



**A DECADE
OF IMPACT**

**Insights, Models & Case Studies
from Rizq's First Ten Years**



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PROLOGUE

Rizq did not start out as an organisation. It was a small twinge of a human conscience, from three LUMS university students - driving across Lahore, collecting leftover food in the back of their cars, because waste and hunger existed side by side, and because there being no existing system willing to bridge that gap, was a good enough reason to act. Their effort was a humble, youthfully spontaneous one, but it rested on an old adage that has always guided societies at their best:

"Human life is inherently sacred, and its dignity is non-negotiable."

Whether it be in scripture, philosophy or science, every tradition affirms the same principle, that human beings possess an intrinsic worth that demands compassion, respect and justice. However, people do not live in ideal worlds. They exist within material systems shaped by scarcity, fear, inequality and neglect, systems that turn virtues into vices, and strip individuals of the freedom needed to realise their potential.

Rizq was created in response to that gap between higher principle and stark reality. What began as a grassroots volunteer movement has grown into a social enterprise working at the intersection of food justice, climate resilience, youth leadership and sustainable development. Today, Rizq operates through a unique ecosystem of welfare programmes, social businesses, and research initiatives across six thematic areas, all converging upon a single mission: to sustain human life and help it fulfil its true potential.

Over the last decade, a journey of tens of millions of meals, this mission has taken the shape of Pakistan's first food bank network, community kitchens, regenerative agriculture research farms, youth movements, eco-housing, and farmer financing programs. It has swept us into South Punjab's floodplains and relief camps, policy dialogue tables and university halls, remote villages in interior Sindh and dense urban slums in Lahore. Each intervention of ours has emerged from lived human experience, guided not only by theory but by the realities of communities struggling to navigate between a fragile existence and hope.

This publication is a commemoration of ten years of work, and a blueprint. Each of the case studies captured here is both a story and a system, an honest record of what worked, what failed, what evolved, and what has lasted the test of time.

Together, they form a practical body of knowledge for anyone else seeking to build dignified and systems-driven solutions within challenging, complex environments. Our intention is not to present a perfect template, but to illuminate through Rizq's work our processes and tested pathways.

For those encountering Rizq for the first time, this compilation introduces the spirit and discipline behind our work. And for those who have walked with us in our mission, it is a reflection of everything we've built together thus far.

Above all, it is an invitation from us to you, to reimagine how compassion can be reorganised in society from a simple seed of good, then systemised, then turned into lasting infrastructure.

--Musa, Qasim, Huzaifa



INTRODUCTION

A decade is long enough for a movement to take shape, mature, and reveal the deeper meaning behind its work. For Rizq, the years from 2015 to 2025 have been a journey of learning, unlearning, and rebuilding, not just systems of food and livelihoods, but systems of compassion, to sustain human lives to fulfil their true potential.

What began as a simple act of rescuing excess food has, over ten years, evolved into a national ecosystem of programs addressing food recovery, household stability, nutrition, disaster response, farmer financing, youth leadership, and policy advocacy. In this journey, we learned that hunger is not a single problem - it is a constellation of failures across moral, social, economic, and governance structures. And so our interventions had to grow equally multidimensional.

This publication captures those learnings.

It is divided into two main parts:

Part I: Ideological Foundations

The first half of the book traces Rizq's inner journey; the questions, ideas, and realizations that have shaped our worldview:

- *Why Hunger?* explores how a world of abundance still produces empty plates, and why economics alone could not explain what we were seeing.
- *Poverty is Lack of Compassion* reframes poverty not only as a lack of resources, but as a crisis of compassion-in systems and in hearts.
- *Rizq Zaya Nai Krtay* expands the idea of Rizq beyond food to all forms of sustenance, and examines the ways Rizq is wasted through concentration, adulteration, apathy, and ingratitude.
- *Exchanging Vices with Virtues* uncovers how fear-driven vices shape our systems, and how faith and virtue can begin to repair them.
- *Sustaining Human Lives; Fulfilling True Potential* lays out Rizq's theory of change: building systems that do not just feed people, but enable them to rise to their innate potential.

Part II: Case Studies and Models

The second half of the book brings the ideology down to earth. It documents, through our key programs and projects, the myriad of approaches which Rizq has tried to put this worldview into practice. Each case study shows how a specific problem in the food system was understood, how the vice underlying said problem was identified, and how a virtue was institutionalised through a model - whether as a welfare program, a social business or an ethical commercial enterprise. From food banks and ration systems to Rizq Khana, Kissan Dost, Youth Republic, and our emergency response efforts, these chapters are meant to serve as blueprints for other aspiring practitioners and innovators.

In order to make them more coherent, usable for students, policymakers, social entrepreneurs and researchers, each case study follows a common structure:

- Background -the problem and context
- Why This Intervention - the insight that shaped the solution
- The Intervention: Explained -how the model works
- Impact -what changed for people, systems, and communities
- Challenges & Learnings -what tested us and what we learned
- Future Roadmap -where the intervention is headed next

You can read this book in one of two ways: as a continuous narrative charting the journey between ideological seed to impact, or as a reference for one of Rizq's specific thematic or intervention areas, opening any case study on its own. The philosophical foundations in Part I illuminate the underlying meaning behind the models in Part II, while the models in Part II showcase how ideas in Part I can live in the real world.

This compilation is not intended as a victory lap nor a claim that we at Rizq have the perfect answers or practitioner models to problems of food insecurity or economic scarcity. It is instead an honest record of our attempts to remedy a myriad of systemic and economic injustices through innovation and youthful verve, a delineation - of all that has worked in our favour since 2015, as well as what has failed, surprised us, transformed us. Above all, it is an invitation from us to you to begin building, questioning, imagining, and to lead with dignity at the heart of your endeavours.

If a lack of compassion is true poverty, then the work ahead for all of us is to design systems where compassion transcends its emotional shape and becomes a structure.

PART I:
IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. WHY HUNGER ?

Every journey begins with a question, and the journey of Rizq began with this one:

If the world produces enough food for everyone, why does hunger still exist?

In our earliest days as students at LUMS, the closer we looked, the more we found ourselves observing two contradictory worlds; at one end were banquet halls, restaurants, hostels and homes where trays upon trays of untouched food were scraped straight into trash bags - an unquestioned habit, a residue of a culture drawn to feasting. At the other end were children in nearby settlements outside the university walls licking empty pots, families that were stretching one meal across several days, and parents overlooking their own hunger in favour of a few extra spoonfuls for their children.

This contrast was hard for us to ignore, and harder still to understand. The more food we began saving, the more hunger we began noticing all around us. And the more hunger we witnessed, the more a burgeoning discomfort burrowed inside us - this did not seem like a country suffering from shortages. This seemed like a society, a system, a world suffering from misallocation.

A WORLD OF ABUNDANCE, NOT SCARCITY

Existing data on the matter only further confirmed the contradiction. Pakistan wastes nearly 40% of its agricultural produce, an amount that, if redistributed, could feed millions. Globally, food production exceeds the caloric needs of every human being on earth. Which begs the question: if nature is indeed generous, our lands indeed fertile, and humanity indeed equipped with the tools to transport, preserve, and distribute food at unprecedented scales ...why is there hunger?

Why does a child's plate remain empty in a world seemingly overflowing with abundance?

And why do some people drown in excess, while others starve just a few streets away?

And perhaps the most uncomfortable question of all: Why is hunger still justified as a "normal" fact of human existence?

SCARCITY, A MYTH?

As students of economics, we were taught a foundational premise in our earliest classes, that for humanity, resources are finite, and our wants are infinite, and deprivation is an unfortunate, but natural consequence. This simple postulation has shaped entire worldviews for millenia - the justification for rampant inequality, competition and exclusion, and indeed, the backbone of policies, markets and incentives throughout the globe.

But this did not align with the rampant contradiction we were witnessing while collecting leftover food, and the contradiction compelled us to pause. If scarcity is truly the natural state of the world, then hunger is certainly inevitable. But if abundance is the natural state of the world, isn't hunger a failure?

The three of us found ourselves unable to reconcile economic theory neither our material, lived realities nor our deeply held belief systems. Many classrooms would speak of rationalising efficiency, trade-offs, and optimisation, but watching hunger persist even where waste was rampant seemed deeply irrational. The idea of "pareto optimality" offered elegant mathematical solutions, but it made little room for moral obligations, compassion, or barakah - the inexplicable promised increase in one's own abundance that comes from sharing with others.

This is where we began to realise that economics as a discipline is incomplete in its ability to adequately describe and critique our lived observations of hunger. Thus, we decided to spend some time sifting through additional perspectives that laid out the true nature of abundance (rizq), and scarcity. What follows is an unfurling of the questions and frameworks that helped the three of us arrive at our answer.

IQBAL AND THE MORAL ROOTS OF POVERTY?

In search of clarity, we turned towards thinkers who saw beyond the limits of technical frameworks, and in this search, we encountered a passage from Allama Iqbal that would shape our intellectual foundations, and later on, those of Rizq. He wrote:

**"IS IT NOT POSSIBLE THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS FREE FROM THE SUFFERING OF POVERTY?
... TO GIVE A CATEGORICAL ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NOT THE TASK OF ECONOMICS
BECAUSE, TO SOME EXTENT, THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON THE MORAL ABILITIES OF HUMAN
NATURE FOR WHOSE DISCOVERY THE EXPERTS IN THIS SCIENCE DO NOT HAVE ANY PARTICULAR
METHOD IN THEIR HANDS."**

This was a moment of illumination for us. Iqbal was saying: The question of poverty cannot be answered through economic models alone, because it is not merely an economic problem - it is a moral one. And so, our problem statement re-articulated itself: **'Hunger does not persist because resources are insufficient. It persists because human morality, compassion, justice, responsibility fall short.'**

This insight became the cornerstone of Rizq's ideological journey, and remains so, till today. It shifted the underpinning of our inquiry from logistics to ethics, from distribution to conscience, and from food systems to human systems - all through the landscape of the human heart. We realised that to solve hunger, Rizq could not merely be moving food from one place to another. It had to be a conduit for moving prevalent, entrenched ideas, beliefs and ways of being. Central to this missive had to be a conscious effort to learn more about the moral roots of poverty.

2. POVERTY IS LACK OF COMPASSION

To appreciate the fact that hunger emerges from deep within the moral roots of poverty, a deeper understanding of poverty itself became necessary. In the previous chapter, we learned that hunger does not persist because the world lacks food, but because something within us - our choices, our priorities, our moral imagination - is persistently falling short. And so our inquiry naturally turned inward, to ask ourselves ***What truly is poverty?***

The more we examined various facets of this question, the more clear it became that poverty is not a one-dimensional condition.

POVERTY: A LACK OF MATERIAL NEEDS?

Traditionally, most people recognize poverty as a function of empty stomachs, inadequate shelter, unsafe water, and financial insecurity. Economists, development experts, and policy-makers often define poverty as the lack of resources required for survival and stability.

Poverty is, truly, a real and brutal form of suffering - measurable, visible and urgent. In 2015, and the expansive ten year journey that has since followed, the Rizq team has witnessed many shades of devastating economic poverty across slum settlements, katchi abadis, labor colonies, flood-hit villages. But as we spent more time in the field, we realised something striking: even when resources were abundantly available, they were gatekept, wasted, misdirected, used recklessly - and poverty would persist. Food existed, plentifully, but didn't reach people in need. Opportunities existed, but seemed to cleanly bypass the deserving. Massive government subsidies were failing to translate to lasting impact for small farmers. Support, generosity, and compassion existed throughout the country, but were failing to translate into real change.

This what clued us to a possibility that something was amiss - both in our characterisation of poverty, and thus, of the mechanisms being used to alleviate it.

POVERTY: A LACK OF SOUL?

Across psychological, philosophical, and faith-based traditions, an alternative characterisation of poverty emerges: poverty as a spiritual or moral condition, referring to the erosion of purpose, empathy, connection and identity. This theory maintains that poverty emerges when a person - or a society - becomes disconnected from meaning, collective responsibility and moral grounding. This "inner poverty" manifests not as empty plates but in empty practices:

- A lack of purpose
- Indifference to suffering,
- Obsession with one's self,
- Loss of communal belonging,
- The absence of gratitude,
- The weakening of a collective conscience

Many scholars describe it as spiritual hollowness, a motivational collapse, or the decaying of man's "inner life." In our lived experience, it is this second poverty we saw in much greater scale and scope in the halls of privilege - not a hunger of the stomach, but a hunger of purpose.

POVERTY IS LACK OF COMPASSION

On the surface, these look like two different poverties: one outside the self (material needs), one inside the self (soul). But the more time we spent engaging with the ground realities of our systems, the more our question from earlier started to refine itself:

IF THERE IS ENOUGH IN THE WORLD TO MEET EVERYONE'S NEEDS, WHAT ALLOWS MATERIAL POVERTY TO CONTINUE? AND IF HUMAN BEINGS ARE CAPABLE OF MEANING & PURPOSE, WHAT ALLOWS INNER POVERTY TO DEEPEN?

Slowly, a clearer answer emerged for us: given the reality of the abundance of resources, both are symptoms of the same underlying absence, ie. a lack of compassion.

- When compassion is missing from institutions and policies, we get a **poverty of material needs**. This is when resources exist, but they are not shared with or prioritised for the vulnerable, nor distributed with justice.
- When compassion is missing from the hearts and relationships of communities, we get a **poverty of the soul**. Lives may be full of activity and consumption at the outset, but they are devoid of connection, service, and responsibility.

So instead of treating this "poverty of material needs" and "poverty of soul" as two separate problems, we three began to see them as two avatars of a single disease. This is why, for us, **a lack of compassion is what constitutes true poverty.**

And so, this newfound understanding shifted the foundation of Rizq's work - if poverty is fundamentally a crisis of compassion, then food insecurity, waste, inequality, and broken systems are symptoms, not causes. They are the visible outcomes of an invisible moral scarcity.

MORAL CHAIN OF COMPASSION

Once we began to envision poverty as a lack of compassion, another axiomatic understanding came into focus; that a lack of compassion leads to a lack of justice, by way of building systems that overlook certain individuals in favour of rewarding others. This lack of justice then shapes laws, markets, and institutions that, by design, ignore the vulnerable. Those unjust systems, in response, produce hunger, malnutrition, displacement, and stagnation.

In this sense, compassion is not just a tender feeling, nor a private emotion. Its existence becomes a structural necessity for a just world free from poverty. Without compassion, our systems drift towards cruelty by default. That means with compassion, systems can be pulled back toward fairness, inclusiveness and human dignity.

True transformation, therefore, does not begin with a program or a policy alone. It must instead begin with empathy. Empathy widens our moral horizons, changes what we see as “acceptable” or “normal” and entirely reframes what we consider to be successful outcomes. For example, it prompts us to reimagine allocative generosity in our budgets, envisioning the preservation of human dignity not as an add-on but a necessary facet of design, and affords equity a greater place in decision making. Without this compassion, every reform well-intended at the outset eventually gives way to self-interest.

COMPASSIONATE AMBITION

We thus realised Rizq would need a different kind of ambition to enact any lasting change in systemic poverty or food insecurity. This ambition needed to be based not only in technical skill or programmatic success but heavily in compassion. A “compassionate ambition”, if you will, that directs human talent and capabilities toward the service of others. It is no longer enough to simply be a doctor, engineer, entrepreneur, teacher, or policymaker. One must be a compassionate human being first guided by empathy, equipped with a strong sense of communal responsibility, and committed, deeply, to the wellbeing of their fellow humans.

All human beings, the three of us have repeatedly found, have a fundamental longing to be useful to the world - prodded open, this usefulness involves serving, uplifting, and contributing meaningfully to humanity. Now, this inner drive may certainly at times be latent, but it becomes visible the moment compassion is sufficiently awakened by some catalyst or crisis - just as it did for each of the three of us, and the hundreds that have since joined us in our mission.

When individuals rediscover this inner calling, or their compassionate ambition - like a chef who decides to cook at unprecedented scale for the hungry, or a scientist that learns to innovate for greater social equity - that is when both forms of poverty begin to simultaneously shrink - the poverty of needs, and the poverty of soul. This is true, comprehensive poverty alleviation.

This realisation became one of the core pillars of the Rizq movement, a part of its philosophy for internal organisation-building and human resource development, but especially the driving motive of its Rizq Youth Republic. Over the past ten years, we have been determined to awaken a compassionate ambition in people, especially Pakistan's youth, so they can wield compassion for humanity as the vector direction for developing their personal capabilities to the full, wherever they stand. This has to be the first step in developing generations of young people who treat compassion as a default component in their thinking of the world.

CONCLUSION: FROM COMPASSION TO RIZQ

A society abundant in compassion cannot be truly poor, even if its material resources fluctuate. Likewise, a society devoid of compassion cannot be truly rich, even if its GDP rises. Compassion is thus the currency that sustains human life, and without it, no policy, program, or innovation can ever hope to genuinely eliminate hunger.

After this winding journey of unravelling scarcity, spanning years, the insight that became the ideological core of our work is thus:

**LACK OF COMPASSION IS TRUE POVERTY.
AND THE ABUNDANCE OF COMPASSION IS TRUE RIZQ.**

A question that still remained for us at Rizq was the counter-factual:

If compassion is so central to human prosperity, and so latent within us, then why do we repeatedly fail to integrate it within our systems?

To paint a more complete picture for ourselves, we decided to look at the resources we waste or misallocate, through the lens of Islam. We'd been taught to believe that food, time, wealth, knowledge, relationships, and even our own inner capacities; these are all forms of 'Rizq', or sustenance, a guaranteed allocation by Allah to help human beings live, grow, and stand with honour. When these gifts are hoarded, corrupted, ignored, or taken for granted, they fail to fulfil their purpose. But to try to remedy this act of 'wasting' Rizq, it was important for us to accurately describe both 'Rizq' and its wastage.

So what is "Rizq" in its deepest sense, and what does it mean to waste it?

3. RIZQ ZAYA NAI KRTAY

"RIZQ ZAYAA NAI KRTAY."

Often repeated by mothers, teachers, grandparents, and the wisdom-keepers of our culture, it was a small instruction, something said casually while clearing the table or packing leftovers after a family meal. Yet as we became more deeply involved in collecting and distributing excess food, and as we witnessed the deprivation around us, the simplicity of this statement and our previously limited understanding of the word 'Rizq' as merely food, began to expand.

That ordinary sentence split open like a seed.

WHAT IS RIZQ?

Rizq is an Arabic word meaning "**sustenance**." But sustenance is not just food, it is anything that keeps you alive, nurtures you, and maintains your existence. In that vein, it is not only material needs such as clothes, shelter, and money that are your *Rizq*, but so are immaterial needs such as **dignity, voice, intellect, safety, knowledge, time, relationships, and thoughts - in fact, anything that allows human beings to grow, sustain, and stand with honor is *Rizq*.**

And hence, the statement "**Rizq zayaa nai krtay**", when given a moment's thought, may hold deeper weight than being an instruction to avoid wasting one's food. In truth, it is a powerful reminder to not waste any form of *Rizq*, be it your relationships, your opportunities, your environment, your time, or your compassion.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "WASTE" RIZQ?

