With minimal education and maximum responsibility**, her dreams lay buried under bills and survival.

Then came a spark—My Dream, My Business (MDMB). Introduced through a local women's group, Asma joined the project and, with training and mentorship, imagined something no one expected—a trampoline business in a local park. She called it **“Hawa Mein Udaan”—a tribute to her long-suppressed dreams.**

Initially offering free rides to neighborhood children, Asma soon gained their loyalty and their parents' support. Laughter turned into livelihood. With MDMB's toolkit assistance and business planning sessions, she scaled up, charging a small fee per ride. Her monthly profits now reach up to 30,000 PKR—nearly four times her old salary.

“Before this, I had no idea I could run anything. But MDMB gave me a reason to believe,” she says. Her children, **once out of school due to financial strain, are now back in classrooms.** Asma's home is no longer just a place of struggle—it's a place of pride.

The trampoline became more than play—it **symbolized freedom, fun, and female agency** in a society where such things are rarely granted together. Neighbors now consult her on starting their own ventures. Asma's next goal is to expand her business into a play zone with additional rides.

"To any woman still waiting for the right time—it's now, you already have what you need. Just start."

Saiqa



Saira: Stitching a future with strength and skill

In a cramped Lahore home, Saira, a 36-year-old mother of three, **stitched quietly beside her husband**. While he brought home factory leather scraps, she turned them into bags and wallets—never realizing **her hobby held the key to independence**.

With no platform and limited exposure, **Saira's craft remained invisible** until she discovered My Dream, My Business (MDMB). Through the project's training and support, she was encouraged to treat her stitching not as side work—but as a viable business.

MDMB provided raw materials and training in financial literacy, product presentation, and customer relations. Empowered, Saira stepped into community expos to display her leatherwork. With her husband's factory-bought stitching machine, she **expanded her product line** and now earns up to 40,000 PKR monthly—eclipsing their previous household income.

“The training didn’t just teach me business—it changed how I see myself,” she shares. Once silent in family decisions, **Saira now holds influence and pride**. Her children are enrolled in better schools, and she’s dreaming of launching her own leather brand.

Her transformation radiates into her community. **Women approach her for guidance**, inspired by her resilience. Saira, once unseen, is now a symbol of grit and grace.

“Women like me don’t just need income. We need identity.”

Shakilla



Shakilla Koukab: A legacy of service, a future of her own

In Rahwali Cantt, Gujranwala, 57-year-old Shakilla Koukab built a legacy long before MDMB. A social worker, trainer, and mother of four, she juggled family and community responsibilities while her husband worked abroad. Yet despite years of serving others, **her dream of owning a business remained out of reach.**

Living in a joint family where women were expected to stay home, **Shakilla broke barriers**—mobilizing CNIC drives, training women in crafts, and educating madrassa youth. But it was MDMB that turned her outward service into inward growth.

Through mentoring sessions and exposure to entrepreneurial models, Shakilla envisioned a clothing business rooted in her embroidery skills. **With MDMB's guidance, she launched her business from home—designing outfits, managing clients, and slowly building a loyal customer base.**

“MDMB gave me clarity. **I had always worked for others, but now I am building something of my own,**” she says. Her monthly income now contributes meaningfully to her household. She balances her business with her ongoing work in UNICEF’s Alternative Care Facilities project, embodying both purpose and profit. Years earlier, **Shakilla independently bought a plot, built a home,** and moved in with her children. MDMB gave her the final piece—a business to call her own.

Her vision now includes expanding her business and mentoring younger women—helping them find their footing like she did.

**“When women work together, they
don’t just earn—they lead.”**



*Shamaifa
&
Nazzeera*



Grinding through barriers: Shamaila & Nazeeran's business of belief

In Nishat Colony, Lahore, Shamaila, a schoolteacher, and her mother-in-law, Nazeeran, turned flour into freedom. With Shamaila earning just 10,000 PKR monthly, their **Christian household struggled** to stay afloat.

Then came MDMB. After attending training, Shamaila pitched a bold idea—a **home-based atta chakki business**. She invited Nazeeran to join. With the project's support, they received a flour grinder and began operating from one room in their home.

