

High quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) is the foundation of a child's education journey: every stage of education that follows depends upon children's learning experiences in the earliest years. Though access to high quality education is essential for young children, it is estimated that:

- In Pakistan, national enrolment in ECCE is low and shows a decline since 2018: among 3–5-year-olds, just **19%** are enrolled in ECCE (Source: PSLM 2002 – 2020).
- Inequalities in access to ECCE persist across multiple groups, including by wealth, urban/rural areas, gender, and disability status. Enrolment outcomes vary by province (Source: PSLM 2002 – 2020).



Picture 1: LEAPS children engaging in creative arts activity

In addition to support for young children, there is also a need for simultaneous investments in training and employment opportunities for youth. This is of particular importance in a country like Pakistan because:

- **64%** of the population is under the age of **29** years (United Nations Development Program Pakistan, 2017).
- Disparities are greater for youth in rural communities and female youth (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

## The LEAPS Programme: Implemented by NCHD

Youth **L**eaders for **E**arly Childhood **A**ssuring Children are **P**repared for **S**chool (LEAPS) is a youth led ECCE programme, which was conceptualized as a response to the following challenges in Sindh, Pakistan:

1. Limited access to quality preschool programming, high early school dropout rate, and poor learning outcomes, particularly among girls.
2. Large youth population not in education, employment, or training, with higher rates among female youth in rural communities.



**“We want in every village this kind of school will be opened for young children.”**

– Focus Group Discussion with Families of Community Youth Leaders

**“We have learnt everything in this programme, and we are still continuing, it is great change that we are learning.”**

– Interview with Community Youth Leader

Picture 2: CYLs engaging in a large group activity during CYL training.

To address these problems, **Pakistan's National Commission for Human Development (NCHD)** implemented the LEAPS-NCHD programme across four districts in rural Sindh, Pakistan: Naushahro Feroze, Khairpur, Sukkur, and Dadu. NCHD is a government organization whose mission is to address service gaps in remote areas by providing education and vocational training programmes. By investing in youth and young children through the LEAPS-NCHD programme, NCHD aims to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDG) targets in education, training and employment, and gender equality in Pakistan. LEAPS-NCHD programme was supported by a consortium of technical partners led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Aga Khan University.

## Aims of the LEAPS Programme

The aims of LEAPS are twofold and target inter-connected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



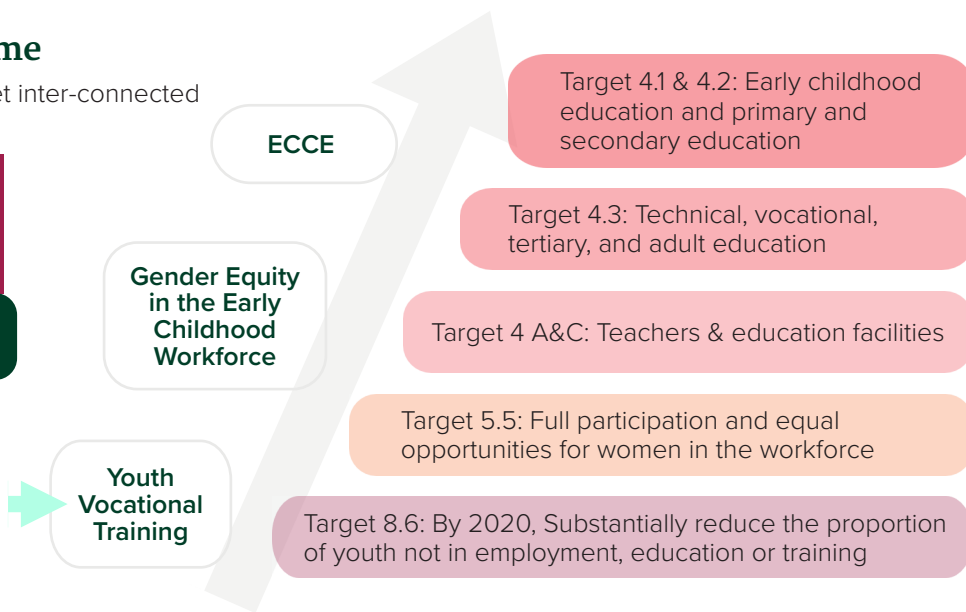
**Aims of the LEAPS programme targeting interconnected SDGs**

### Aim 1.

Increase children's school readiness by focusing on children's language and literacy, social and emotional, physical development, and numeracy skills