But what does it actually mean to "waste" something (*Zaya krna*)? Better yet, how or *why* does one waste something? To waste something is to use, consume, or expend it carelessly or aimlessly, in a way that prevents it from fulfilling its intended purpose. So for *Rizq* to be wasted, it must fail to achieve what it exists for, that is: to nourish, protect, elevate and sustain human life, so one can reach their true potential. The moment it fails to do so, it is wasted.

This understanding led towards a deeper question: **how do we actually waste Rizq?**

By this we are not referring to the obvious and superficial ways we waste Rizq, ie. throwing away perfectly good food, wasting our time, expending our finances on unnecessary luxuries. Those are merely symptoms of a wasteful instinct. The real inquiry is about the underlying patterns that shape all forms of waste - how can we fully characterise the ways in which Rizq gets misused, neglected, or diverted from its purpose?

Through personal reflection, much mutual debate, and years of field experience, we came to understand that Rizq is wasted through four fundamental pathways:

1. Wasting Rizq By Concentration
2. Wasting Rizq By Adulteration
3. Wasting Rizq By Apathy & Inaction
4. Wasting Rizq By Ingratitude

WASTING RIZQ BY CONCENTRATION

Concentration - that is, the concentration of resources - is among the quietest and most socially accepted forms of wastage, because it disguises itself as a success, efficiency, or even business savvy. But is the purpose of Rizq to stagnate in the hands of a few favoured individuals? Or is the purpose of Rizq to circulate continuously, even when accumulated?

Yet the moment Rizq stops flowing, it stops fulfilling its purpose of generating prosperity. What gathers excessively in one hand is automatically withheld from many others. One may assert theologically that one's Rizq is pre-destined, and hence does not require human intercession to flow naturally, but the Qur'an categorically rejects this perspective as a mark of disbelieving:

"AND WHEN IT IS SAID TO THEM, "SPEND FROM THAT WHICH ALLAH HAS PROVIDED FOR YOU," THOSE WHO DISBELIEVE SAY TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE, "SHOULD WE FEED ONE WHOM, IF ALLAH HAD WILLED, HE WOULD HAVE FED? YOU ARE NOT BUT IN CLEAR ERROR."

When wealth accumulates with a small group while entire communities struggle to meet basic needs, Rizq is wasted through concentration;

When food piles up in warehouses, restaurants, and homes while families sleep hungry, Rizq is wasted through concentration;

When knowledge is restricted to a privileged few, leaving others without the tools to navigate life, Rizq is wasted through concentration.

Even power and opportunities become wasteful when they remain locked in circles that replicate themselves rather than opening pathways for others. This is because concentration creates stagnation, trapping blessings that were meant to circulate. It transforms Rizq from a flowing resource meant to nourish many, into an idle, inaccessible stockpile.

In our work on the ground, we saw this pattern everywhere: food concentrated in Pakistan's affluent localities while inner-city pockets faced chronic hunger, donations concentrated in large cities while the country's remote districts remained invisible, and opportunities concentrated among the well-connected while those with equal potential remained unheard. Over time, it became clear that hunger was not the result of scarcity but of concentration. Rizq was present, it just was not shared.

To waste Rizq through concentration is, directly or indirectly, to believe that blessings belong to any one of us alone. But Rizq is only Rizq when it flows - its purpose is fulfilled not when it is kept, but when it reaches the lives it was meant to sustain.

Perhaps there is no better way to elucidate this concept than by sharing a **poem by the Great Baba Bulleh Shah.**

***Vaikh Bandeya!
Aasmana Te Urdy Panchi
Vaikh Te Sahi Ki Karde Ne
Na O Karde Rizq Zakheera
Na O Bhukke Marde Ne
Kaddi Kise Ne Urdy Panchi
Bhukke Marde Vaikhe Ne?
Banday Hi Karde Rizq Zakheera
Banday Hi Bhukke Marde Ne...***

WASTING RIZQ BY ADULTERATION

Adulteration is not limited to mixing impurities into food; it is any act that weakens the integrity of a blessing, dilutes its purpose, or turns something meant to nourish others into something that instead harms them. Food, for example, is adulterated when fillers, chemicals, and human deceit renders a meal unsafe for the very people who depend on it. But adulteration extends far beyond the plate. For example, knowledge is adulterated when it becomes a means to mislead rather than enlighten. Power is adulterated when it serves the ego instead of upholding justice.

Wealth is adulterated when it is earned without honesty.

Even relationships are adulterated when sincerity is mixed with manipulation or self-interest. And perhaps the most damaging adulteration is what we inflict on the environment - clean air contaminated with toxins, rivers poisoned with industrial waste, soil weakened by chemicals, all of this corrupts the natural Rizq meant to sustain life.

A polluted ecosystem is adulterated Rizq. It may seem whole from afar, but has in actuality lost the purity necessary to nourish and protect the life around it and within.

Dishonesty adulterates Rizq by stripping it of its intended purpose - breaking a pact of trust. In this context, the wisdom of Mian Muhammad Baksh carries profound relevance:

“Jhooth di roti agge, sacch da danasza changa.”

Better a single grain earned in truth
than a full loaf born of falsehood.

This is because adulteration does not only damage the material form of a blessing, it destroys its moral essence. A blessing mixed with dishonesty or harm cannot fulfill its purpose, no matter how abundant it appears.

Maybe that is why The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasised:

“And he who gives adulterated goods to others, is not from us. And Allah will remove barakat from the livelihood of the Muslim brothers. (Allah) will destroy his economy and leave him upon his own condition.”

WASTING RIZQ BY APATHY & INACTION

There is a kind of waste that leaves no visible trace, no spilled grain or polluted river, yet it may be the most destructive of all. It is the waste that comes from apathy, from quietly deciding not to act where it is necessary.

Apathy is not the absence of Rizq. It is the absence of a response to it being concentrated or adulterated. It is when we possess blessings, but do not use them to uplift ourselves or others. It shrinks the radius of human responsibility until it includes only the self. It is when we see need, injustice, or suffering, and convince ourselves that it is not of our concern.

In such a world, Rizq may be present, in the form of knowledge, wealth, youth, strength - but none of it reaches the places where it is needed. Thus, potential dries up, simply because no one acted. Time is wasted not only when it is spent foolishly, but when it is spent indifferently. Talent is wasted not only when misused, but when unused. Compassion is wasted not only when rejected, but when never expressed.

Apathy wastes Rizq by allowing blessings to die in their potential rather than flourish in their purpose.

WASTING RIZQ THROUGH INGRATITUDE

There is another form of waste that does not come from scarcity, corruption, or indifference. It emerges from the heart itself. It is the waste that comes from ingratitude, from failing to recognize a blessing for what it is.

Ingratitude is subtle. It begins when we stop seeing Rizq as something entrusted to us, and begin seeing it as an entitlement. When the extraordinary becomes ordinary, or when what once moved us to humility begins to feel like something we've deserved all along.

The Qur'an describes this spiritual law with clarity:

"If you are grateful, I will surely increase you. But if you are ungrateful, indeed My punishment is severe."

(Surah Ibrahim, 14:7)

And more profoundly the Prophet (pbuh) said:

Allah says "I swear by My Glory and Might , if you are pleased with what I have allocated for you I will bring comfort to your heart and body and you will be praised by Me. On the other hand , if you are not content with what I have allocated for you. I swear with My Glory and Might I will set the world loose on you where you will run just like Animals run in the wild and you will still not get more than what I originally allocated for you. O son of Adam I created the Seven Heavens and the Earth effortlessly, so would it trouble Me to simply send a loaf of bread your way? . O son of Adam, don't ask me for tomorrow's sustenance just like I have not asked you for tomorrow's deeds, O son of Adam I LOVE YOU so by my right over you, LOVE ME"

This narration reveals that the greatest wastage of Rizq happens through ingratitude. When we are content, our blessings nourish us fully, bringing peace to both heart and body. But when we are restless and dissatisfied, life becomes a constant chase, and even abundant Rizq begins to feel insufficient. Allah reminds us that the One who created the heavens and the earth can surely send a loaf of bread, and that distrust in provision is ultimately distrust in the Provider. Ingratitude wastes Rizq not because it isn't given, but because we have refused to receive it with grace, failing to discharge the responsibility set over us in return for our provisions.

CONCLUSION

Through this chapter, we uncovered what Rizq truly is, what it means for it to be wasted, and the subtle ways in which that waste takes place - that is, through concentration, adulteration, apathy, and ingratitude. These patterns helped us see waste not merely as an action, but as a disruption of purpose, a misalignment between a blessing and the life it was meant to sustain.

But once we understood what waste is and how it happens, the natural next task for us was to understand the deeper 'why' behind the 'how'.

Why do we waste our Rizq at all?

Why do individuals, communities, institutions, and entire societies repeatedly fall into behaviors that damage, hoard, corrupt, or neglect their Rizq?

Why does waste persist even in the presence of abundance?

Why do systems continue to produce hunger, inequality, and depletion when resources clearly exist? Answering this "why" took us beyond individual actions and into the realm of deeper moral, cultural, and structural forces, the values we uphold, the incentives we normalise, and the worldview that shapes our collective behavior. Waste, at its core, is not simply a logistical or economic issue. It is a reflection of the systems we create and the moral assumptions we live by.

To understand why Rizq is wasted, we needed to understand the worldview that allows and sometimes even encourages that waste. That exploration forms the heart of the next chapter. There, we will step back from the symptoms and examine the systems and moral currents that perpetuate them and begin to understand the deeper transformation required for Rizq to flow through humanity justly, purposefully, and sustainably.

4. EXCHANGING VICES WITH VIRTUES

In the last chapter, we explored ways in which we understood that Rizq is laid to waste, ie. by resource concentration, adulteration, apathy and ingratitude. These forms of waste, as destructive as they are, are not the origin of the problem; they are mere symptoms and one must dig deeper still to truly arrive at the root of the disease.

This naturally brought us to the question why human beings waste at all in the first place.

Why do we hoard the Rizq that is meant to circulate, and why do we adulterate what is meant to remain pure?

To answer this, we had to move beyond the visible mechanics of waste, and enter the moral terrain from which it emerges. Wastage reflects not the scarcity of resources, but rather a malaised condition of the human heart.

At the root of that condition lie the forces that quietly influence our choices, behaviors, and systems, these being the vices we fall into, and the virtues we abandon.

Human Vices: The Hidden Architecture of Today's Economic Systems

Modern societies incentivise greed by treating it as an ambition, arrogance as a display of confidence, extraction as resource efficiency, and competition as a natural engine of progress. This is precisely how, over time, behaviours that were historically considered vices have become normalised, then institutionalised. It is not long before they become the architecture of entire economies:

- When greed is rewarded, hoarding is a rational response.
- When apathy is tolerated, neglect becomes normalised.
- When envy is inflamed, comparison becomes a way of life.
- When fears are triggered, insecurity becomes a market.
- And when individualism is worshipped, communal thinking becomes optional.

In a world built upon these trade-offs, the existence of widespread hunger and poverty is not surprising. It is a design choice and a marker of systemic success. After all, the systems are nothing more than a reflection of the humans that make up those systems. As we have earlier established, hunger is not the outcome of a shortage of Rizq, it is the outcome of systems built upon human vices. When societies elevate self-interest above shared humanity, they deliberately generate those conditions where some drown in excess, while others starve without reprieve.

Therefore to effectively challenge the systems that perpetuate hunger and poverty, we need to challenge the foundations of these systems by converting them from human vices to human merits and values. And to do this in a way that is precise, this requires a deeper understanding of the roots of vices and virtues.

THE ROOT OF VICE

From where do these vices emerge? Are human beings naturally selfish? Naturally competitive, as we've been taught by classical economics? Naturally inclined to hoard, ignore, corrupt, or neglect? For us at Rizq, through years of reflection, field experience, and introspection, one realisation has emerged with striking clarity:

Every vice is a child of fear.

Greed is born out of a fear of scarcity, a pre-emption that human resources are limited, that abundance will run out, and that survival thus depends on taking more than one's needs at a given moment.

Envy, similarly, emerges from the fear that someone else's success diminishes our own worth, that others will outpace us, or that we are falling behind in life.

Wrath, then, is born out of a fear of vulnerability, erupting when a person fears being hurt, disrespected, exposed, or powerless. It is the armor fear uses to protect the ego.

Pride, arrogance and superiority are often a flimsy compensation for a quieter inner fear, that without exaggeration we may not be enough, or that humility will make us invisible.

Lust is not desire itself, it is an excess of desire fueled by fear. The fear of not being loved, not being accepted, or not being connected drives a person to seek validation through the consumption of others.

Overindulgence or gluttony arises from the fear that one's comforts will disappear, that pleasure is fleeting, or that satisfaction must be seized before it is lost.

Sloth is rarely apathy; it is often the fear of trying and failing, the fear that one's effort will not matter, or that responsibilities will expose one's limitations.

This is the multitude of ways in which fear shrinks the human heart. It pulls a person into survival mode even when survival is not actually at risk, and it is within that state that compassion begins to feel unsafe, generosity starts to feel costly, and the truth becomes negotiable. We have found fear to be something that instantly shrinks the human imagination, and reduces our moral horizon to the confines of the self. When this happens on a collective scale, hunger is no longer merely a social or economic failure, it becomes the visible symptom of an invisible set of fears; fears that drive us to take more than we need, leaving others with less than what they deserve.

As fear spreads, it becomes the emotional currency of a society. Vices begin to appear rational, and injustices become predictable.

ORIGIN OF FEAR

If vices grow out of fear, the next question is:

Where does fear itself originate from?

Human beings are not born afraid. A child, for example, does not worry about tomorrow's food, tomorrow's opportunities, or tomorrow's survival. A child moves through the world with an unspoken certainty, **"someone will take care of me"**. This early trust is not taught, it is simply the natural state of the human heart.

Fear enters later during the chronology of one's life, at moments when that trust is shaken. Fear grows when we begin to believe that we are alone - in our struggles, in our provision, in our future. Disconnection from people, from community, from nature, and above all from the Divine, precipitate this notion that one is alone.

It is when a heart feels cut off, unprotected, unsupported, unguided, that fears of being alone emerge, and consequently vices appear as coping mechanisms to salvage one's survival, fearing if we don't thrash about, there is nothing and no one to care for us. These fears of scarcity are not due to a presence of danger, they are a natural consequence of the absence of trust in, first, God, second, oneself, and third, one's wider community. Ultimately, it is a belief that says **"I am alone in the world - and I must secure myself by any means necessary, even at the cost of others."**

The Antidote to Fear & Root of Virtue

And this is why, across spiritual traditions and in the Quranic worldview, the opposite of fear is not courage, **it is faith (yakeen)**. Courage can exist with fear, but faith dissolves it entirely.

Courage fights fear, while faith goes a step further and replaces it with certainty.

When a human being truly internalises that sustenance is written by Allah, that Rizq flows from a Source that is never depleted, that is when generosity becomes natural, compassion becomes safe, and honesty becomes effortless. A person who feels held by the Divine does not need to hold tightly to the world, and is able to act compassionately, from a place of virtue, without fears of scarcity.

Simply put, our lesson in sum: Fear creates vice, and faith creates virtue.

The systems human beings build mirror the fears and aspirations they carry. If fear dominates human hearts, vices will dominate socio-economic systems. For just and compassionate systems, virtues must dominate human hearts, and for that to be the case, belief & faith are paramount.

5. SUSTAINING HUMAN LIVES, FULFILLING TRUE POTENTIAL

After asking “Why hunger?”, and after diagnosing waste, misallocation, and the moral roots of poverty? After relentlessly asking ourselves how it is that fear breeds vice, and how virtue can repair what fear corroded for centuries - we finally arrived at a fundamental turning point in the Rizq movement:

Now that we understand the moral underpinnings by which we wish to design our movement, how do we put all of this into practice through Rizq?

In the previous chapter, we explained how we arrived at an understanding of how human vices create systems of deprivation and how human virtues offer the only real antidote. That journey led us to the next defining axiom in our unravelling of poverty:

If human vices can shape entire systems, then human virtues can reshape them.

But, as co-founders of a grassroots-led effort and increasingly seasoned practitioners, we recognised this truth to be only half of the work. Transforming vice into virtue is not an abstract exercise, and should not merely be a matter of moral idealism or philosophical preference. Virtues must now move from theoretical to tangible, and from the depths of our moral imagination to the tactile gears and springs of real systems.

- How do we, through Rizq, build a food system where compassion is not just felt, but engineered?
- How can the three of us work to create markets where integrity is a mandatory structuring force?
- How do we, at this organisation, design programs where justice is not an aspiration but an operating principle?
- And lastly, perhaps most crucially - how do we translate an ethical worldview into actual models that actually sustain human lives, both in Pakistan, and beyond?

Because the task of achieving true food security, and bigger still, truly sustaining all human life, is not solely an endeavour of feeding the hungry. To really achieve these lofty ideals, the goal must be for us to construct the systems that allow every human being to grow, flourish, and fulfill their potential. It is, then, about the following overlying mission:

SUSTAINING HUMAN LIFE, TO FULFILL ITS TRUE POTENTIAL

To do this, Rizq needed a clear method, and a replicable approach that could be applied across every broken system we encountered.

DIAGNOSING THE SYSTEM - IDENTIFYING THE VICE

Having established for ourselves, and our team, that every broken human system carries a moral failing or a vice at its core, we set to re-defining our process. Before we set about designing a solution for any broken system, it was important to spend time evaluating what had corrupted it in the first place. Poverty, malnutrition, exploitation are not accidents of nature or unavoidable consequences of economic structures. They are the moral shadows cast by human choices.

As we studied the food ecosystem across Pakistan, from discarded trays in the cities' largest banquet halls to empty plates in slums and villages, a single insight would keep revealing itself:

Every material problem has a moral root, awaiting diagnosis.

Such as unaffordable food, emerging from **greed**

Unsafe and unhygienic food emerging from **dishonesty**.

Wasted food emerging from **apathy**.

Farmer exploitation emerging from **injustice**.

Community hunger amidst abundance, emerging from **fear-based hoarding and neglect**.

Thus, the expressions may differ, but the underlying principle has been the same wherever we've journeyed to in our work: material failures are always, bar none, preceded by moral failures. We have since come to recognise clearly that these are not random problems. They are patterns of vice running through every node of entire resource systems, whether a small farm, a restaurant, a policy institution.

We began designing programmatic interventions at Rizq, for each of these problems, shaped explicitly around the vice we found to be at its foundation:

- **Through Rizq Bachao**, we confront apathy by converting food waste into a system for rescuing surplus food.
- **Through Rizq Khana**, we confront greed and exclusion by refusing profit-maximisation and ensuring the masses can access affordable, dignified meals.
- **Through Rizq Ration & Relief Systems**, we have worked to confront neglect by building reliable, thoughtfully-designed community support for crisis and hunger.
- **Kissan Dost Program & Rizq Breeds** confront injustice by restoring fairness and value to small farmers.
- **Youth Republic & Leadership Programs** confronted collective apathy by cultivating responsibility, compassion, and civic action among Pakistan's youth.