Starting small, they cleaned, ground, and packaged flour themselves. Initial sales were local. But word spread. Their commitment to quality built customer trust, and their income grew—now reaching up to 30,000 PKR monthly.

“People doubted us,” says Shamaila. “But we knew this was our way out.”

The **mother-in-law-daughter-in-law duo** now dreams of creating a local flour brand, expanding to nearby areas, and **training other women in basic business skills**.

Their chakki didn't just grind grain—it crushed stereotypes.

Together, they're proving that **family unity**, backed by the right opportunity, can build something lasting—for themselves and others.

"When you truly decide to move forward, the path begins to form on its own."

Zoya



Chunri by Zoya — weaving confidence into every thread

At 23, Zoya from Green Town, Lahore, lived quietly in a modest home of four. With a middle school education, an unwell father, and no stable family income, she felt powerless. “I wanted to help,” she said, “but being **a less-educated Christian woman**, I didn’t have the confidence to step out or start something.”

Then Zoya discovered the MDMB project through her community group. Curious but hesitant, she enrolled. What followed was a personal turning point. The training sessions gave her more than skills—they sparked belief. She **learned to keep business records, deal with customers, present products, and plan finances**.

With encouragement from her family and trainers, Zoya launched her venture—Chunri by Zoya—selling stylish dupattas. She explored local markets, **built vendor links, and mastered pricing**. “Despite criticism, my family stood by me,” she shared. Soon, Zoya began setting up stalls. The response? Overwhelming. “People liked my products—and now many return,” she said with pride. Her income grew to PKR 25,000–30,000 monthly, helping her support her family. She has now expanded into ladies’ clothing to meet demand.

Today, Zoya walks taller. “Before, I couldn’t imagine earning. Now I manage a business,” she says confidently. Zoya’s story is proof that when **courage meets opportunity**, it sparks a chain reaction—changing not just lives, but entire communities.

"People used to call me 'awaara' (the wanderer) because I moved from house to house for work. Today, I am a proud woman and a proud mother, earning with respect from my own kitchen while giving my children the future they deserve."

Shazia



Shazia: A Proud mother's Recipe for Success

As the eldest sister in a poor family, Shazia carried **responsibility from a young age**. Her childhood and married life were spent working in other people's homes. She hoped marriage would bring stability, but her husband's low income and long hours left her children neglected and her life controlled by others. Still, Shazia dreamed of **higher education, success, and strong values for her children**.

Cooking was her passion, and her food was always appreciated. In 2024, a turning point came when her sister brought Shazia's biryani to the Bargad office. The team loved it, and she began providing daily lunches. With Bargad's support and mentorship from Ms. Saiqa Rani, she received business orientation and was launched on social media as "Desi Tarka by Shazia." Her women-led home kitchen now delivers **affordable, fresh, and quality meals** to offices and homes, giving her the freedom she always desired.

Working from home, Shazia now gives her children time and care. "**I see myself in the women who still work in other people's homes**," she says, hoping to involve them so they can earn with dignity.

"I believe that God always rewards hard work. No task is small; every skill matters."

"MDMB didn't just give me a business. They gave me my identity back."

About Bargad

What began as a student-led initiative has since become one of Pakistan's leading youth development organizations. Over 28 years, Bargad has implemented 100+ projects, facilitated over 1,600 youth-led actions, and reached 500,000+ youth and women across Pakistan. It has more than 3500 volunteers across 104 districts. With partnerships in 86 universities and a strong digital presence, Bargad has provided technical assistance for formulating and implementing pioneering provincial youth polices, nurtured leadership, and amplified marginalized youth voices.

From the simple demand for safe and inclusive spaces to becoming a national voice for youth and women empowerment, Bargad remains rooted in its founding purpose: to create safe and inclusive spaces where youth and women grow, lead, and thrive.

Author:

Amber Bajwa - Minza Yaqoob - Saiqa Rani

Editor:

Iqbal Haider Butt

Proof Reading:

Sahar Sohail

Designer:

Minahil Aslam - Ahmed Zafar



@bargadyouth



Bargad Organization for
Youth Development