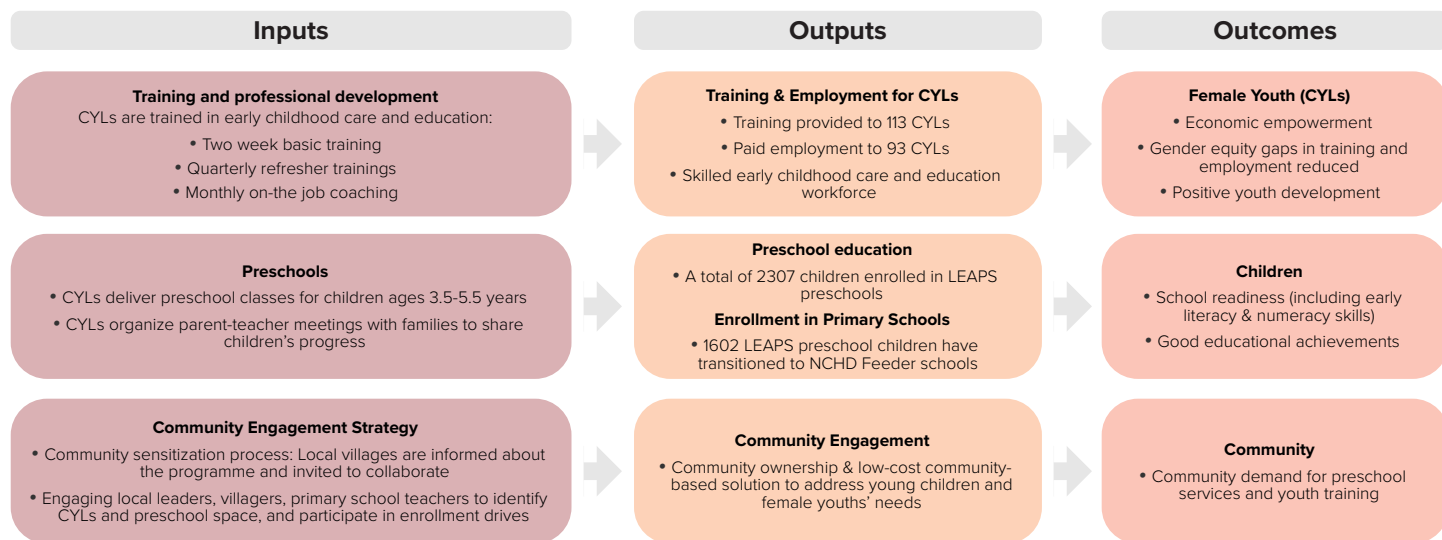
### Aim 2.

Promote female youth's personal and professional development, and economic empowerment by providing training, supervision, and monthly stipends.



## Overview of the LEAPS Programme

LEAPS-NCHD programme trains female youth (18-24 years)-called Community Youth Leaders (CYLs)-who deliver high quality ECCE program for children (3.5-5.5 years) in communities without access to formal preschool education. The LEAPS-NCHD programme was implemented by NCHD through their existing education platforms, leveraging the NCHD's strengths in community mobilization and engagement, in 93 villages in districts Naushahro Feroze, Khairpur, Sukkur, and Dadu in Sindh province.



## LEAPS Programme Results

### Benefits to Children

Over the course of the programme, outputs at the child-level included:

# 1602

# 2307

Children enrolled in LEAPS-NCHD preschools, including 1139 girls (49%) and 1168 boys (51%).

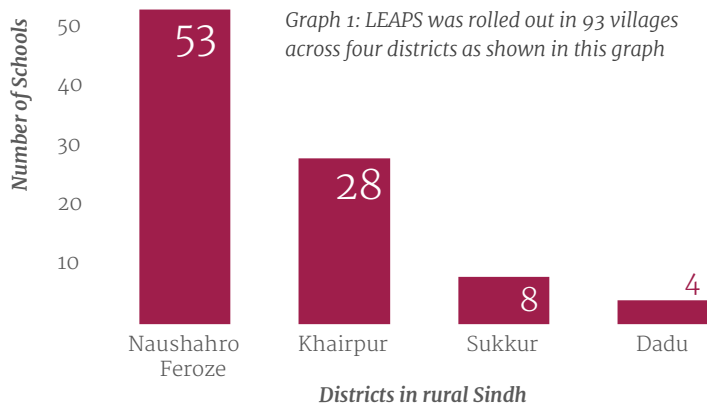
Children transitioned to primary school by April 2021 supported by:

- Transition workshops attended by 92 NCHD Feeder primary schools and CYLs.
- Transition kits comprising learning materials and first aid kit. These kits were provided to 92 NCHD Feeder primary school teachers.

## Positive Impact on Children’s School Readiness, Learning, and Development

Findings showed that children in LEAPS-NCHD communities had significantly higher school readiness scores as compared to children in communities that did not have a LEAPS preschool.

During interviews, parents, CYLs, and NCHD feeder primary school teachers indicated observing improvements in children’s academics, social skills, and hygiene after attending LEAPS preschools. Primary school teachers also shared that LEAPS children were better prepared upon arrival in primary school in comparison to non-LEAPS children who were not enrolled in LEAPS-NCHD programme.