Each of our programs was a moral intervention before it became a technical one. We weren't simply solving operational issues, we were consciously trying to replace a vice with its counterpart virtue as the antidote.

Over time, as these programs grew in scale, scope, and geography across the country, patterns began to emerge. Problems across similar domains clustered together, and multiple vices lived inside single segments of the food system. And our practical experience naturally crystallized into five thematic divisions, each shaped by the moral failures they needed to address.

- Food Access & Nutrition
- Sustainable Agriculture & Livestock
- Relief & Resilience
- Research & Policy
- Youth & Community Development

DESIGNING SYSTEMS WITH INSTITUTIONALISED VIRTUES

The next step for Rizq was operationalisation, building models, processes, teams, and pricing mechanisms as a means of sculpting these virtues into the structures that would channelise them, uphold them, while functioning sustainably. Through on-ground implementation, watching these invisible axioms translate into the very impact we'd sought to enact, we gained increasing conviction learned that virtues become real when they are:

- Engineered into pricing models,
- Consciously codified into operations,
- Reflected in supply chains,
- Practiced in governance, and
- Demonstrated through concrete outcomes.

To achieve this set of outcomes, we built three kinds of models at Rizq, each capable of institutionalising virtue in its own way.

A- Welfare Programs

There are segments of society that are incredibly destitute, vulnerable, or wholly structurally excluded from economic participation. These communities cannot be sustained through the very existing market systems that precipitate their living conditions - welfare must be a necessary component of remediation. For these subsets of society, bottom of the pyramid communities, generosity must be institutionalised.

Rizq's food safety nets, food banks, food distribution networks, disaster, and emergency relief programs are structured around the antidotal virtues of compassion and solidarity, supported by mission-aligned donors whose giving is guided by the same values.

Thus, our overarching aim has been to build Rizq not as an ad-hoc charity, or even simply a structured charity with the mandate of briefly alleviating hunger. We have conceived it at the outset - and then attempted to build it up as a system that sustains lives with dignity, consistency and compassion.

Welfare, for us, has become a moral obligation we strive to express through institutional reliability and continuous challenging and elevating existing practices around welfare-based giving - building in greater dignity, respect, inclusivity, transparency wherever we find it lacking.

B- Social Businesses

There are many social problems, like urban nutrition, food affordability, and farmer incomes, where creating further dependence is not the answer and charity is not enough.

These are the gap areas where virtue must be built into a sustainable enterprise. Our business endeavours must then be designed so that compassion, fairness, purity, and dignity form the financial engine of the model - a social businesses model.

In **Rizq Khana**, our low cost affordable nutrition social business, we resisted profit-maximization not because it is morally undesirable, but because the moral virtue of compassionate access had to be engineered into the pricing model itself.

Social business, Rizq believes, allows a virtue to become self-sustaining.

C- Commercial Ethics Businesses

Markets shape entire human societies on a massive scale. If left unchecked, these markets reward vice, extraction, adulteration, exploitation and misinformation. Rizq responds by building commercial companies where integrity, purity, traceability, and justice are non-negotiables. These companies are designed to operate at market pace and commercial scale, but with ethical constraints necessarily built into sourcing, production, packaging, branding, and pricing, not as add-ons but as the very essence of the thing

Our goal, through these commercial endeavours, is to demonstrate the power of virtue that becomes **market discipline**, where fiscal success does not have to come at the cost of human dignity or environmental health.

WHY DO ALL THIS?

At the heart of everything Rizq does further lies the unshakeable conviction that human beings are inherently honoured. This belief is not the property of any one culture or tradition, as we have found, it is a fundamental assertion echoed across civilisations and philosophies. The Qur'an reminds us,

We have indeed honored the children of Adam

Surah Isra-Verse 70

Honour is mentioned before sustenance, before law, before responsibility. Across the Abrahamic faiths, human dignity is unconditional, not an afterthought. Rumi calls the human "a treasure house the universe cannot contain," Martin Luther King Jr. affirms that every person possesses an inherent worth. Across continents and centuries, the same message reappears: a human life carries intrinsic value simply by existing.

Modern psychology arrives at the same conclusion from a different path, and Abraham Maslow observed that the human spirit is not designed merely to survive, it is designed to rise. At the base of his hierarchy are physical needs, food, safety, shelter, but at the top lies self-actualisation, the fulfillment of one's gifts, capacities, and inner purpose. Yet a person cannot reach the higher stages of their evolution if the foundations are broken - a hungry child cannot dream boldly, an exploited farmer cannot flourish, a humiliated labourer cannot engage in creativity. A mother struggling to feed her family cannot pursue higher spiritual meaning, and a young person crushed by fear cannot rise to their brilliance. To truly, deeply sustain a human life, therefore, is to protect the very ladder through which human potential can climb upward.

This truth is beautifully captured in the wisdom of Baba Farid, who expressed in a simple, piercing couplet:

**Panj rukan Islam de, chewāñ Fareeda tuk.
Je na labay chewa, panje jandey muk**

Here Baba Fareed claims that bread is the sixth pillar of Islam, and in fact is so important that if one does not have it fulfilled then the other five don't matter, a clear indication towards the fact that a lack of resources and food will constrain a human from reaching their potential. A person deprived of sustenance is deprived of the ability to worship, to learn, to grow, to contribute, to fulfill the destiny woven within them. Far from a simple act of charity, the act of feeding someone is then a restoration of their dignity, a reawakening of their possibility, a recognition of their divine imprint.

Islamic philosophy takes this a step further. The human being is not only honoured, but duly and deliberately appointed: "I am placing a vicegerent on earth." To be a vicegerent is to be a steward of creation, a bearer of moral responsibility, a mirror of divine attributes in the world. But this divinely

appointed duty of vicegerency is impossible without dignity, and dignity is impossible without sustenance.

This is why Rizq does what it does. Our work is not simply to distribute food, rescue waste, support farmers, educate youth, or design social ventures. These are means, not ends. The true purpose is to sustain human lives in a way that allows them to rise, heal, create, serve, and ultimately fulfill the purpose they carry within themselves. We do not feed people to keep them alive, we feed them so they may become. Every program, every model, every division of Rizq carries this belief at its core, that human dignity is sacred, that human potential is vast and that systems built upon virtue can unlock that potential in ways that transform families, communities, and entire societies.

Because it is when dignity is protected that human potential awakens. And when this potential awakens, true justice - social, economic, and moral - finally begins to take shape.

Conclusion - Sustenance as the Path to Purpose

Rizq's ideological journey leads us to a fundamental truth:

**We do not feed people merely to keep them alive.
We sustain human beings so that they may become.**

Our work is not defined by the mechanics of food recovery or program delivery, it is defined by the things those actions make possible - restoration of human dignity, awakening of potential, and reclaiming of purpose.

Hunger, as we have learned over and over since 2015, is not simply the absence of food. It is the consequence of systems stripped of virtue. And sustenance, in its truest sense, is not the filling of a plate but the freeing of a life, freeing a child to learn, a farmer to earn with honour, a mother to breathe without fear, and a young person to imagine a future worthy of their dreams. Every intervention we build, in food access, agriculture, relief, youth leadership, and research, is guided by the central conviction that human potential is sacred and that our systems must be designed to help it rise and not crush it.

This, in sum, is why Rizq exists. Not only to save food, and not only to build livelihoods. Our mission is to honour the human spirit, by enabling humans to play their role as divine vicegerents and achieve their highest potential, and to build the systems that can facilitate this journey.

PART 2:
CASE STUDIES & MODELS



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Rizq Bachao

Rizq Bachao: Pakistan's First Surplus Food Marketplace

AT A GLANCE:

Launched in 2015, Rizq Bachao was conceptualized as a response to a glaring contradiction within Pakistan's food systems - where millions of tons of wasted food coexisted with millions of families unable to feed themselves. Rizq Bachao intercepts surplus food across the supply chain, from farms to commercial kitchens, linking excess food to food-insecure communities. Through a mix of digital matchmaking and Rizq's own logistics, this surplus is then rescued, sorted, and redistributed via a network of food banks and partner organizations. Originally initiated in Lahore by three co-founders studying at LUMS, the program evolved from a personal effort to a structured network of Pakistan's first food banks and also its first-ever food recovery logistics fleet, and then into a tech-enabled marketplace model.

Rizq's policy efforts also broke ground. **The team collaborated with the Punjab government on the "Disposal of Excess Food" Regulation (2019),** to standardize food donation practices, marking a critical step toward institutionalizing food redistribution in Pakistan.

Today, Rizq Bachao stands as a model of how community-driven innovation can solve systemic problems. **It has rescued and re-channelised over 4 million kilograms of food, recovered over PKR 100+ million worth of food value,** served countless meals with dignity, and built a sustainable, scalable system that other organizations can learn from, onboarding 38 Bachao donor and beneficiary partners into its network. Rizq Bachao provided a foundation to the entire building of Rizq trust by uncovering the levels of systemic inefficiencies that exist at every level of the food chain.

More than just a project, Rizq Bachao is a movement, one that has redefined the way large swathes of the Pakistani populace thinks about food waste, dignity, and hunger.

BACKGROUND

Food wastage remains a largely ignored issue worldwide, but **an altogether invisible crisis in Pakistan. It is estimated that 36 million tons of food are wasted in the country annually - approximately 40% of Pakistan's total food production.** Culturally, lavish feasts and large banquets are commonplace, generating staggering amounts of high-quality surplus food that ends up in garbage dumps or informal markets; a reality that lives in stark, paradoxical contrast to the fact that millions in the country starve and are under-nourished.

“LAVISH FEASTS ARE COMMONPLACE, GENERATING STAGGERING AMOUNTS OF HIGH QUALITY SURPLUS FOOD THAT ENDS UP IN GARBAGE DUMPS”

In 2015, this contradiction became impossible to ignore for Huzaifa Ahmed, a LUMS sophomore. Inspired by his mother's daily dastarkhwan, and disturbed by the sheer volume of food discarded at events while entire communities went to bed hungry. It seemed incredulous that no effort had been made across the nation to connect the two, a solution that, at the outset, seemed simple and straightforward, and - as a student of Economics - a classical, albeit overlooked case of mismatched supply and demand. Inspired, he shared an idea with his friends Musa and Qasim: what if the three of them set about collecting surplus food, and redistributing it amongst the hungry? Better yet, what if they re-envisioned the very system in place, the main driver of this injustice?

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

Though simple in its initial iteration, Rizq Bachao was never conceived as merely a one-off charity project. From the very outset, the founders were clear about three things: That hunger is not caused by a lack of food, but by the broken systems that waste it; that people deserve dignity rather than pity; and that the model had to be envisioned as something financially and logistically sustainable, rather than a knee-jerk emotional reaction to waste. Moreover, though resolving food insecurity in Pakistan is traditionally associated with charitable giving and selfless, spiritual servitude, the founders felt this was not enough to engender a systemic push towards greater food security and human dignity. Ideally, they felt, food support would be designed so as to treat recipients as customers, rather than passive beneficiaries.

At that time, surplus food recovery was almost unheard of in Pakistan. There were no policies in place, no incentives to encourage this sort of endeavor, and no operational models or prior local precedents to follow. Through Rizq Bachao, Huzaifa and his friends thus set out to design and stress-test a model that could:

- Make it more 'normal' and safe for institutions to donate their surplus food;
- Offer a framework, an infrastructure, and a robust logistics network that would convert ad hoc leftover-handouts into a structured, quality-controlled giving endeavor, connecting screened beneficiaries with high-quality, sorted, repackaged food;
- Eventually evolve into a marketplace that could create value, both socially and financially speaking, out of excess food.

THE MODEL & ITS EVOLUTION

Over the course of the past ten years, Rizq Bachao has evolved through three phases, each corresponding with lived experience as first-time food rescue practitioners, an evolving socio-economic landscape, and perspectives informed by real-world constraints and learnings.

PHASE 1 (2015 - 2020): THREE BOYS, ONE MISSION

Logistical Model:

The journey began with a simple Facebook post:

“TEAM RIZQ IS READY TO COME TO YOUR DOORSTEP TO COLLECT THE SURPLUS FOOD LEFT FROM YOUR WEDDINGS, DAWATS, AND OTHER FUNCTIONS. JUST GIVE US A CALL.”

To the founders' surprise, the response was immediate, as messages and calls began pouring in almost immediately. Rizq Bachao, which would eventually grow in a nationwide movement, then began with the three founders using their personal cars in between classes, picking up food from homes and small events, and then delivering it to nearby low-income communities in slums, beneath flyovers, and in industrial areas.

As the movement grew, and the car excursions began increasing in frequency, they realised the need for a dedicated infrastructure. This sparked two landmark innovations:

- The 'Rizqshaw', Pakistan's first dedicated food recovery rickshaw, an end-to-end collection and distribution vehicle that operated across Lahore, picking up food from donors and delivering it directly to communities.
- The First Food Bank in Sultanpura, a brick-and-mortar move beyond random 'hunger hotspots', and an effort to build deeper community relationships, Rizq established its first community food bank in Sultanpark. Surplus food from restaurants, wedding halls, and individuals was brought here, sorted, stored hygienically, and then distributed to the local community.

The core beneficiaries at this stage were low-income households in and around Sultanpurk. All donations and distributions were recorded manually by the teams.

Financial Model:

From the beginning, Rizq was wary of creating dependencies. Wherever possible, food was offered at a token price far below market rates, but just enough to shift the relationship from 'handout' to 'transaction'. This helped preserve self-respect among community members, and test the idea of beneficiaries as customers, not passive recipients. In reality, most of the costs in this phase, fuel, operations, coordination, were covered by the founders' own savings and small donations. After about six months, financial pressures made it clear that the model would need serious restructuring to survive.

Early Challenges & Wins

Despite viral attention, large institutions hesitated to come forward and provide their bulk amounts of surplus food. There were no policies protecting donors, and donating excess food was seen as a risky endeavor with legal ramifications, operational hurdles, and health risks.

“THE FOUNDERS SPENT MONTHS KNOCKING ON CORPORATE DONORS OFTEN HEARING NO OR NOTHING AT ALL”

Yet, several key wins laid the foundation for what came next. The first was a growing youth volunteer network formed around the idea - more and more young people resonated deeply with the cause, and were drawn to its uniqueness. This volunteer network would go on to become the Rizq Youth Republic, the cornerstone of all of Rizq's youth programs and community engagement efforts today.

The second win was Rizq's first major institutional donor - Monal Restaurant agreed to join the food redistribution cause, supplying surplus food for redistribution, and actively encouraging its own customers to waste less food. A partnership with a heavyweight like Monal immediately signalled to other businesses and conglomerates within the food industry that partnership was a possibility, and more agreements began rolling in.

Third, the LUMS Social Innovation Lab, and the broader LUMS campus ecosystem, stepped up to provide intellectual, logistical, and moral support, helping Rizq move from a nascent volunteer initiative to a more refined, structured non-profit.

PHASE 2 (2020 - 2022): STANDARDISATION & SCALE DURING COVID

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it simultaneously became a pressure test and a catalyst for Rizq Bachao. When markets closed, and supply chains ground to a halt, surplus food began piling up on shelves with nowhere to go. Meanwhile, in stark contrast, the country's poorest daily-wage earners and vulnerable households began facing acute hunger, with no discernible end in sight. Food donations skyrocketed from families and companies moved to act out of compassion, and Rizq suddenly found itself handling 4-5 tons of food per day, with a still-evolving operational backbone not yet equipped to handle these volumes.

Shift to Institutional Donors & Verified NGOs:

To manage this shift in scale, and to ensure that the food reached those most in need, Rizq Bachao pivoted from scattered individual donors, exclusively towards large-scale institutional donors restaurants, caterers, corporates. The founders opted to shift end-distribution from direct community handouts to verified NGO partners, such as orphanages, non-commercial schools, food banks and redistribution hubs, madrassas and mosques, langarkhanas, dastarkhwans, and relief and emergency shelters. Each NGO went through a strict vetting process and a series of capacity building trainings, ensuring both genuine need while also maintaining an adherence to Rizq's standards.

Logistics & Quality Systems:

To handle growing complexity and risk, Rizq introduced formal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for its Bachao supply, demand, storage, logistics, and knowledge partners. Compliance frameworks - including a warning and blacklisting mechanism for non-compliant partners - became a necessary series of guardrails. To align Bachao's operations with industry best practices, HACCP-aligned protocols were introduced, covering staff and volunteer training on food safety, storage, temperature control, hygiene (gloves, shoe covers, coverings), and sorting. In order to accommodate increasing volumes of surplus food, the Bachao team expanded from a single Rizqshaw to a small fleet of Bachao rickshaws and cars that were later supported by logistics partners like Foodpanda.

Financial Model:

The financial model for Bachao evolved alongside its logistics and operational expansion. This phase saw the first entry of corporate funding donors and grant funding into Rizq's donation pool, enabling Rizq to cover operational overheads to a greater extent than before. The revenue model for Bachao also shifted as Rizq moved towards a network-enabling approach - instead of charging individuals a nominal fee from the end consumer, they began charging the recipient non-profit a monthly subscription fee for the excess food they received via Rizq.

These developments were indicative of the fact that Rizq Bachao, during this phase, had transitioned from a scrappy student initiative with classroom origins, into a recognized, structured brand in the food security and wastage space.

PHASE 3 (2022 - PRESENT): FROM OPERATOR TO MARKETPLACE

Despite these successive wins for Rizq Bachao, the fully-managed logistics model remained costly and demanding. Fuel prices, staff time, and vehicle maintenance became a source of constant stress for the team, calling the existing model into question yet again.

However, as Pakistan emerged from COVID, so did an opportunity to evolve the Bachao model once more - large grocery and food delivery companies were now sitting on mounds of unsold stock, while scores of communities still direly needed reliable access to food. In response to this, Rizq Bachao pivoted from being a full-service operator to acting as a food surplus linking agent or marketplace - creating financial stability in the process.

New Operating Model:

Under the current model, Rizq primarily connects donors with beneficiaries, instead of always physically moving food. Food moves through one of two main pathways:

1. Direct Donor-NGO linkages, where partner organisations coordinate pickups and deliveries themselves.
2. Donors drop food at Rizq's hub, and verified beneficiaries collect it from there.

Rizq now signs clear contracts with donors, specifying donation frequency and quality protocols, maintaining beneficiary profiles, including their needs, capacity, and reporting responsibilities, and conducting random checks and monitoring compliance all to uphold the quality, timeliness, and dignity of operations. Rizq still directly manages food logistics for large-volume corporate partners by using its warehouses as a central node. But the overall system is now lighter, more scalable, and less dependent on Rizq itself having to own every operational step.

IMPACT

To date, the Rizq Bachao program has successfully rescued and rechannelised over 4 million kilograms of food, recovered over PKR 100+ million worth of food value, served over 2 million meals with dignity, and built a sustainable, scalable system that other organisations can learn from, onboarding 38 Bachao donor and beneficiary partners into its network.

