

# JUSTICE SUCCESS STORY

## Legal Aid Society helps to provide relief to a community in Sanghar, protecting them from overbilling from Electric Supply Company

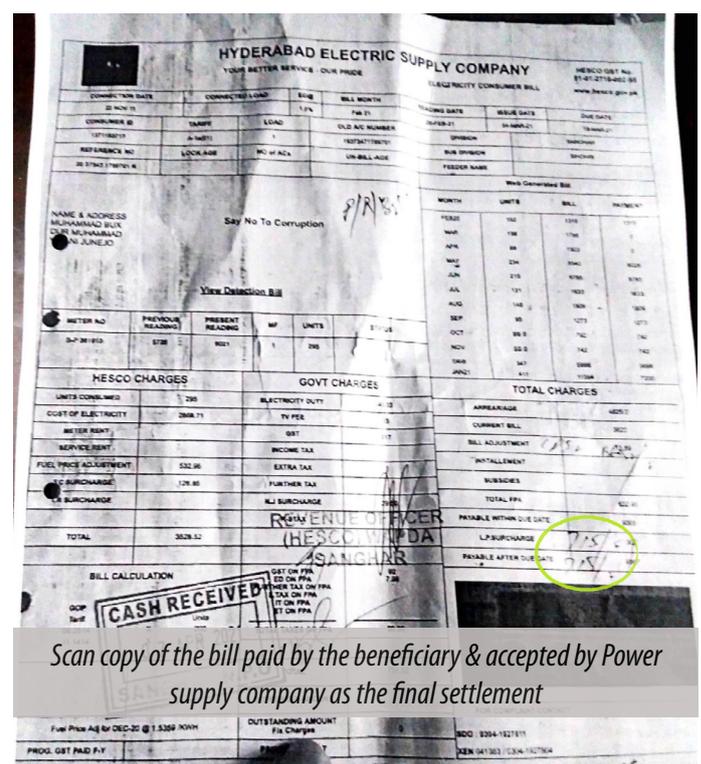
Electricity shortages, circular debt, and expensive power purchase agreements with private enterprises are commonly reported in Pakistan. These problems are often cited as factors responsible for making electricity in Pakistan almost unaffordable for certain segments. Structural issues at the retail electricity distribution stage such as distribution losses, power theft, unrecovered bills and bad management hold a part in the overall power-sector structure. To cover up their losses and inefficiencies, and inflate their revenues, the practice of excessive billing transmission to the end-users continues.

Such was the case in village Panyal Haji Jani Junejo UC, Chotyaron Taluka, District Sanghar, where an entire community was facing inconveniences in terms of their electrical power supplies from Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (HESCO). The entire community was not only forced to pay extra amounts of money due to overbilling but was also facing the pressure of having their power supply cut in case of not meeting the due dates. Despite several efforts and applications to the regulatory authorities, all prior efforts had completely failed to convince the electric supply company to end this malpractice.

**Mr. Muhammad Baqsh** S/O Dur Muhammad, aged 62, a businessman in the fish industry from the mentioned community was in a state of disarray when he received an excessive bill of PKR 8,652 despite paying his monthly electricity bills within the respective due dates. The over-billing practice by HESCO started from March 2021, with additional surcharges applied in respective months. Mr. Baqsh initially paid surcharges to avoid trouble for a couple of months, hence clearing his bills on a timely basis. However, after two months, Mr.

Baqsh realized the continued discrepancies in the bills and approached the concerned departments multiple times personally to resolve this issue, but was struggling to have his issue adequately addressed by the concerned department.

After losing almost all hopes to get justice, Mr. Baqsh was guided by someone in his community towards Legal Aid Society in Sanghar. Following the same, Mr. Baqsh approached LAS Sanghar district office, where he shared his concern and requested legal assistance. Taking an active approach **Mr. Muhammad Haseeb** (Field Officer, LAS) immediately took up this case. The team first verified the bills of the complainant and confirmed irregularities in the billing. The case was further taken up by submitting an online application (APP/0001745/21) on behalf of Mr. Muhammad Baqsh to the Federal Ombudsman office through their online portal on **March 16, 2021**. As a result



Scan copy of the bill paid by the beneficiary & accepted by Power supply company as the final settlement

of which the Federal Ombudsman called upon the concerned authorities from HESCO and a hearing was held on **April 7, 2021**, at the Federal Ombudsman's office in Hyderabad - where the power Supply Company was found to be involved in the manipulation of the electricity units and excessive billing; and was therefore ordered to deduct the irrelevant surcharges from the respective bill. Following the same HESCO rectified their billing accounts and issued a corrected new bill to Mr. Baqsh of PKR 715.

The matter was resolved only in a matter of only 3 weeks through ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Mechanism. However, the greater impact of this intervention was observed when the Power Supply Company had started transmitting reduced (correct) bills to all its consumers in the entire community in subsequent months (as reported by several community stakeholders). Mr. Baqsh is gratified to get this support and

paid thanks to the LAS Sanghar team for their guidance and active support. He narrated that LAS is rightfully the voice of the affected, and of those whose rights are snatched from them.

**The main objective for the existence of the Legal Aid Society (LAS) is to serve marginalized and underprivileged communities - to reduce challenges in accessing justice. For the same Legal Aid Society has been conducting Legal Clinics in different villages of Sanghar. To date, the team has successfully conducted 22 Legal Awareness Clinics in Sanghar, during which 391 Men and 216 women had participated. The participants were not only informed about the provision of free legal assistance by LAS, but were also educated with the correct forums and procedures for submitting their applications, and hence for the resolution of the issues faced by them.**



*Beneficiary Mr. Muhammad Baqsh, in rejoice after having his billing issues sorted*

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