## Female Youth Benefitted in Economic Empowerment, skill development, and personal & professional development

During the course of the LEAPS-NCHD programme, a total of 113 teachers were trained, and paid employment was provided to 93 CYLs.

Interviews and group discussions conducted with CYLs, their families, and other programme stakeholders revealed that CYLs benefited from their participation in LEAPS including:

- Learning & Skill Development
- Financial Benefits
- Confidence
- Emotional Regulation
- Respect & Recognition
- Aspirations for the Future
- Social Networks



Picture 3: CYLs sharing their LEAPS journey during Annual CYL Conference, held on January 11th, 2020.

**The LEAPS-NCHD Programme also enabled CYLs to act as agents of change in their communities. Many CYLs advocated for girls’ and boys’ education and the importance of empowering young women.**

### Community Youth Leaders as Agents of Change:

Huma, is an 18-year-old CYL living in a remote village of a desert in Sindh. Due to poor infrastructure facilities, children and youth in Huma’s village are unable to pursue higher education. Additionally, it is culturally inappropriate for girls and female youth in Huma’s village to travel alone to another village to pursue education or employment. As a result, most young men and women in her village work in the fields. When the LEAPS-NCHD programme was being implemented in Huma’s neighboring village, Huma was the first female youth to step out of her village, and she joined the programme as a CYL. Huma’s family, in particular her father, supported her in her pursuit to achieve this milestone.

The community members in Huma’s neighboring village also supported her by donating their housing space to set up the LEAPS-NCHD preschool for children. Huma shared that prior to joining the LEAPS-NCHD programme, people in her village were not supportive of her ambition to secure higher education and employment. However, the same people now view her as a role model and respect her for her education and work. She gives full credit to the LEAPS-NCHD programme for this appreciation and respect. Huma is one example of an agent of change who has motivated families, in her village as well as the neighboring village where she works, to support their children and youth (especially female youth) in their ambitions.



“There is lot of changing is occurred in the CYL’s personality, after becoming part of LEAPS she became close to young children, and financially she supports her family”

Focus group discussion # 2, CYL Family



“The fondness for further study has emerged as I joined this programme, I thought I must work hard and work in a better way, that’s why I want to study further.”

Interview with CYL #16

## Strengthened Community Ownership, Demand for ECCE, and Youth Training & Employment

LEAPS-NCHD programme relies on community engagement to succeed. The programme benefitted communities in the following ways:

- Conducted 93 parent-teacher meetings.
- Conducted 93 inauguration ceremonies in preschools prior to the first day of preschool sessions.
- Created demand for education & vocational training for children and youth among families and communities.

*“Whatever children have learnt we have also learnt.”*

Focus Group Discussion #3, Mothers

*“It is so nice to share that before our children used to study under open sky but now villagers have given their rooms for schools.”*

Focus Group Discussion #2, FO



Picture 4: CYL and NCHD officer conducting inauguration ceremony to commence preschool sessions

## LEAPS Emergency Response

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the LEAPS-NCHD team created an emergency response plan for CYLs and children. This emergency plan was implemented during COVID-19 school shutdowns. The table below summarizes the activities and outputs of this plan during COVID-19. Some of these resources can also be used in future emergencies, such as flooding.

COVID-19 Response Strategy: Summary of Activities & Outputs

Level	Activity	Outputs
Child	Remote learning workbooks	1840 workbooks delivered
CYL	Remote learning activities targeting CYLs	4 activities implemented
	Two-day trainings on COVID-19 standard operating procedures and school re-opening plans (small groups)	93 CYL participants
NCHD Officers	One-day trainings on COVID-19 standard operating procedures and school re-opening plans (small groups)	42 NCHD participants
LEAPS Schools	COVID-19 Safety kits including disinfectants, masks, COVID-19 activity sheets, COVID-19 story books, and other cleaning supplies	93 COVID-19 safety kits delivered
LEAPS Communities	COVID-19 standard operating procedures, posters, and fliers	Received by 93 communities

## Summary of Findings from the LEAPS Programme

### Positive impacts on children

LEAPS provided quality ECCE programming for young children in rural communities utilizing a gender-equitable, inclusive, community-based model. This resulted in significant positive impacts on children's learning and school readiness skills.

### Benefits for female youth participants

LEAPS led to a range of benefits for female youth participants, including economic benefits, and personal and professional benefits. By enhancing CYLs' skills, CYLs were in turn able to also support family members, including financially and through teaching and skill development.

### Benefits for the community

LEAPS served as a service gap by closing inequities in lifelong learning by serving communities that do not have preschool service and intentional targeting female youth in rural communities.