Within just the COVID and immediate post-COVID period, Rizq Bachao engaged over 200 surplus food donors and more than 180 vetted distribution partners across at least five major cities, assembling a nationwide ecosystem of kitchens, warehouses, NGOs, community organisations and corporate partners around a single, shared purpose, that good food should never go to waste while hunger persists.

Equally notable was the quality of what was recovered. Nearly half of all food rescued during this period consisted of fresh fruits and vegetables, with bakery items and essential groceries together making up much of the remaining volume. In total, roughly three-quarters of all food redistributed consisted of fresh produce, bread, and basic groceries, a powerful statement further challenging prevalent hesitations about food surplus redistribution - Rizq Bachao has thus demonstrated that a food rescue program need not conjure up images of table scraps and subpar leftovers, but that it could mean nutritious offerings, high quality food, and respect.

CHALLENGES & KEY LEARNINGS

Over a decade, several critical challenges shaped the evolution of the Bachao model. Among the earliest lessons was that of the importance of clear targeting and dignity for surplus food redistribution - as the cofounders began to sell food at token rates within communities, the jostle of the earliest unstructured process failed to differentiate between target and non-target buyers, frequently crowding out those in real need, and occasionally leading to unpleasant refusals. Introducing vetting processes - and later partnering with vetted NGOs - significantly improved targeting, while preserving the dignity of the buyers

In terms of logistics and capacity, the expanding scope of work would sometimes reveal gaps in storage and safety infrastructure, such as the first large donation of hundreds of packets of cheese, requiring a cold storage facility. Each such reveal would catalyse investment in better facilities, as well as the eventual introduction of training and SOPs. Similarly, as volumes of food donations increased, and as Rizq's own desire to target the problem at an increasingly higher, systemic level grew, Rizq was continuously pushed to redesign its own role. Bachao moved from being a free logistics provider, to a linkage model, to a marketplace-builder for food waste powered by corporate financing.

Ultimately, the key operational takeaway was thus: Surplus food recovery is not just a matter of logistics. It is a systems intervention that requires policy, culture change, standardisation, and sustainable business logic.

FUTURE ROADMAP

Rizq Bachao now aims to become Pakistan's go-to solution for surplus food, operating on three main pillars: (1) Commercial surplus trade, whereby Bachao enables businesses to sell near-to-expiry or excess stock to other businesses or end consumers at discounted rates, reducing waste and recovering value; (2) Surplus food redistribution, through which Rizq Bachao continues linking verified donors and beneficiaries through a lean, tech-enabled marketplace model, supporting NGOs, food banks, and community kitchens; and (3) Research, audits & advisory, ie. conducting food waste audits for partners, generating data-driven recommendations, and contributing to national and corporate strategies on food loss and waste.

In essence, Rizq Bachao began simply as a youthful, idealistic challenge to an unjust system posed by three boys with a car, and a Facebook post, and has since evolved into a national surplus-food ecosystem building movement - Pakistan's first. Rizq's inaugural program continues to be among the ones it is best known for, and it continues to demonstrate that when compassion is given a systemic, structured channel, it goes beyond filling plates, it wields the power to shift perceptions and reshape systems.



Rızq Ration

Rizq Ration: A Structured, Dignified Food Safety Net

AT A GLANCE:

Launched in response to the chronic food insecurity faced by Pakistan's most vulnerable households, **Rizq Ration was conceived as the country's first attempt at building a structured, household-level food safety net.** Where Rizq Bachao addressed surplus and emergency hunger, Rizq Ration was designed to confront a prevalent lack of basic continuity, predictability, or dignity in food support for families living in long-term food insecurity.

The program delivers nutritionally planned, monthly ration packs to carefully screened households, over a six-month cycle, and using a tech-enabled targeting and verification model. Beneficiaries are enrolled through a structured assessment framework integrating both the Pakistan Poverty Scorecard and the Household Hunger Index, supported by on-ground verification conducted by trained youth volunteers.

Each family is issued a QR-coded identity, allowing full traceability at every distribution. These records feed into Rizq's digital system, enabling donor-level transparency while protecting recipient privacy. Rations are distributed through Rizq's network of community food banks, offering predictable access. Operational delivery is led by Rizq Youth Republic, whose trained volunteer network administers surveys, manages distributions, maintains records, and drives community fundraising.

At its peak, **Rizq Ration served over 2,300 families and more than 13,000 individuals nationwide, delivering over 20,000 ration packs.** But beyond food, the intervention has offered proof that a systemic, thoughtfully-designed food assistance intervention can significantly improve upon existing norms surrounding ration provision - incorporating technology, extensive verification, and subsidized food assistance models that allows partners and target families themselves to contribute financially to food support.

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity has long been one of Pakistan's most entrenched and invisible injustices. While Rizq Bachao exposed the scale at which food is wasted across urban supply chains, it also brought the founders - Huzaiifa, Musa, and Qasim - face-to-face with a deeper reality: that hunger, for many households in Pakistan, was not episodic. It was persistent, cyclical, and structurally woven into their daily lives

These were families for whom a rescued meal offered momentary relief, but no stability, such as widows caring for children alone, elderly caregivers with failing health, persons with disabilities without reliable income. These were homes where charity arrived sporadically, if at all, and almost always without warning, continuity, or discretion. **It became increasingly clear that Pakistan lacked not food relief, it instead lacked a steady food safety net.**

Rizq Ration thus emerged in response to this gap, envisioned by the team as not a carbon copy of ration drives existing in the country, but as a sincere attempt to build what did not yet exist: a structured, transparent, and dignified food-based support system for those families living at the edge of all formal protections.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

The need for a ration program arose directly from Rizq's earliest field engagements. While surplus food redistribution through Rizq Bachao succeeded at addressing wastage and emergency hunger, many families required something else entirely - continuity, and a predictable monthly supply of essential staples that stabilised the household economy, rather than filling their plates for a night.

From its earliest days, Rizq had resisted the logic that food security could be addressed through spontaneity alone. Hunger, the team had already concluded, could not be solved through emotional, reactive, one-off mobilization without adequate structural design. The absence of any such dependable systems meant that millions of Pakistanis depended on informal charity cycles instead of formal protections. Thus, relief was unpredictable and temporary, while vulnerability was permanent.

The founders were also clear on what Rizq Ration was not meant to become. It was not to be a food emergency line, nor a patronage network, nor a donor-facing charity mechanism devoid of accountability. Encouraging dependency without creating dignity was not acceptable, and neither was opacity in the name of generosity.

What Rizq sought to build instead through Rizq Ration was a systemic infrastructure built as a program, behaving less like a charity and more like a service delivery mechanism. This meant replacing spontaneous giving with continuity, thoughtless volume with verification and targeting, and public spectacle with respectful privacy. It also, simply, meant acknowledging that hunger, in Pakistan, deserved the same architectural seriousness as any other system nationally.

Rizq Ration thus became something of an institutional experiment: Could food support be designed humanely, rather than merely distributed? And could technology serve hunger without alienating the very ones it was meant to protect?

COULD FOOD SUPPORT BE DESIGNED HUMANELY, RATHER THAN MERELY DISTRIBUTED? COULD TECHNOLOGY SERVE HUNGER WITHOUT ALIENATING THE ONES IT MEANT TO PROTECT?

EARLY CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS

The first challenge was targeting. Traditional food distribution efforts tended to favour those with proximity, higher mobility, or greater influence, and thus often excluding the elderly, chronically ill, and women constrained within domestic settings. **Rizq responded to this reality by developing a structured screening model integrating the Pakistan Poverty Scorecard and the Household Hunger Index, reinforced by field verification conducted by trained youth volunteers.** For the first time in many communities, vulnerability was measured instead of simply being assumed.

The second challenge to arise was that of dignity. Public queues and chaotic distributions were deeply embedded within Pakistan's charity landscape as a feature, rather than an exception. Rizq, on principle, rejected this model - asserting from the outset that its support would be quiet, localised, and predictable. Rizq Ration's deliveries would take place through community food banks rather than public gatherings, and against token numbers, not full names publicly announced. Furthermore, families would receive support as clients, not mere beneficiaries.

The final challenge was credibility. While Rizq Ration's donors demanded visibility, the beneficiaries sought privacy. Thinking of ways to balance these two, Rizq responded to this conflict through innovation, developing a robust Rizq Ration digital backbone that was capable of safeguarding family identity while simultaneously ensuring traceability.

These pressures, and Rizq Ration's evolving response to them, shaped the program's final architecture. Targeting accuracy, greater discretion, and donor transparency became non-negotiable pillars for what was no longer a product - rather, a system.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINED

At the heart of Rizq Ration lay a simple yet radical proposition: that families should not have to beg for food or rely on ad hoc donations to survive. Instead, food support should be systematic, predictable, and based on need, not luck or visibility. The first structured model that emerged was a six-month food assistance program designed to provide monthly ration packs to highly vulnerable households. These packs were carefully curated to ensure caloric and nutritional adequacy for an average family size, balancing staples with locally available, culturally appropriate food items.

Eligibility for the program was determined through a rigorous screening process. Rizq employed a combination of the Pakistan Poverty Scorecard and the Household Hunger Index to assess household vulnerability. **Only families scoring 40 or below were enrolled, ensuring that aid was targeted towards those most in need.** Priority was given to households headed by women, especially widows and single mothers, as well as individuals with chronic illness or disabilities.

One of the program's most innovative aspects was its decentralized distribution model. Rather than establishing a single warehouse or central location, Rizq leveraged its nationwide network of more than 30 community-operated food banks. These localised hubs allowed families to access aid in a familiar and trusted environment, while reducing transportation costs and enhancing community ownership. Volunteers played an instrumental role in both distribution and monitoring, ensuring smooth, respectful interactions with beneficiaries.

Technology formed a backbone for the program's transparency and accountability. Each beneficiary family received a unique QR-coded ID, which was scanned at every monthly distribution. This not only streamlined tracking and logistics but also created a detailed, real-time database of distributions, verified receipts, and family-level impact. Using SurveyCTO and the Rizq App, the team developed dashboards that allowed staff and donors to monitor distributions and ensure timely support. Over time, the program expanded to include an e-commerce-style donation platform. This allowed individual and institutional donors to sponsor specific families or communities, receiving detailed updates and real-time confirmation of deliveries. This feature significantly boosted donor confidence and encouraged repeat giving, as contributors were able to see exactly where their funds were going.

Rizq Youth Republic (RYR), the organization's volunteer wing, played a central role in operationalizing the program. Young volunteers supported with household surveys, screenings, logistics, distribution, and outreach. Their engagement not only lowered operational costs but also helped build a new generation of empathetic, civic-minded youth leaders.

SUSTAINABILITY & EVOLUTION

As the Ration program expanded, sustainability became as critical as scale. Rizq began investing early in digital infrastructure, reducing the overall administrative load while increasing accountability: tools like SurveyCTO, QR-based tracking, and automated dashboards helped the Ration team streamline their execution and also strengthen their program oversight. Rizq also quickly realised that emergency feeding could not remain a perpetually open-ended act of relief without eventually risking beneficiary dependency. Thus, the model needed to evolve.

The first major shift was the introduction of a structured six-month support model. Families were not enrolled indefinitely, but instead each household entered a pre-defined period of relief that was reviewed regularly through data collection and on-field verification.

Rizq Ration's second evolution focused on the financial design of the program. As beneficiary needs grew but resources remained finite, Rizq moved away from the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to aid. A tiered ration support model was introduced, based on poverty scorecards and household assessment. Families that were determined to be in the most severe economic circumstances continued to receive a full ration subsidy, while others were placed on a partial assistance plans, receiving 50% of their ration costs, with Rizq covering half of that share, and external donors funding the remainder.

Rizq Ration's service delivery thus became more proportionate, responsive to circumstances. Not everyone was entrenched in similar circumstances, and so not everyone could be met with the same brushstroke of support. An in-house donor-facing digital Rizq Ration platform introduced for donors the ability to sponsor families or communities directly, generating real-time donation confirmations and detailed reporting. This act of transparency greatly improved Ration donor retention and confidence.

At the community level, food banks began evolving into community hubs, as young volunteers, partner organizations, and local community leaders increasingly assumed greater ownership over distributions. In many areas, in an act of tremendous communal compassion, the targeted communities began contributing resources themselves, extending support to new families independently. Rizq Ration thus grew beyond the confines of traditional organizational ownership of a program, and became something more of community infrastructure.

IMPACT

Since its launch, Rizq Ration has delivered over 20,000 subsidized food hampers to more than 2,300 families across Pakistan. These families represent over 13,000 individuals who, for the first time, received consistent food support over a defined period with dignity and transparency.

Quantitatively, the impact was clear. Evaluations indicated improvements in food consumption scores, reduced meal skipping, and greater dietary diversity in households that had previously struggled to secure even one meal a day. Households receiving monthly support were less likely to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as selling valuable assets, withdrawing their children from school, or reducing adult food intake to prioritize children.

Qualitatively, the stories were even more compelling. Women heads of households reported greater confidence in planning meals and felt a renewed sense of dignity.

One beneficiary, a widow and mother of three, shared:

“IT WASN’T ONLY THE FOOD. IT WAS KNOWING THAT EVERY MONTH, SOMEONE WOULD COME. WE DIDN’T HAVE TO ASK OR BEG. THAT DIGNITY... WE HAD FORGOTTEN IT.”

Many families shared that the predictability of support allowed them to plan ahead for the first time in years. In one striking example, a volunteer-led fundraiser generated PKR 450,000 in a single night, allowing immediate food support for 150 families the very next day. These moments of swift, meaningful impact served as powerful validation of the program’s structure.

The program also strengthened community bonds. Because of the localized nature of food banks and the participatory design of distributions, many communities began to self-organize and support each other, with those slightly better off stepping up to assist new beneficiaries. Volunteers grew into leadership roles, often spearheading new drives and mobilizing their own networks for fundraising and support.

CHALLENGES & KEY LEARNINGS

Despite its many successes, the Rizq Ration program faced several challenges, each of which offered valuable learning for future iterations.

One major challenge was ensuring accurate targeting. While the poverty scorecard and hunger index provided structured tools, there were occasional instances of misuse or manipulation. In politically sensitive or densely populated areas, it was sometimes difficult to verify claims or to navigate local power dynamics. These challenges led the team to invest more in field training, introduce verification spot-checks, and develop a stronger referral mechanism through trusted community leaders.

Funding predictability was another hurdle. While the donation platform improved trust and donor retention, the need for flexible, multi-month funding remained critical. This was particularly pressing during times of national crisis, such as COVID-19 or flooding, when demand spiked dramatically. Rizq responded by developing emergency response protocols but recognized the need for a standing fund to ensure uninterrupted support.

As the program scaled, transparency and reporting became more difficult to maintain with the same level of rigor. Tracing each donor's contribution to a specific family was a powerful feature, but required sophisticated data management and manual oversight. Plans are now underway to automate and integrate dashboards more fully to streamline these processes.

Another major reflection was around the program's exit strategy. While the six-month duration was designed to avoid dependency, many families remained deeply vulnerable after the program ended. Some even experienced a psychological dip, having to return to an uncertain food environment after experiencing stability. This has led to internal discussions about how to build "soft exits," such as linking families to livelihood programs, community kitchens, or alternate forms of support.

Finally, the program highlighted a broader systemic gap: the lack of coordinated efforts among government, private sector, and civil society actors in tackling hunger. Rizq Ration, while effective, could achieve even more with structured collaboration, policy backing, and shared infrastructure.

FUTURE ROADMAP

Looking to the future, Rizq Ration is focusing on three key directions to deepen its impact and reach.

First, the team is exploring partnerships with local grocery stores, or kiryana outlets, to enable discreet, neighborhood-based distributions. Families would be able to collect their monthly packs using digital coupons or QR codes, eliminating the need for mass gatherings while increasing convenience.

Second, Rizq is working on digitizing its program operations, manuals, and best practices. These toolkits will be made available to other non-profits, government departments, and corporate CSR arms interested in replicating the model. This shift from direct service delivery to ecosystem enablement reflects the organization's maturity and desire to scale through collaboration.

Third, the development of a donor dashboard is underway, offering real-time tracking of distributions, impact metrics, and financial transparency. This platform aims to become a key resource for data-driven philanthropy in the food security sector.

Additionally, Rizq is pursuing academic partnerships to rigorously evaluate the long-term nutritional and social impacts of food-based safety nets. Such research could help build the evidence base needed to influence national policy and institutionalize models like Rizq Ration within Pakistan's broader welfare ecosystem.

Ultimately, Rizq Ration represents more than a food program. It is a living example of how thoughtful design, community engagement, and technology can come together to protect dignity and preserve life. At a time when hunger is still a daily crisis for too many, this model offers a powerful reminder that a different future is possible, one in which no one is left behind.



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دال چاول
سستا، صاف اور معیاری

Rizq Khana: A Dignified, Scalable Solution to Everyday Urban Hunger

AT A GLANCE:

Launched in Lahore in 2020, Rizq Khana was conceived as a response to a growing but largely unseen crisis in Pakistan's cities - everyday urban hunger among low-wage workers, daily labourers, and informal workers who could no longer afford a single clean, nutritious meal during their working day. **In a context where food inflation crossed 48 percent in 2023, basic cooked meals moved steadily out of reach for those on minimum or unstable incomes.**

Rizq Khana was not designed as a charity kitchen. It was structured as a dignity centred, financially disciplined food service model that prepares meals in a central kitchen and distributes them through a network of mobile food carts stationed at high footfall locations such as hospitals, industrial areas, court complexes and labour markets. **Each cart serves between 150 and 200 meals a day at highly subsidised prices, with simple dishes of daal chawal at around PKR 100 per plate, roughly one third of comparable market rates.**

Behind each plate sits a system. Bulk procurement keeps ingredient costs low. Standardised recipes and hygiene protocols ensure consistency and safety. Trained operators, often from vulnerable backgrounds themselves, run the carts as micro-enterprises, earning income while serving their communities. **Revenue from meal sales covers a significant portion of operating costs, anchoring the model in social business logic rather than grant dependence alone.**

To date, Rizq Khana has served over 1.2 million meals in Lahore, operated 18 food carts at peak scale, and created over 150 jobs across kitchens, carts, logistics and supply chains. In doing so, it has preserved an estimated PKR 70 million in income for the urban poor by offering meals at a fraction of typical prices, and has demonstrated that feeding cities with dignity is possible when design, operations and compassion are given equal weight.

BACKGROUND

As Pakistan's cities expanded over the past decade, rural to urban migration has accelerated, informal settlements have grown denser, and inflation has steadily eroded purchasing power. For the urban poor, and particularly for daily wage earners, the cost of food began to outpace wages. By 2023, food inflation had crossed 48 percent, pushing even basic nourishment out of reach for millions of people whose work kept the city functioning, but whose incomes could no longer secure a full meal.

Rizq's years of work inside Pakistan's food insecure communities, hospitals, labor markets and food banks revealed a sinister and invisible pattern: security guards, sanitation workers, patient attendants, loaders and factory workers are skipping meals to save money for transport, rent and medicine. Others rely on the cheapest street food options available, often prepared without any hygiene standards and with little to no regard for nutrition. Acute hunger during crises tends to draw attention, but everyday hunger in non-emergency times does not.

Existing systems offer little in the way of support. Government programs are not structured around affordable urban meal provision. Where subsidized food does exist, it is often distant, unpredictable, or administratively complex to access. Charity kitchens and sasta dastarkhwans provided relief for some, but many workers feel ashamed eating from spaces that are explicitly branded as charity and do not align with their own sense of dignity.

Rizq Khana emerged in this context. It was not an extension of emergency one-off feeding lines, but an attempt to confront the structural reality that a significant segment of the urban workforce is working full days while being unable to afford a simple, nutritious lunch. The question at the heart of the Rizq Khana model was thus a simple yet demanding one:

**“WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO FEED THE MASSES AT SCALE, EVERYDAY,
WITHOUT COMPROMISING ON DIGNITY, OR SUSTAINABILITY?”**

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

Rizq's earlier programs had already established a guiding insight, that people do not simply want food, they want food that feels 'normal'. Crucially, this means they want meals they can pay for, even if said meals are heavily subsidised, for that does not bear the mark of being a recipient of a handout, and furthermore, they wish to be served in a way that does not mark them out as beneficiaries. Over the years, the team encountered countless stories that underscored this insights, including workers who would stand for twelve hours on duty and still skip lunch to save money, hospital caretakers who chose between eating and paying for medicines, and women in low income neighborhoods who reduce their own food intake so that their children could eat.

At the same time, Rizq observed that most available options for low-income workers in urban centres fell into two (unsatisfactory) categories. Either the food was unaffordable, relative to workers' wages, or it was cheap but unhygienic, lacking in nutritional value and unsafe. Government mechanisms did not reliably address this gap, while private sector responses tended to be few and far between, or only limited to specific sites.

internally, Rizq had also been exploring models of food support that moved beyond one off distribution and traditional charity. Experience had reinforced a central lesson already learnt through Bachao and Ration, that people responded with far greater self-esteem and loyalty when they were treated as customers with agency, rather than as passive beneficiaries.

Rizq Khana was thus designed as a deliberate departure from handout logic. The intention, then, was to build a system where food could be prepared in bulk volume, distributed efficiently, and then sold at an affordable rate, while still recovering a meaningful portion of its cost. It would be based on the social business principles founded by Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus - a sustainable model that reinvested revenue back into itself, while solving a pressing social problem. In practice, this meant designing a hybrid between a social business and a public feeding model, where the urban working class could access clean and nutritious meals

EARLY CHALLENGES & FOUNDATIONAL INSIGHTS

Launching Rizq Khana in 2020 required careful experimentation. The first set of challenges were primarily operational. Chief of these was the fact that producing thousands of meals a day with consistency in taste, safe hygiene and reliable cost control required highly standardised systems that did not yet exist within the organization at that scale. Recipes had to be tested and fixed, portion sizes were calibrated, and kitchen operations were wholly reorganised to accommodate the new bulk production without sacrificing quality.

The second challenge was a cultural barrier. Within popular public perception, low cost food has stereotypically been equated with low quality, carrying an implicit association with social inferiority or desperation. For Rizq Khana to succeed, the team needed to build a brand that signaled dignity rather than charity. This meant investing in clean, recognisable carts, standardised uniforms, clear and attractive signage and simple but neat packaging. The food had to look and feel like something anyone could and would choose, and not something only those in dire need would accept.

The third challenge lay in navigating the urban environment itself, and the various informal, logistical, and even political realities associated along with. Positioning food carts in locations where they were most needed, outside hospitals, near factory gates, in busy markets and transport hubs, was a quagmire of navigating complex permissions, municipal regulations and local power dynamics. Moreover, maintaining a reliable supply chain from central kitchen to multiple carts, every day, demanded a constant refinement of procurement, storage, dispatch and return logistics.

These challenges yielded foundational insights for the Rizq Khana team, who learned that investing heavily in operational discipline at the outset will pay dividends in the long run. They observed that when dignity was made central to program design, people responded positively to high quality, low cost food without hesitation. They also recognized that the cart operator was a critical face of the program, and needed to be trained and empowered as such. Small gestures such as clean plates or a respectful greeting began to shift perceptions.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINED

At its core, Rizq Khana operates through a hybrid model that combines a centralized industrial kitchen facility with a distributed, city-wide network of mobile food carts.

Meals are prepared each morning in a central kitchen equipped for high volume production. Bulk procurement of staples and fresh produce allows the Rizq Khana team to secure ingredients at lower prices, while standardised recipes are designed for balanced nutrition, consistent portion sizing and cultural familiarity. Hygiene protocols structure every stage of preparation, from storage and cooking to packaging and dispatch, ensuring that food safety is not compromised in the pursuit of volume.

From the central kitchen, meals are dispatched daily to Rizq Khana carts located at high footfall sites across the city. These include hospitals, industrial zones, courts, bus stands, universities and labour markets, locations where working people congregate, rest and move. Each cart typically serves between 150 and 200 plates per day, pricing meals at PKR 100, a rate that is significantly below the prevailing cost of similar food in the open market.

Each cart is operated by a trained individual, often vetted by the Rizq team from a vulnerable or low income background, and one selected not only for genuine economic need, but for their willingness to take on responsibility. Through Rizq Khana, they will receive training in food handling, basic hygiene, customer interaction, record keeping, sales and simple inventory management. Thus, over time, this transforms the cart from a static distribution point into a modest micro-enterprise that generates income for the operator while also advancing the program's overall social mandate.

Behind the scenes, Rizq tightly manages supply chains, purchasing ingredients in bulk, tracking inventories, and matching daily production to demand patterns across locations in order to minimize waste. Revenue from sales is collected and recorded, and then reinvested into operations. This enables Rizq Khana to function beyond being a simple feeding line, where it can also serve as an urban food ecosystem, kitchen, logistics, cart network and micro-entrepreneurship program, designed to make nutritious meals affordable and accessible at scale.

SUSTAINABILITY & EVOLUTION

As Rizq Khana matured as a program, financial sustainability became more of a genuine operational requirement than a wistful aspiration. The central kitchen model, coupled with bulk procurement, allowed the program to reduce per-plate costs meaningfully. Revenue from meal sales, amounting to PKR 26 million over the course of the initiative, covered a significant portion of running expenses, marking an important shift away from a complete dependency on grant funding.

Internally, the Rizq Khana team introduced streamlined systems for inventory management, quality assurance, daily production tracking, cart level sales reporting and operator performance monitoring. These measures were vital for reducing losses and providing clear data for decision making. Branding was treated as an essential tenet of the program rather than merely a cosmetic one. Standardised Rizq Khana uniforms, visible hygiene practices such as gloves and consistent cart design helped build public trust, especially among first time customers skeptical of low cost food.

Partnerships gradually helped expand the model's reach. Hospitals and public institutions began requesting carts outside their gates to serve staff and attendants, and factories and enterprises approached Rizq to explore on site feeding solutions for their workers. Word of mouth among the urban working class further strengthened footfall and began building a loyal customer base that returned to the carts daily.

Perhaps most significantly, Rizq Khana demonstrated that a self-sustaining feeding program could generate shared value across the food chain. It became clear that, with disciplined operations, transparent pricing and a strong value proposition, affordable meals in Pakistan's cities did not have to remain a purely philanthropic exercise, divergent from conversations on sustainability; they could instead form part of a social business model that dignified both the consumer and the provider.

IMPACT

The impact of Rizq Khana has been both quantitative and social. As of early 2024, the venture had served over 1.2 million meals in Lahore alone through 19 operational carts at its peak, and a central kitchen that produces fresh food daily. Over 150 jobs were created across kitchens, carts, logistics and supply chains, many of them taken up by individuals who had previously been unemployed or underemployed.

By offering a plate of food at around PKR 100 instead of the typical PKR 180 or more charged at comparable outlets, Rizq Khana preserved an estimated PKR 70 million in income for low wage earners. For daily workers, this difference translated directly into money available for rent, transport, school fees or healthcare. Rather than simply feeding people, Rizq Khana safeguarded incomes and reduced the financial strain that drove many to skip meals in the first place.

"I USED TO SKIP LUNCH EVERY OTHER DAY. NOW I EAT DAILY. I DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FOOD AND MY FAMILY." - ABID, SECURITY GUARD

Fatima, one of the first cart operators, described how running the cart had given her more than an income. It had given her pride and a sense of belonging. "I feel like I am not just selling food," she said. "I am actually feeding people who need it the most, just like me."

Doctors, nurses, office staff and day labourers have shared similar stories of how Rizq Khana had improved their day to day lives. Perhaps most importantly, the model helped normalise the idea that everyone, regardless of income, deserves access to clean, nutritious and affordable meals.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

The road to establishing Rizq Khana was not a smooth one. An especially precarious and slow process has been securing the permissions to place food carts in public or semi public spaces, typically requiring very patient navigation of bureaucratic processes. Public-private partnerships with government departments have been a critical recent development, and have enabled the Khana team to move towards aggressive scale-up across Lahore and beyond.

Maintaining a reliable supply chain at large scale demanded by the operations required daily coordination between procurement, kitchen teams, logistics staff and operators. In the early months, financial deficits were unavoidable, as the food cart model was tested, refined and adjusted to match real world demand and cost structures in Lahore.

Societal perceptions presented their own challenges, as many people initially assumed that a subsidised meal would be of poor quality, or that it was meant only for those in extreme distress. Rizq had to work consistently to build a brand that communicated dignity, cleanliness and value, rather than charitable pity. This required investment in training operators as the first point of contact, standardizing uniforms and packaging, and maintaining visible hygiene standards at carts and in the kitchen.

Each of these challenges carried lessons for the Rizq Khana team. For example, they learnt that professional standards are just as necessary in social programs as in commercial enterprises, particularly when operating in a complex urban environment like Lahore. They further learnt that empowering local cart operators with responsibility and skills created a sense of genuine ownership that even superseded external monitoring. And above all, they saw that when people are treated with respect in even the smallest interactions, they feel imbued with dignity; one of the team's favorite learnings has been watching the progression from 'beneficiary' to 'customer' as repeat customers walk up to the cart and grow comfortable registering complaints or requesting changes to the menu, a signifier of a voice and basic human dignity having been restored.

FUTURE ROADMAP

Following a highly successful pilot in Lahore, Rizq is now preparing to scale Rizq Khana to a national level. Plans are underway to launch the program in Islamabad, Karachi, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, and Sialkot. The expansion aims to set up at least 100 carts across these cities over the next two years, with centralised kitchens established in each new location. A total of PKR 112 million is projected for this scale-up phase, which will be raised through a combination of donor partnerships, CSR contributions, and reinvested revenue.

Beyond expansion, Rizq Khana aims to become a fixture in Pakistan's urban food landscape. The hope is to institutionalise affordable meals as a right rather than a privilege and to work closely with local governments to embed Rizq Khana into urban planning. In the long run, we see this model evolving into a national network of feeding hubs - empowering thousands, feeding millions, and reshaping how Pakistan tackles everyday hunger.

At Rizq, we insist that we let this be the future, where instead of meeting hunger only with charity, we meet it with a sense of heightened design thinking, an emphasis on dignity, and shared purpose.



Kissan Dost Program

Kissan Dost Program: Empowering Small Farmers to Rebuild Food Systems

AT A GLANCE:

Launched in the wake of Pakistan's 2022 floods, the Kisaan Dost Program (KDP) was initiated by Rizq as an emergency response that rapidly evolved into a long-term and farmer-first agricultural model. At a time when entire villages across the nation were underwater, crops were destroyed and households were pushed deeper into debt, KDP set out to offer something different from typical short-term relief offerings. Through this program, Rizq wanted to build proof of concept for a pathway to sustained recovery and resilience, particularly for those small farmers who are not typically served by traditional service providers.

KDP provides smallholder farmers with interest-free, collateral-free input financing, along with high quality, climate-resilient seeds and fertilisers, and season-long technical advisory, followed by end-cycle market linkages. Farmers repay the amount only after harvest, in a single lump sum, aligned with their cash flow, allowing them to cultivate without the constant pressure of servicing debt on top of the existing stresses of managing their croplands. Alongside this, the program introduces farmers to regenerative practices, including optimised fertiliser use, mulching and integrated pest management, helping to improve soil health and reduce input costs over time.

Since 2022, **KDP has supported over 1000 farmers across more than 11,200 acres of land cumulatively in Punjab and Sindh achieving average yield increases of 30 - 45 percent in key crops, reducing input costs by up to 40 percent in many cases and resulting in a repayment rate of 98 percent.** For farmers long dismissed as risky borrowers in areas known as the 'deathbed of microfinance', KDP has demonstrated the opposite, that when treated with dignity and given fair terms, smallholders can be among the most reliable partners in the system.

Today, KDP sits at the heart of Rizq's dedicated sustainable agriculture and livestock division, serving both as an operational program and as a blueprint for how Pakistan's food system might be rebuilt from the ground up with small farmers at its center.

BACKGROUND

Pakistan's food system rests overwhelmingly on the labour and land of its smallholder farmers. They constitute the overwhelming majority of the agricultural workforce yet remain the least protected & least financially equipped and most exposed to risk. For decades, these farmers have operated within a deeply unequal and unfair system. Most rely on informal lenders and aarhtis who charge heavily exploitative interest rates, leverage access to inputs to exclusive buying agreements and leave farmers with little bargaining power at harvest. Quality seeds and fertilisers are often out of reach or adulterated and formal banking remains inaccessible to those without collateral or credit histories.

The impact of this inequality is magnified in climate-vulnerable districts. Increasingly erratic weather, water scarcity and rising input costs have made agricultural livelihoods more precarious than ever. For a smallholder farmer with only a few acres and multiple dependents - an average of 8 in our targeted communities - a single failed season can instantly trigger a spiral of debt, distress sales and forced migration.

The 2022 floods exposed these structural inequities in their bleakest form. Entire fields were submerged, seed stocks were ruined, livestock was lost and stored grain utterly destroyed. When the floodwater receded, farmers were left with bare land, empty savings and therefore no viable way to finance the next sowing. During Rizq's extensive flood relief operations in districts like Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh and parts of Sindh, one truth became impossible to ignore, that hunger in Pakistan could be traced all the way back to the production end of the food value chain, to a broken agricultural economy that kept the very same farmers who produced the nation's food trapped at the margins.

It was in this context that the Kisaan Dost Program was initiated, as an attempt to respond to disaster in a way that did not simply patch over the damage with a band-aid, but actually began to address the underlying structures that had made these farmers so vulnerable in the first place.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

Traditional support mechanisms for farmers in Pakistan are insufficient, and often completely exclusionary towards KDP's targeted subset of small farmers (5 acres or below). Commercial banks across the country demand the kind of collateral and paperwork that most smallholders simply do not possess - exclusion by systemic design. Microfinance institutions are prevalent, but they offer loans with hidden charges, rigid repayment schedules and high interest rates that sit uneasily with the religious and cultural beliefs of the farmers. Government subsidies and schemes, while significant on paper, frequently fail to reach the most marginalized farmers due to the sheer extent of administrative bottlenecks, information asymmetry and informal local power dynamics.

Years of work in disaster zones and rural communities has given Rizq a clear view of this landscape, and its formal and informal realities. Farmers did not ask for charity or freebies, they simply wanted fair access to inputs that were genuine, to a means of financing that did not entrap them in debt, to advisory they could trust and to markets that did not strip them of their hard-earned value at the point of sale. They wanted someone to stand with them, sincerely, through a season, rather than visit for a day to offer a handout.

KDP was built on a simple conviction that smallholder farmers are capable of transforming their own futures if only given the right tools and supportive terms tailored to their circumstances. The program emerged from Rizq's inherent belief, derived from raw grassroots-level insights, that what was missing was neither effort nor will on the part of farmers but a system that truly believed in their potential.

In practical terms, this translated into a set of service delivery commitments designed around farmer needs. Deeply impoverished and flood-affected small farmers would receive input financing without interest or collateral, in a manner aligned with Islamic financial principles. They would work with high quality seeds and fertilisers rather than leftovers from a distorted market. They would receive regular technical advisory instead of occasional visits, and be supported in understanding prices, contracts and their rights. And they would be encouraged to engage in regenerative practices that protected their land for future seasons.

EARLY LEARNINGS & CHALLENGES

The Kisaan Dost Program took shape as floodwaters receded in late 2022, and as farming communities stood at an unusual crossroads. The loss had been widespread, but there was also a rare openness to new approaches. Farmers were actively seeking ways to recultivate their land. This urgency created space for innovation, but it also revealed a complex set of challenges.

One of the earliest and most delicate questions was targeting. With limited resources and widespread need, the team had to make difficult decisions about who would be supported in the first cycle. While the national definition of a smallholder farmer is someone cultivating up to twelve acres, KDP deliberately tightened its criteria, focusing on farmers with five acres or less. Within this group, households with a higher number of dependents, especially children and elderly members, were prioritized. Over time, a formal poverty scorecard was introduced to complement land-based criteria, ensuring that socio-economic vulnerability, not just acreage, informed selection.

These decisions were not easy. They required telling some farmers that they would have to wait for future cycles, and defending a focus on the 'poorest of the poor' even when partners suggested expanding to larger holdings. Yet the KDP team remained committed to serving those least likely to be reached by other schemes, including widows and households historically overlooked by both public and private actors.

Access to quality inputs emerged as another major challenge. Local agricultural markets were dominated by middlemen and small farmers were accustomed to receiving seeds and fertilisers bundled with credit from *aarhtis*, often of dubious quality, and at highly inflated prices. Establishing a new vendor network, verifying product authenticity, and securing bulk supplies for unfamiliar regions required intense groundwork in procurement and logistics and a deep understanding of informal social hierarchies and norms.

Trust-building was an equally critical ingredient of program success, and equally a major challenge. In districts like Rajanpur, labelled by many as the 'deathbed of microfinance' due to historic loan defaults and institutional exits from major players, KDP's offer of interest-free, collateral-free financing was initially met with scepticism. Farmers questioned whether there were hidden conditions, whether the repayment terms would change, and whether the program would disappear after one season - essentially, whether Rizq, like so many others before, had come with strings attached.

Furthermore, climate risk hovered in the background of every strategic decision for KDP. In some areas, unexpected floods and pest attacks reminded the team how fragile a single crop season could be, a microcosm of every small farmer's lived reality. These experiences reinforced the importance of pairing finance with field advisory and of beginning to explore climate-resilient practices and risk-sharing mechanisms, even as the model was taking shape. While early challenges like these did on the surface complicate implementation, they also refined the program's design. They made clear that KDP could not be a simple loan scheme or input giveaway, it had to be a season-long close knit partnership with farmers, understanding their needs and lived realities in great depth, from one cycle to the next.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINED

KDP functions as a structured and season-long support system that walks with farmers from land preparation to harvest. Its design integrates four core components: financing, technical and regenerative advisory, farmer empowerment, and market linkages.

a. Interest-Free Input Financing:

First, KDP provides interest-free input financing. Each farmer receives a complete input package tailored to their crop and acreage, typically including certified seeds, fertilisers and seed treatments. There is no collateral requirement and no installment schedule. Repayment of the input cost is made only after harvest, in a single payment timed to the farmer's cash flow. This structure releases farmers from the pressure of servicing loans during the growing season and allows them to invest more fully in cultivation practices that improve yield.

b. Technical & Regenerative Advisory:

Second, KDP strongly incorporates technical and regenerative advisory into the model. Farmers are paired with trained field officers who serve as crop advisors throughout the crop cycle. These officers conduct regular visits, monitor crop progress, troubleshoot pest and weather-related issues, and encourage practices such as optimised fertiliser application, composting, mulching, integrated pest management and water-efficient irrigation. The emphasis is not only on maximising output in a single season, but on improving soil health long-term, reducing unnecessary chemical use and building the land's capacity to withstand climate stress.

SUSTAINABILITY & EVOLUTION

From its inception, KDP was designed not as a one-off intervention, but as a revolving model. Initial flood relief funding from partners such as Coca-Cola, Total Parco, Cargill and the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy was deliberately structured into an interest-free revolving fund. Farmers repaid the exact value of the inputs they received, and those repayments were reinvested to support the next cohort of beneficiaries. Years later, the same pool of capital continues to cycle through successive seasons - most recently having successfully completed the sixth crop cycle across South Punjab and Sindh.

KDP's bulk procurement and improved input application practices have further strengthened the model's financial sustainability. Farmers benefit from lower costs and better yields, while the program benefits from greater predictability in repayment. Over time, field learnings have been used to refine crop packages, adjust fertiliser recommendations and adapt to local soil and climate conditions, creating a feedback loop between research, practice and design.

A major marker of sustainability has been KDP's repayment performance. Across four crop cycles, the program has maintained a recovery rate of approximately 98 percent, including in districts many institutions had long written off. Analyses of repayment data surprised even internal teams, challenging prevailing narratives about smallholder farmers' reliability. Strong community ties, visible on-ground presence, and the social fabric of the program all contributed to this outcome.

These successes laid the foundation for KDP's integration into GroRizq, Rizq's agriculture and livestock division. What began as a flood rehabilitation effort is now evolving into a broader rural development and food systems platform, with KDP serving as its core farmer financing and support mechanism.

Through a partnership with Bank Alfalah to rehabilitate 200 flood-affected farmers in Khairpur, the bank secured its first-ever regulatory permission from the State Bank of Pakistan to extend zero-collateral agricultural finance to smallholders. This was not simply a deal; it was a precedent. For the first time, formal banking systems were re-engineered around farmers that had long been deemed 'unbankable.'

Since then, over 950 acres of low-yield land in Sindh have been restored through this model, establishing proof not only of concept, but of consequence.

In its most recent evolution, KDP has entered a new institutional phase through engagement with the State Bank of Pakistan's Zarkhez-e digital agriculture financing scheme. While Zarkhez-e offers collateral-free lending, in-kind inputs, and crop insurance, Rizq observed that the farmers who needed it most were still the least able to access it. Digital exclusion, mobility constraints, and mistrust of formal systems quietly kept the poorest farmers beyond reach.

At the same time, new questions are being explored. How can crop insurance or disaster funds be layered onto the model to protect farmers and capital in the event of severe shocks? How can data be disaggregated by caste, gender and land tenure to ensure that benefits reach the most marginalized groups? How can regenerative practices be deepened and linked to market incentives for climate-smart produce? Each successive season becomes a test bed for answers, and for the development of a service portfolio that can eventually take the form of an Agricultural Service Center (ASC) catered exclusively, for the first time, towards Pakistan's smallest, most impoverished farmers.

IMPACT

Since 2022, the Kisaan Dost Program has supported more than 1000 farmers across over 11,200 acres in Punjab and Sindh. In key crops such as wheat, cotton and rice, farmers have reported average yield increases of 35 to 40 percent compared to previous seasons. Input costs, when viewed per acre, have declined by up to 40 percent in many cases due to bulk purchasing, more efficient application, and reduced dependence on unnecessary chemicals.

Economically, the impact has been transformative for many households. Farmers who once relied on aarhtis and informal lenders have, in multiple cases, been able to cultivate their entire holdings without resorting to high-interest loans. Several KDP farmers reported a doubling of their net income over a single season, allowing them to reinvest in livestock, post-flood home repairs, children's education and small savings, expanding their subsistence-led time horizons for the very first time.

The qualitative impact runs deeper than numbers. Muhammad Ramzan, a KDP-enrolled farmer since 2023, states:

"I was planning to sell all the livestock I have for PKR 55,000 just to be able to sow my crops this season. All of a sudden, Rizq registered me for this program, and gave me new seeds and inputs I need for my cultivation. As a result, not only was I able to sell my animals for a profit during Eid at PKR 110,000, I achieved a better crop as well.

**I have not had this kind of income before. It is all thanks to your program.
May Allah bless you for this initiative."**

Endline surveys revealed another consistent theme. While farmers valued the quality of inputs and the increase in income, many described the interest-free nature of the financing as the most meaningful aspect of the program. For those who felt spiritually burdened by interest-based loans yet saw no alternative, KDP offered a form of financial alignment that brought both economic and religious relief.

Resilience has also improved. In 2023, when approximately 97 percent of the cotton crop in Rajanpur was wiped out by adverse conditions, KDP farmers still fared better than many of their neighbors due to diversified practices, better input use, and the savings accumulated from previous cycles. Although this did not eliminate loss, it mitigated its severity.

Perhaps most importantly, KDP has begun to shift community norms. Farmers are experimenting with intercropping and new seed varieties, while field officers report growing curiosity about climate-smart practices and a visible change in how farmers talk about their own role in Pakistan's food future.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Operating across rural Pakistan has surfaced multiple layers of challenge. Climate unpredictability remains a central risk. Floods, droughts, heatwaves and pest infestations can undermine a season's work despite careful planning. This reality has strengthened KDP's commitment to exploring crop insurance, community disaster funds and more robust climate adaptation strategies.

Local power dynamics present another complexity. Village hierarchies, caste structures and land ownership patterns can potentially influence who hears about the program, who feels entitled to apply and how resources are perceived. Transparent selection processes, regular community meetings and public sharing of criteria have proven essential in mitigating perceptions of bias, but the issue requires continuous attention.

Logistical hurdles, from delays in input delivery to miscommunication around repayment timelines, have underscored the importance of robust field coordination and clear communication for KDP. In new districts, winning trust for an unfamiliar model offering "free of interest" support has required patience, repeated explanations, and demonstrable proof over more than one season.

Internally, KDP has learned that extension officers and field associates are central to programmatic success. Where they are well trained, trained and employed from within the very communities being targeted, program outcomes are markedly stronger, such as improved social capital, a stronger understanding of on-ground market conditions, vendor networks, and informal social realities, and an improved understanding of site-specific agricultural needs. Where they are stretched thin, their impact suffers. Investment in people, and not just systems, has emerged as a non-negotiable condition for scaling KDP.

FUTURE ROADMAP

KDP is now entering a new chapter as part of the broader GroRizq vision, where the next phase will focus on both greater program depth and breadth. Rizq aims to now deepen support for small farmers within KDP's existing target districts while expanding into new ones through partnerships with agribusinesses, financial institutions and local organisations.

Immediate priorities include strengthening farmer market linkages, so they can sell into more fairly priced, predictable channels, while expanding Rizq's climate-smart agriculture initiatives such as water conservation, heat-tolerant varieties and flood-resilient cropping systems, and also working towards better digitising farmer records for traceability, risk assessment and impact tracking to enable KDP farmers to compete in global export markets. There is also a growing emphasis on building farmer groups and cooperatives to enhance collective bargaining power and reduce dependency on intermediaries.

At a strategic level, Rizq aims to draw on KDP's field experience to inform important policy conversations around smallholder farmer financing, input access, crop insurance and agriculture-led rural development. The ambition is not only to run a successful programme, but to influence how institutions across sectors think about and engage with small farmers.

For Rizq and KDP, the long-term vision is clear. Pakistan has the land, the people and the productive capacity to become a regional, even global, food powerhouse. What it lacks is a system that consistently invests in the farmers at its foundation. Kisaan Dost stands as a testament to what becomes possible when human compassion is given better structure, when financing is aligned with sincerity, on-ground needs, and fairness, and when the people who feed the nation are finally no longer overlooked with suspicion but met fully with trust.



Rizq Breeds

Rizq Breeds: Empowering Farmers by Building Ethical Livestock Supply Chains

AT A GLANCE:

Rizq Breeds emerged as a natural extension of Rizq's Qurbani work and its agricultural portfolio, with a simple but ambitious aim - to transform livestock from being a fragile household asset into a more stable livelihood pathway for smallholder farmers, while in parallel building an ethical, traceable market for urban and diaspora customers seeking Shariah-compliant and welfare-based meat.

At its core, Rizq Breeds connects two worlds that would otherwise rarely meet on equal terms within Pakistan's societal fabric. On one side are rural farmers, especially women, for whom goats, sheep and cattle are often the only assets they manage directly and their primary buffer against shocks and catastrophes. On the other side, are conscientious urban consumers who are willing to pay fairly for animals that are provably well reared, hygienically handled and transparently sourced. Between them lies a fragmented livestock economy dominated by middlemen, low productivity and exploitative pricing.

Through a series of experiments, Rizq Breeds has tested livestock placement models, input support, veterinary access, empowerment of women farmers, and structured buy-back guarantees for Qurbani. The current model combines a Livestock Empowerment Program, ethical procurement and Qurbani services, and premium meat delivery in Lahore, generating revenue through modest service fees and fair procurement margins.

To date Rizq Breeds has onboarded over 100 female farmers, facilitated livestock sales worth more than PKR 9 million and piloted a range of ethical channels for Qurbani and meat distribution. Its next chapter, supported by a dedicated partnership with Pledges.com, will establish a revolving livestock rearing system across the Khanewal-Bahawalpur belt, placing sheep and bulls with flood-affected small farmers while building a guaranteed, ethical market at scale.

BACKGROUND

Livestock sits right at the heart of rural life in Pakistan. For over 8 million rural families, animals are a core part of their household survival, providing milk, nutrition, manure, and, when necessary, doubling as an asset that can be sold to meet urgent financial needs. For Pakistan's women in particular, small animals such as goats and sheep are often the only productive assets they are allowed to manage directly and the only form of savings they can truly access without negotiation.

Yet despite this, the livestock economy remains one of the least supported parts of Pakistan's food system. Productivity per animal is significantly low compared to global standards, and access to veterinary care, quality feed and proper housing remains deeply limited. Over the course of working closely on-ground with small farmers throughout South Punjab, and in Sindh, Rizq has found that many farmers keep unproductive animals simply because they lack the knowledge, finances or market access to upgrade their herds. In interior rural regions, any resulting profitability from these animals is marginal, even though, paradoxically, the demand for meat and dairy continues to grow both in Pakistan's urban areas and overseas.

The 2022 floods exposed the fragility of this system. An estimated 1.17 million livestock animals drowned, wiping out years of accumulated savings for thousands of families, crippling them financially by stripping away their only cushion against illness, crop failure or sudden expenses. Climate change continues to raise the stakes as changing weather patterns mean fodder shortages and disease outbreaks now threaten herds with increasing regularity.

At the same time, the market on the demand side is rapidly changing. A growing segment of urban and diaspora consumers are actively seeking ethically sourced, hygienically processed, traceable meat. They want Qurbani animals and meat that reflect their values of welfare, transparency and community uplift. Yet in Pakistan, this potential remains largely underdeveloped. Informal markets, opaque supply chains and ad hoc sourcing dominate.

Between these two realities - rural families with under-supported livestock and urban consumers searching for ethical options - lies a persistent gap. It is precisely this gap that Rizq Breeds aims to fill.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

For Rizq, the link between rural poverty and exploitative market structures became its most starkly visible while working with flood stricken smallholder farmers under the Kisaan Dost Program. It was clear that for many households, livestock were a form of savings, a source of nutrition, and the last line of defense against falling into the high-interest informal debt that already plagued their households.

Rizq already had acquired experience running years of Qurbani campaigns, wherein the team sourced animals from local markets, slaughtering them in compliance with Islamic principles, and distributing meat among food insecure families. Yet this work raised a difficult question:

If the Qurbani ecosystem had so much financial and spiritual energy flowing through it every year, why were smallholder livestock farmers, especially women still stuck at the margins, selling under distress conditions to middlemen?

The answer, to Rizq, lay in how value and risk were being distributed. Farmers bore a disproportionate degree of the risk of rearing animals with little support and often sold under pressure at prices set by middlemen. Urban customers meanwhile have limited visibility into how animals were raised, and thus few opportunities to actually align their purchasing decisions with their ethical commitments. Contrary to popular conceptions - these urban consumers, whether in urban Pakistan or overseas, are not unwilling to pay a premium for ethical sourcing, they simply lack transparent channels that would inspire confidence to make livestock purchases accordingly.

The Rizq Breeds program challenges this unjust market dynamic by offering farmers a guaranteed and transparent market through Rizq's ethical Qurbani system. All animals raised under the program will enter one of two established sale pathways:

1. Urban retail channel: Animals are sold to customers who prioritize traceability, welfare-based rearing, and support for smallholder farmer communities.
2. Philanthropic channel: Donors purchase animals that are then distributed to food-insecure families during Eid, linking rural producers with urban households that value purposeful giving.

Pricing in both channels is set in advance and communicated clearly to Rizq's farmers. This creates predictability, and protects them from the volatility of informal livestock markets. It gives families the confidence that their rearing efforts will translate into stable income at the end of the cycle.

THE MODEL AND ITS EVOLUTION

Phase 1:

In its initial phase, Rizq Breeds experimented with models that placed pregnant animals directly with female farmers. Under this design, women received a pregnant sheep or goat as a productive asset. They were responsible for caring for the animal, with support from Rizq's team. At the time of procurement for Qurbani, Rizq would buy back the original capital animal at an agreed share of market price, while the newborn offspring remained with the farmer as her own long-term asset.

On paper, the model offered a powerful combination: immediate income from the buy-back, and a growing herd for the farmer herself. In practice, however, significant challenges emerged. Determining a fair market price at buy-back proved complex given the volatile local market landscape, and any disputes over said valuation risked eroding carefully built social capital and farmer trust. Additionally, limited access to veterinary support and good feed, coupled with low baseline knowledge on best rearing practices, led to higher-than-expected mortality and significantly reduced productivity.

These challenges however, did not negate the model's promise but instead revealed that rushing towards placement alone without building a strong service catalogue and a clear pricing framework would not be sufficient. Though the pregnant animal scheme was discontinued in its original form, its lessons were carried forward.

Current Social Business Model:

Drawing on those early learnings, Rizq Breeds evolved into a more structured social business model comprising three primary services:

Livestock Empowerment Program

Smallholder farmers, particularly women, receive support in the form of silage and basic training on animal husbandry. The aim is to improve animal health, weight gain and milk yield, while building the farmer capacity needed for long-term livestock productivity.

Procurement and Qurbani Services

Two to three months before Eid-ul-Adha, Rizq Breeds procures animals directly from these farmers and other smallholders, offering fair market prices. Animals are then managed through a Shariah-compliant Qurbani process that emphasises welfare, hygiene and traceability. Customers, both in Pakistan and abroad, can book their animals knowing that their purchase supports small farmers rather than middlemen.

Premium Meat Delivery

In Lahore, Rizq Breeds offers doorstep delivery of cow, sheep and goat meat in safe, temperature-controlled packaging. This service caters to households seeking clean, hygienic and pre-portioned meat without the logistical and storage burdens that often accompany Qurbani. A modest service fee and a minimal premium on animal pricing help cover Rizq's operational and administrative costs, contributing to the financial sustainability of the Breeds model.

Across all three services, women farmers remain a central focus. Recognising that livestock work is often carried by women but rarely acknowledged as such, Rizq Breeds prioritises onboarding female farmers wherever possible, viewing their economic empowerment not as a secondary benefit, but as a core design objective.

The Emerging asset placement model: Rizq x Pledges:

The next phase of Rizq Breeds, supported by Pledges.com, builds on these foundations with a more formalised livestock placement and revolving capital model in the Khanewal - Bahawalpur corridor. This region, traditionally a strong livestock belt, experienced unprecedented flooding during the 2025 floods, leading to sharp increases in livestock mortality and weakened herds.

Under the new design, Rizq Breeds will operate two complementary rearing systems:

2. Small Animal Cycle (Sheep):

Around 200 sheep will be placed across five clusters, with each participating farmer managing a flock of approximately 20 sheep. Ownership of the animals will remain with Rizq, while farmers act as contracted caretakers. They will receive a fixed monthly stipend per animal, creating a stable income stream, and will benefit nutritionally and economically from milk or controlled local sales where appropriate. Pregnant ewes will be prioritised so that herd growth is built into the first cycle.

2. Large Animal Cycle (Bulls):

Around 100 bulls will be distributed across 30 small farmers, each rearing three to four bulls under agreed conditions. As with sheep, ownership remains with Rizq, and farmers receive a monthly care stipend. Bulls will be reared in community or household pens with regular veterinary oversight and supported feed.

At the end of each cycle, animals will be transported to Rizq's managed facilities for Qurbani season, entering two ethical sale pathways: an urban retail channel for customers prioritising traceability and welfare, and a philanthropic channel for donors wishing to support food-insecure families. Farmers will have a first right to buy select animals if they wish to retain livestock as personal assets. Through this model, livestock becomes not just a one-off sale, but part of a revolving asset base that supports multiple cycles of farmers while supplying a clearly differentiated ethical market.

IMPACT

Rizq Breeds has generated both quantitative and qualitative impact in its early years.

Quantitatively the initiative has onboarded over 100 female farmers into its various models, channeled more than PKR 9 million worth of livestock into urban and diaspora markets and enabled dozens of small farmers to sell animals at fairer prices than those available through traditional middlemen. In doing so, it has reduced farmer reliance on distress sales where households are forced to accept whatever price is offered in moments of urgent need.

Qualitatively, farmers report a deep sense of relief at having guaranteed buyers and clear pricing in advance of Qurbani season. Knowing that an animal will be purchased at a fair rate, and that the transaction will occur in a respectful, predictable manner, has reduced farmer anxiety, enabled better planning, and provided psychological security that is difficult to measure but felt and voiced clearly.

For women farmers, the effect has been particularly significant. Women who were previously seen only as helpers in livestock care are emerging as recognized income contributors. They now speak of newfound confidence, greater participation in household financial decisions, and the ability to invest in children's education, nutrition and healthcare from earnings linked to their own labor.

On the customer side, Rizq Breeds has demonstrated that ethical welfare-aware meat can be made accessible in a way that is both spiritually and practically satisfying. Customers who book Qurbani animals or order meat delivery have a way to know, with transparency, that not only are their religious obligations being fulfilled, but their spending is directly supporting small farmers, especially women, in flood-affected and economically marginalised areas.

The Pledges-supported model is expected to even further enhance these impacts by shifting from individual animal purchases to a structured rearing ecosystem, that supports many more livelihoods over multiple cycles.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

The journey of Rizq Breeds has not been without its difficulties. Though the intervention appeared straightforward at first, early experiments with pregnant animal placement uncovered complex questions about pricing, mortality and baseline farmer capacity. In particular, the task of trying to determine fair market prices in volatile conditions, while also trying to shield farmers from sudden downturns and align with customer expectations, proved a challenge. Mortality rates driven by gaps in veterinary access, limited farmer experience and unexpected cold spells highlighted the need for much stronger technical support.

Even under the current model, these practical constraints remain. Pakistan's livestock productivity lags behind many global benchmarks, in part due to fragmented access to basic services, limited access to high quality silage, and weak extension and advisory systems. Raising per-animal yields in terms of meat weight and dairy output requires sustained investment and patience and cannot be achieved with a quick fix.

Communication has been another key challenge for Rizq Breeds. Differentiating Breeds from conventional trust-based Qurbani projects and explaining why ethical sourcing and farmer empowerment justify certain price points has required constant education. Customers can be confused by the distinction between animals sourced directly from small farmers under structured conditions and those bought opportunistically from markets. Over time the team has shifted from generic online forms to curated WhatsApp catalogues, direct calls and personalised guidance to help customers understand both the value and overall process.

These challenges have yielded important learnings for the Breeds team. Pricing, for example, now incorporates multiple variables including early procurement to secure better rates, as well as the use of experienced livestock assessors and more robust quality checks. Internally, at Rizq, there is a clear recognition that Breeds must continue to refine its value proposition and messaging so that both farmers and customers are clear about what sets it apart.

Above all, the initiative has reinforced that working at the intersection of livelihoods, animals and markets demands humility. Models must remain flexible enough to adapt, and honest enough to admit when a design that looks elegant on paper does not truly serve people or animals well in practice - the first step to evolving towards better service delivery.

FUTURE ROADMAP

Looking ahead, Rizq Breeds is positioned to evolve from a primarily seasonal Qurbani-linked venture into a year-round livestock rehabilitation and ethical meat enterprise.

In the near term, the focus will be on successfully rolling out the Khanewal–Bahawalpur livestock placement model, a means of demonstrating that a revolving asset structure can support dozens of small farmers, at least 40 in the initial phase, while supplying 200 sheep and 100 bulls into ethical Qurbani channels. This will involve strengthening field monitoring, veterinary networks, and data systems so that mortality, growth rates and farmer income can be tracked and optimized.

Over the medium term, the aim for Rizq is to lower supply chain costs through scale and better planning, transforming Breeds into a model that can eventually connect with meat export markets while still retaining its social mission and small-farmer orientation. This will require a clearer articulation of its value proposition and a deeper collaboration with private sector and institutional partners.

Strategically, Rizq Breeds aims to expand its reach among female livestock farmers, positioning them as central partners in rural value chains. It also seeks to incorporate better climate resilience into rearing practices, from shade and water management to heat-tolerant breeds and disease prevention. Lastly, the lessons and insights gained from the program have instilled within Rizq a desire to advocate for better policy and financial instruments for livestock farmers, including insurance mechanisms and fairer access to formal markets.



Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative Agriculture: Transforming Agriculture Through Innovation

AT A GLANCE:

Across much of Pakistan's agricultural heartland, the land that once sustained generations is undeniably becoming increasingly fragile. As inputs grow more expensive each year, soil health, groundwater levels, and yield levels all steadily erode. For smallholder farmers, this has created a harsh paradox: they invest more into their land and yet extract - not less - but increasingly less from it, often sinking deeper into cycles of borrowing and repayment that never truly end.

Rizq's regenerative agriculture work emerged from the simple conviction that farming should not strip away life and abundance from the very thing it depends on, our lands. Though much work had been done to propose techniques that could enhance soil health in Pakistan, the question was whether these methods that heal the soil could also farmer livelihoods - and Rizq set out to answer that question with evidence.

Through a collaboration between field research and lived experience, led initially by Rizq's Chief Technical Advisor, Dr Mahmood, and later expanded under a dedicated project team, Rizq began testing a portfolio of regenerative practices. These included permanent raised beds, mulching, reduced chemical inputs, precision sowing, alternate wetting and drying (AWD), and agroforestry. Side by side plots compared these approaches with conventional methods, measuring cost, yield, water use, and emissions.

Early results from Rizq's regenerative agriculture farms revealed that land preparation costs fell by up to 80 percent, irrigation needs by 85 percent, and fertiliser usage by 71 percent, while estimated carbon emissions per acre dropped by 91 percent. In an especially compelling finding, farm profitability increased even where input use declined. Trial plots began evolving into living classrooms, where skeptical farmers gradually began to see that sustainability and economic logic need not be at odds.

BACKGROUND

Across much of Pakistan's agricultural heartland, farmers face an unsettling paradox. The land that once sustained generations is now increasingly fragile. Inputs cost more each year, while soil health and water levels decline. Yields that once promised stability have become uncertain, plummeting far below those of neighboring countries with similar geographic contexts. For most smallholders, the cycle of borrowing and repayment never really ends, it merely deepens.

At Rizq, our work in sustainable agriculture has increasingly centered around one conviction: that farming should not take away from the very thing it depends on - our land. Over time, this conviction evolved into a practical question, one of whether farming methods that heal the soil could also sustain farmer livelihoods?

The answer began to take shape through a quiet collaboration between data and lived experience. Early regenerative agriculture trials were led by Dr Mahmood, Rizq's Chief Technical Advisor, whose field research on raised beds and mulching had produced promising results.

“We analysed our experiments and discovered key insights, particularly in terms of cost-effectiveness. The financial profitability was extremely high, and the model showed potential for wider adoption.”

- Dr. Mahmood,

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

In 2022, the Rizq team, already exploring a foray into sustainable agriculture for the first time, were convinced by Dr. Mahmood's early results driven by his own experiments at the LUMS Water Informatics and Technology Center, and offered support for a larger pilot. When they attempted to replicate the method on their own, it didn't take off as expected; an experience that highlighted the importance of technical consistency and farmer engagement. Together, we decided to scale the work into structured research farms, combining rigorous experimentation with on-ground learning.

The vision was straightforward - we wished to demonstrate that climate-resilient agriculture can be both scientifically sound and economically feasible, and to build a body of knowledge specifically grounded in Pakistan's realities rather than mere imported assumptions.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINED

Our approach evolved incrementally, one plot and one season at a time. The model was built around live experimentation, guided by data but responsive to farmer feedback and local conditions. The interventions we tested addressed both environmental degradation and the economic stress faced by farmers. Chief among them were:

Our approach evolved incrementally, one plot and one season at a time. The model was built around live experimentation, guided by data but responsive to farmer feedback and local conditions. The interventions we tested addressed both environmental degradation and the economic stress faced by farmers. Chief among them were:

1. Permanent raised beds for wheat and rice to reduce tillage, soil erosion, and waterlogging.
2. Mulching with rice straw to conserve moisture, suppress weeds, and add organic matter back into the soil.
3. Tree plantation along field perimeters to integrate agroforestry, regulate microclimates, and improve biodiversity.
4. Precision sowing to minimise seed wastage through manual placement and marked spacing.
5. Reduced chemical inputs, replaced gradually with compost and organic fertiliser blends to enhance soil vitality.

“Mulching, raised-bed sowing, and reduced fertiliser use were among the most effective techniques. But each came with its own challenges, especially around labour availability, correct input combinations, and farmers’ willingness to experiment.”

- Dr. Majid Ikram, Project Lead

To understand viability, we compared regenerative and conventional plots side by side. The contrasts were striking. Land preparation costs dropped by 80%, sowing costs by 48%, and fertilizer use by 71%. Irrigation needs fell by 85%, while pesticide use was eliminated altogether. Revenue increased by 43%, and the estimated carbon emissions per acre dropped by 91%.

These findings, while preliminary, were unprecedented in local research. They validated what Dr Mahmood had long hypothesized: that soil regeneration and farmer profitability can indeed go hand in hand. The trials became a foundation for rethinking agricultural economics, linking sustainability directly with financial efficiency.

But perhaps most importantly, they brought evidence to what had previously been intuition: that resilience begins not from technology alone, but from re-aligning the relationship between people and their soil.

IMPACT

Environmental & Economic Benefits

In the rice cycle, using traditional fertiliser under the Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) method saved roughly \$305 per acre compared to water-intensive direct seeding. Water productivity improved to 0.152 kg/m³, while yields increased by 18%. In the wheat cycle, halving fertiliser use caused only a 9% yield decline, but conversely, profitability rose by 2.7 times from 34,863 to 95,393 units per acre. As Asma Ahmad, Rizq’s Research Associate, summarises,

“THESE NUMBERS SHOW THAT REGENERATIVE FARMING IS NOT JUST ECOLOGICALLY SOUND BUT ALSO INCREDIBLY ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERING. FARMERS CAN INDEED EARN MORE WHILE USING LESS

From a climate perspective, the results were equally profound. GHG emissions in wheat cultivation dropped from 1,386.9 kg CO₂eq/acre to 134.8 kg, while methane emissions from rice fields fell by 23% through AWD. Compost use further reduced soil and fertiliser emissions by 40%, and water consumption declined by up to 300 m³ per acre.

Collectively, these results suggest that regenerative agriculture could form the backbone of Pakistan's climate mitigation efforts, transforming smallholder farmlands into low-emission, high-yielding lands while preserving and eventually enhancing soil health.

Social and Behavioural Transitions:

While data revealed one kind of success, social transformation took longer. Convincing farmers to depart from inherited methods was never easy.

“AT FIRST, THE NEIGHBORING FARMERS THOUGHT WE WERE CRAZY!”

recalls Mr Shukrullah, one of the farm managers.

“THEY LAUGHED AT OUR SMALL PLOTS AND SAID IT WOULD NEVER WORK. BUT WHEN THEY SAW THE FIELDS, THE MOISTURE RETENTION, THE REDUCED FERTILISER SMELL, THEY STARTED TO TAKE INTEREST.”

Over time, the model farms became living classrooms not just for testing techniques but for demonstrating real credibility. Each growing season turned scepticism into wonder. “The local farm manager was resistant to adopting the new [regenerative] methods, as his routine involved interactions with conventional input suppliers. He discouraged the approach, though indirectly. Despite this, awareness grew. Another farmer in the area experimented with multiple cropping on raised beds and reported impressive results. This sparked interest among others, and so on.”

As Dr Mahmood observes,

“AWARENESS GROWS THROUGH OBSERVATION. ONCE FARMERS WITNESS THAT SUSTAINABLE METHODS CAN MATCH TRADITIONAL YIELDS WITH LOWER COSTS, BELIEF WILL FOLLOW NATURALLY.”

This shift, subtle yet persistent, is the very foundation of long-term adoption. Behavioural change in agriculture rarely happens through instruction alone; it unfolds through concrete, long-cultivated proof.

As per Dr. Mahmood, on the revenue side, the most promising approach was avoiding chemical fertilizers gradually rather than eliminating them immediately. Currently, our success story aligns with broader discussions on regenerative agriculture. International organizations are also looking into similar models. However, the main challenge remains—the adoption of new techniques requires time and effort.

One of the biggest sustainability challenges is the gap between research and on-ground implementation. While effective technologies and practices already exist—like AWD, composting, and optimized fertilizer use—the challenge lies in making them accessible and adoptable for smallholder farmers. At Rizq, we're addressing this by developing model farms that serve as live demonstrations and learning hubs, and by actively engaging local farmers through training and peer networks. The key now is building financial models that de-risk adoption and raising awareness so that farmers feel confident in shifting to sustainable practices. Bridging this gap is essential to turn proven research into widespread impact.

The measurable reduction in emissions - especially methane and nitrous oxide - makes regenerative agriculture a strong candidate for carbon credit schemes. For example, compost adoption cuts soil/fertilizer emissions by 40%, and AWD alone reduces methane by 23%. These figures are quantifiable and can be certified for voluntary carbon markets. Moreover, the enhanced economic returns and lower input costs make this model attractive for green financing, especially for smallholder farmers transitioning to low-emission systems.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

Rizq's journey into regenerative agriculture was far from linear. Alongside breakthroughs came significant constraints that shaped our understanding of what a practical, scalable transition of these practices truly demands within farming communities.

Farmer Acceptance:

Adoption proved difficult at first. "Most farmers aim to maximise returns on their labour, time, and money," says Dr Majid. "Water is cheap, fertilizer is subsidised, and conservation feels like a luxury." Building trust therefore required demonstration to offset decades of known, entrenched practice popularised by large-scale industrial farming methods, lived precedent now immortalised as conventional wisdom. Though it took time, farmers began to engage once they saw that regenerative practices could reduce costs without compromising yields.

Machinery and Labour Constraints:

Even during the course of Rizq's own research, the shift to regenerative practices demanded technical adjustments at every step. Seeders needed special calibration for each crop. Harvesters struggled to operate on raised beds, often breaking down after limited use. "We need better-trained technical labour and locally designed equipment," notes Mr Basil, a farm manager. "The skill exists, but it needs direction and predictability."

The lack of service centres for regenerative equipment also posed logistical barriers. As a result, tasks like mulching and manual sowing required additional labour, temporarily increasing operational costs.

Climatic Variability:

Extreme temperatures and fluctuating rainfall compounded these challenges. In 2023, for example, "even traditional farms lost up to 15% of yield that year," Basil recalls. "It reminded us that our success must be measured across cycles and not seasons." Despite setbacks, the data provided a valuable baseline to refine techniques for resilience under local climatic stressors.

Institutional and Cultural Resistance:

In some cases, institutional scepticism slowed progress. "There was hesitation even among stakeholders," reflects Dr Mahmood. "Some were reluctant to share data fearing inconsistency. But that is precisely why we decided to run our own independent trials to build evidence from the ground up."

These experiences taught Rizq that regenerative agriculture is as much a social process as a technical one. The trust must be earned - and this requires replication of science.

FUTURE ROADMAP

The success of Rizq's regenerative trials has opened a broader conversation about scaling sustainable farming models through research, partnerships, and policy influence.

Rizq has successfully organised multi-stakeholder, high level policy dialogues on regenerative agriculture, spurring discourse on the subject both domestically, at LUMS and the Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University Multan, and also globally at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand, positioning Pakistan as a research-backed thought leader in the regenerative space, rather than a passive follower. Our findings have been presented to global experts and development financiers across a wide array of platforms. At the policy level, institutions such as the Asian Development Bank have shown interest in using the Rizq model to inform sustainable agricultural frameworks across South Asia.

Internally, Rizq is exploring new pathways to scale our impact:

- Developing financial incentives such as per-acre subsidies, carbon credit linkages, and premium pricing for regenerative produce by linking to export markets
- Investing in research and development to refine local regenerative machinery and set up private service hubs that rent equipment to smallholders at affordable rates
- Introducing green financing mechanisms to attract social investors committed to low-emission farming transitions

As Dr Mahmood reflects, "These practices are sustainable in the long run, but they require patience and a whole lot of faith. If we stay the course, regenerative agriculture won't only be a dream, it can become a foundation for how Pakistan farms."



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COVID-19 Response

Redefining Food Social Safety Nets during COVID-19

AT A GLANCE:

Between March and July 2020, as Pakistan entered an unprecedented national lockdown, Rizq Trust rapidly transformed from a food recovery initiative into one of the country's most agile and far-reaching emergency relief responders. Operating across major urban and peri-urban centers including Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, Rizq led a nationwide response that integrated emergency food assistance, hygiene support, economic relief, and large-scale youth mobilization. **Over the course of the campaign, more than one million meals were delivered, upwards of PKR 40 million were raised through public giving and corporate partnerships, nearly half a million meals were served through donor-backed programs, and over 1,500 volunteers were mobilized both on-ground and digitally across the country.**

This response was driven by a powerful coalition of partners spanning corporate Pakistan, civil society, and the public sector. Support flowed through alliances with major brands including PepsiCo, Fauji Foundation, Unilever, Nestlé, Dawn Foods, Shakarganj, Careem, Swvl, Airlift, and Levi's, alongside international partners such as GAIN and the German Embassy. Rizq's work also marked a turning point in public-private collaboration when the organization launched the RizqXChange platform in partnership with the Punjab Government and PITB, creating one of Pakistan's first centralized, technology-enabled relief systems during COVID-19.

Public engagement with Rizq skyrocketed through national and international campaigns including Stars Against Hunger and #EhsasKaro, supported by a constellation of global sports figures and cultural leaders, alongside hundreds of local institutions and media partners. The visibility and credibility of Rizq's response culminated in national and international recognition, **including the Punjab Government's Corona Heroes Award and the Commonwealth Points of Light Award, conferred under the patronage of Her Majesty The Queen.**

Rizq's approach during the pandemic was characterized not only by the scale of its operations, but by the innovative adaptability of its systems, the formation of strategic public-private partnerships, and the extraordinary commitment of its volunteers. At a time when most organizations were downscaling, Rizq expanded - hiring teams, deepening outreach, and reinforcing a vision centered on human dignity and solidarity.

BACKGROUND

When COVID-19 swept across the world in early 2020, Pakistan's crisis was as much economic as it was medical. Overnight, the first lockdowns brought informal economic activity to a halt. Daily wagers, street vendors, domestic workers, factory laborers and countless others found that the work that had sustained their households simply vanished. Families that already lived close to the edge slipped rapidly into deep food insecurity, with no end in sight.

Unlike a flood or a localized disaster, this was a diffuse national emergency. Inner-city neighborhoods in Lahore, Korangi in Karachi, and peri-urban belts around Islamabad all faced the same question - how will a household eat when the day's income has suddenly disappeared? Traditional charity models struggled to respond under mobility restrictions, and many organizations scaled down or closed. Even where informal giving took place, there was no mechanism in place by which it could safely or even consistently reach those most at risk.

Rizq, already working on food recovery and hunger alleviation, immediately recognized that this moment demanded a national emergency food safety net built in real time, and despite the lack of time, a system designed to be humane, and thoughtful in its approach to the myriad of new challenges posed by lockdown. Immediately, within days of the first lockdown in March 2020, the team began re-orienting its food banks, volunteer networks and partnerships towards a coordinated and nationwide COVID-19 response. At Rizq headquarters, the aim during this time was singular, that no family should be left hungry or unseen as the crisis unfolded.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

Rizq's pre-COVID work had already exposed how fragile household food security truly was. In many low-income communities, a single medical bill, missed wage or local disruption could trigger hunger for the entire household, and COVID-19 amplified these risks at an unprecedented scale, throughout Pakistan. Scores of households lost all income with no warning, as women-headed families in particular fell between the cracks of formal systems and frontline workers operated without adequate protection. Misinformation and fear spread almost as quickly as the virus itself.

The Rizq team understood that ad-hoc and unstructured aid would not be sufficient, and that this moment called for a response that could move with speed and depth, but without sacrificing either employee or beneficiary safety, or - as was now fully entrenched into the Rizq ethos - basic human dignity. Ration packs needed to account for the essential supplies now least accessible to food-insecure communities, and household targeting needed to rely on data and local intelligence rather than visibility. Young volunteers needed to be organized into a disciplined volunteer force not just trained in food distribution, but also mindful of safety protocols, rather than operating from a place of scattered and reactive goodwill.

Rizq's COVID-19 intervention was therefore designed as a comprehensive social safety net rather than a one-off charity drive, stabilizing household food security through rations and cooked meals, reducing health risks through hygiene kits and awareness campaigns, cushioning economic shocks through emergency cash assistance, and channeling the capacity of young people through the Rizq Youth Republic. As co-founder Qasim Javaid later reflected, this was a moment that proved that even when systems faltered nationwide, people, purpose and partnerships found a way to hold the country together.

THE FOUR-PRONGED RELIEF MODEL: EXPLAINED

Rizq's emergency response strategy was comprehensive and multidimensional, designed to address the interconnected challenges of hunger, health risks, economic vulnerability, and community resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. The programming was carefully crafted to provide immediate relief while building sustainable support systems.

At its core was a large-scale food assistance programme, one of Rizq's largest ever. Standardised ration packs were designed to sustain a five-person family for roughly two weeks, including flour, rice, pulses, oil, sugar, tea and other staples. These were distributed to daily wage workers, informal laborers, displaced workers and low-income households in high-risk localities. To ensure that nutrition did not suffer as markets closed and supply chains became irregular, Rizq activated its relationships with key corporate partners such as Fauji Fresh n' Freeze, to divert into the relief stream perfectly edible surplus, perishable produce, like vegetables and fruits, that would otherwise rot on the shelves.

Food alone, however, could not contain a virus, demanding adaptiveness outside of Rizq's usual relief scope. And so, in parallel, Rizq incorporated healthcare support and hygiene promotion into its operations. Hygiene kits containing soap, sanitisers and masks were supplied to frontline workers, volunteers and vulnerable communities. Behaviour-change campaigns were designed and launched to explain handwashing, mask usage and physical distancing in simple and familiar language, utilising community leaders and local influencers to reach those dense and underserved neighbourhoods where official messaging often could not penetrate.

Rizq also recognised that hunger is almost always a symptom of deeper economic stress. Therefore, for families whose incomes had disappeared overnight, the team was certain that in-kind aid alone would not restore economic stability. Rizq therefore introduced direct cash transfers for some of the most economically vulnerable households, particularly daily wage earners, all carefully vetted across a series of multivariate criteria, including poverty scorecards, baseline surveys, and informal assessments. These cash transfers allowed households to prioritize rent, medicines or any utilities compromised by the pandemic, according to their own realities, and in turn also supported local markets by preserving purchasing power at the neighborhood level.

Underpinning all this was Rizq Youth Republic, the organization's sprawling, nationwide youth engagement arm. At a time when fear and risk were prevalent in equal measure, thousands of young volunteers from across Pakistan stepped forward to help identify at-risk households through their local networks, helplines and digital outreach, to pack and deliver ration supplies, lead awareness campaigns and conduct fundraisers. They also developed and conducted creative youth-led initiatives such as #EhsaasKaro, "Compassion vs Corona", and "Volunteers 313", a Ramadan campaign in which 313 volunteers each committed to feeding 100 families.

Organizational Structure during Covid-19:

The Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented situation whereby Rizq had to accelerate operations, while simultaneously ensuring social distancing and COVID protocols. To tackle this challenge, Rizq implemented a hybrid organizational structure designed to effectively balance centralized strategic oversight with decentralized operational execution. This model facilitated both high-level coordination and local responsiveness, which proved critical in managing a large-scale emergency response across diverse urban and rural settings.

Rizq Headquarters in Lahore functioned as the nerve center. From there, teams oversaw strategy, logistics planning, procurement, inventory management, communications and fundraising. HQ also led volunteer recruitment and training and established digital systems to monitor all ongoing distributions in real time. This centralized leadership enabled consistently high standards in the quality of ration packs, safety protocols for volunteers and transparency for donors.

At the same time, regional and district-level units in cities such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad were given the authority to adapt implementation programs to their local realities. These local teams managed storage and distribution points, coordinated directly with mosques, community-based organisations (CBOs) and local authorities, and developed context-specific routes and timings for deliveries. This decentralised structure ensured that while overall strategy remained cohesive, the day-to-day response was highly agile and powered by local community knowledge.

Operationally, the campaign unfolded in two broad phases.

1. Between 22 March and 5 April 2020, the focus was on planning and resource mobilization. Rizq's research and outreach teams used poverty scorecards, heat maps and grassroots knowledge from local NGOs and youth ambassadors to map priority zones such as communities in inner Lahore, Korangi and vulnerable rural belts. Simultaneously, the team audited stocks across existing food banks, activated corporate partnerships with Metro, Unilever, Levi's and others, and worked with packaging vendors and logistics partners to quickly build a robust emergency supply chain. Standard operating procedures were thoroughly codified in a Rizq Emergency Response Manual, covering procurement, quality control, volunteer safety and verification requirements. Ration packs were carefully designed with community needs in mind, and a live dashboard was set up to track outreach and spending.
2. From April to July 2020, the work shifted into full-scale execution, and a three-tier volunteer model took shape. A 'core' volunteer team based at HQ managed daily planning, inventory flows and donor reporting, as many staff members stayed on-site for weeks at a time to reduce viral exposure, and have necessary hands continuously on deck. Field volunteers, in teams of four to six, carried out contactless deliveries equipped with PPE, through distanced handovers and photo verification. Remote volunteers working from home supported helplines, beneficiary registration and CRM management. As the crisis grew, volunteer applications also increased dramatically, indicating a powerful and heartening surge of youth willing to step forward.

Rizq's public-facing campaigns played a huge role in amplifying this effort. The #EhsaasKaro encouraged empathy-led giving, while "Compassion vs Corona" drew significant media coverage that helped raise resources. "Stars Against Hunger", in collaboration with Aisam-ul-Haq and Momin Saqib, raised PKR 11 million and supported 20,000 families. International partners such as GAIN supplied nutritionally-balanced ration packs, while Levi's funded close to 500,000 meals for female garment workers and their families. Throughout, a robust verification system, using unique beneficiary codes, timestamped photos and volunteer IDs, powered a public live dashboard which displayed every meal served, areas reached and funds utilized, building donor, partner, and even volunteer trust in the model.

IMPACT

Rizq's COVID-19 response grew far beyond emergency food aid into one of the most collaborative humanitarian efforts Pakistan had seen in years. Relief operations expanded into 23 cities nationwide, supported by an operational backbone that combined centralized coordination with decentralized delivery. A dedicated logistics warehouse in Gulberg, set up in partnership with Pepsi, became the distribution heart of the response, enabling high-volume ration assembly and dispatch while maintaining strict quality and safety standards. Despite thin on-ground teams in the earliest days of the lockdown, Rizq sustained nationwide operations through disciplined systems, digital coordination and extraordinary volunteer commitment.

What made the campaign uniquely powerful was the ecosystem that gathered around it. Corporate Pakistan stepped forward not simply as donors, but as logistical, supply-chain, and operational partners. Support flowed through partnerships with PepsiCo, Fauji Foundation, Careem, Swvl, Airlift, Metro, Unilever, Nestlé, Dawn Foods, Shakarganj Food Products, the Monal Group of Companies, and Fauji Fresh n' Freeze, among others. Some partners redirected surplus food into the relief stream, others unlocked transport and last-mile delivery, while still others funded large-scale ration and meal distributions. Technology platforms such as Daraz, Eat Mubarak, and Careem supported public giving, enabling thousands of citizens to participate digitally in relief from their homes.

The cultural response was just as profound. Rizq's campaigns transformed crisis into collective action. Through #EhsaasKaro, more than 15,000 rations were delivered across 23 cities with the support of 50 institutional partners and over 3,000 volunteers. The campaign mobilized universities including LUMS, UCP, UMT, and LCWU, alongside media partners such as HUM News and Dunya News, and community organizations across Punjab and Sindh. In parallel, the Stars Against Hunger campaign elevated fundraising to an international stage. Tennis legend Aisam-ul-Haq led mobilization alongside a constellation of global sports figures including Wasim Akram, Shoaib Malik, Maria Sharapova, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Sania Mirza, and many others. Through roadshows, press conferences, billboards, and international endorsements, the campaign reached an estimated 600,000 people and directly supported tens of thousands of families with food relief.

Rizq's reach extended beyond cities into Pakistan's most remote areas. Through the Guide Fund campaign, conducted with the LUMS Adventure Society, over two million rupees were channelled to more than 300 families in Northern Pakistan. Meanwhile, a targeted intervention with Eat Mubarak, Foodies R Us, and Nestlé supported laid-off workers from the restaurant industry who had lost all sources of income almost overnight.

On the institutional front, Rizq entered an entirely new terrain through its collaboration with the Punjab Government to launch RizqXChange, a centralized relief platform designed to prevent duplication and ensure coordinated public-private response. The initiative connected donors, field teams, authorities, and beneficiaries through one verified database managed by PITB, complemented by a toll-free helpline and pre-qualified procurement systems. The Punjab Food Authority supported last-mile distribution. This partnership truly demonstrated what coordinated social protection could look like at provincial scale.

Financially, the campaign was among Rizq's most ambitious to date. Over PKR 100 million was mobilized through donations, corporate partnerships, and grants from international and institutional partners including GAIN, Levi's, USAID, the Scottish Embassy, and the German Embassy. Levi's alone funded nearly half a million meals, particularly for female garment workers, whose livelihoods had been among the hardest hit. In total, more than 2.2 million meals were delivered, PKR 2.1 million was disbursed in direct cash assistance, and over 48 million rupees worth of food were channelled through verified distributions.

Recognition followed not as an intended objective but as an acknowledgement of Rizq's scale and integrity. Rizq received the Punjab Government's Corona Heroes Award, while its leadership was honoured internationally through the Commonwealth Points of Light Award, presented under the patronage of Her Majesty The Late Queen Elizabeth. Rizq's work was also formally acknowledged by the Governor of Punjab and by Dr Amjad Saqib of Akhuwat, reinforcing the organisation's standing as a trusted, innovative humanitarian partner.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

The COVID-19 operation, though wildly successful as a nationwide relief effort, stretched Rizq's systems to their limits. Each success on-ground was forged alongside a set of challenges that truly became critical learning points for the organization's future, including its Disaster Relief and Resilience division.

The first challenge lay in navigating strict lockdowns; with cities throughout Pakistan under heavy restrictions, securing movement permits for volunteers and trucks required constant, repetitive engagement with local administrations and police. Often, the difference between a successful delivery and a stalled consignment depended on the trust that Rizq had built with community and government stakeholders over the years of prior work.

The second challenge was in ensuring the safety and emotional well-being of the scores of volunteers engaged. Rizq managed to procure adequate PPE, hand sanitisers and masks at a time of global scarcity, but this demanded creativity and careful budgeting. Then, training the volunteers to follow protocols consistently, and monitoring those practices across dozens of teams, took much sustained effort. Even with these precautions, the psychological weight of working amidst fear, illness and visible distress was considerable, but in response, Rizq introduced reflection sessions, mental health check-ins and regular debriefs to enable teams to process what they were seeing on-ground and to prevent burnout.

Major demand-supply mismatches posed another serious difficulty. Needs increased exponentially during the pandemic as more households fell rapidly below the poverty line or lost their primary income. Donations, generous and plentiful though they were, arrived in waves and could not always keep pace with the growing scarcity. To address this, Rizq shifted to a rolling distribution model, which prioritised the most vulnerable households and encouraged donors to commit to recurring contributions so that families could be supported over time rather than through one-off deliveries.

Taken together, these experiences taught Rizq to operate with greater agility. As Rizq's first major relief effort, the team's greatest strengths turned out to be decentralized decision-making, strong local partnerships and a willingness to adapt in real time, and each of these emerged as non-negotiable features of an effective emergency response. Equally importantly, the campaign reaffirmed that food security cannot be treated in isolation from questions of income, housing, health and urban planning. Any serious attempt to protect people from hunger during crises must engage with all of these dimensions at once, thoughtfully, but rapidly.

FUTURE ROADMAP

The COVID-19 pandemic painfully, undeniably exposed the fragility of food systems across Pakistan and revealed just how quickly vulnerability can spread when incomes collapse and supply chains fall apart. For Rizq, the crisis was its first ever major disaster response, a test of operational endurance and thus a proving ground for a new model of humanitarian action built around community trust, youth leadership, and system-wide coordination. The COVID response reshaped Rizq into something beyond an organisation that does traditional relief - and served as proving grounds that it is a movement that designs social safety nets that can withstand dire circumstances and catastrophes.

What emerged from the pandemic was a successful emergency operation that serves as a blueprint for how civil society can respond to national crises with speed, transparency and - importantly - moral clarity. In a country where social protection systems are fragmented, overstretched, Rizq's COVID response showcased the power of decentralised, nationwide relief delivery driven through strong central coordination. It showcased that with the right digital infrastructure, volunteer networks, and private-public collaboration, relief can move much faster than bureaucracy, and empathy can be converted into systems

The digital systems developed during COVID-19, including beneficiary verification, digital tracking, and public reporting dashboards can be formalized into a national-scale food security intelligence framework capable of vulnerability mapping and targeted intervention during disruptions, supporting governments, donors, and communities with evidence-based action.



Floods 2022 Response

Floods 2022 Response: Mobilizing Aid for Resilience

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2022, Pakistan faced one of the most devastating climate disasters in its entire history. Unrelenting monsoon rains, coupled with accelerated glacier melt, submerged nearly one-third of the country, displacing millions all across South Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan, and affecting more than 33 million people. Homes collapsed to debris, miles of farmland vanished beneath floodwaters, classrooms were reduced to rubble, and millions of Pakistanis were left without access to food, clean water, or shelter. For families that were already living on the margins, the floods erased life, rather than disrupting it.

For Rizq, an organisation with a central mandate in food security, the disaster demanded an immediate, fundamental shift. Within a few days, Rizq moved from its country-wide conventional operations into a full-scale emergency response. Drawing on the lessons acquired from its COVID-19 operations, the team activated a nationwide network of Youth Republic volunteers, corporate partners, humanitarian organisations, and local leaders, galvanising them to respond at unprecedented speed and countrywide scale. The endeavour began as emergency food relief, and from there expanded rapidly into shelter, healthcare, agriculture rehabilitation, disaster-safe eco-homes, and long-term resilience.

The Floods of 2022 marked a turning point in Rizq's organisational journey, signalling its evolution from a food recovery initiative, into a holistic crisis-response and resilience-building organisation.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

Though Rizq had already weathered and responded to a major national crisis, this one was of a very different nature - instantaneous, and more relentlessly destructive. The moment Rizq's relief teams moved on-ground to conduct need assessments, it became abundantly clear that a ration hamper, on its own, would not be able to hold a family through months of displacement, nor would a temporary tent restore a flood-stricken farmer's ability to ensure they planted wheat seeds in time for the winter. At Rizq HQ, the conversation turned away from purely instantaneous relief, to trying to map which interventions would best serve the flood-stricken in their ability to get back on their feet once the waters recede. What was immediately apparent was that an effective relief strategy would need to encompass both approaches.

Thus, Rizq's 2022 Flood Relief intervention was guided by a twofold mission. First, to respond quickly to urgent survival needs with food, water, shelter and healthcare. Secondly, to lay the foundation for long term resilience, through eco-housing, sustainable agriculture, and youth mobilisation, to build community capacities to withstand future climate shocks. Rather than treat the floods as a one off disaster, Rizq chose to see them as an inflection point in the wake of accelerating climate disasters. Ultimately, the devastating floods of 2022 were a warning call for the country, and an opportunity for Rizq to rethink what a community centric and climate-aware response must look like for Pakistan.

What set Rizq apart in this emergency response effort was its ability to mobilize multiple layers of support at once, through key nodes identified during Covid-19. Rizq's Youth Republic volunteers were trained and deployed within hours, corporate partners opened their warehouses and supply chains, international humanitarian actors such as World Central Kitchen and Global Medic joined hands with Rizq teams to initiate immediate on-ground relief, and local political and community leaders provided their access, insight and influence. Rizq's digital tools, now primed to be instantly engaged, allowed for real time data collection and transparent reporting. Together, these elements turned a food security social enterprise into a multi-sectoral relief actor - overnight.

INTERVENTION AREAS

Rizq's Flood Relief Programme was architected around five critical pillars: Emergency Food Assistance, Healthcare and Hygiene, Essential Goods Distribution, Shelter and Livelihood Recovery, and Community Resilience and Awareness. These functional pillars were supported by a hybrid organisational model that combined central coordination with decentralised local leadership.

1. Emergency Food Assistance:

With food systems completely destroyed and flood-stricken communities fully cut off from markets by the water, Rizq prioritized access to nutritious and safe food as the first line of defense. Drawing heavily upon its experience from COVID-19, where it had served more than a million meals through its Rizq Daig and Rizq Food Bank models, the organisation quickly established structured food interventions in some of the hardest hit districts including Taunsa, Rajanpur, Rojhan, Jacobabad, Sukkur, Qambar Shahdadkot, Dadu, Umarkot, Mirpurkhas, and pockets of interior Balochistan.

In partnership with the World Central Kitchen, Pakistan Air Force and Monal, Rizq established live community kitchens in high need areas. These mobile and central kitchens followed a 'hub and spoke' model, allowing hot meals to be cooked on site and sent out to nearby clusters that had no capacity to cook. Over the course of three months more than 1 million cooked meals were provided to flood-stricken families in South Punjab and in Sindh.

Alongside cooked food, more than 35,000 dry ration packs were distributed. Each ration was carefully designed based on local dietary preferences and average family size, and typically included wheat flour, rice, lentils, oil, sugar and tea. Where possible, these ration packs were further supplemented with baby food and nutrition specific items. Instead of distributing empty calories or giving out bland meals, the goal was to sustain families through weeks of displacement with nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

2. Healthcare and Hygiene:

As the standing floodwater stagnated, reports of disease outbreaks began to take hold; flooded areas became breeding grounds for mosquitoes and sources of contaminated drinking water. Rizq immediately integrated health and hygiene support directly into its food distribution missions, treating public health as a parallel priority. In partnership with Global Medic, and other health focused donors, Rizq distributed thousands of mosquito nets, hygiene kits, water purification tablets, oral rehydration salts and first aid supplies. Hygiene kits distributed included soap, hand sanitisers and masks, while menstrual hygiene products were distributed to women and girls along with appropriate guidance on safe usage and disposal of said products within camp settings.

Youth volunteers from the Rizq Youth Republic delivered basic awareness sessions in camps and temporary settlements, encompassing topics such as safer water storage, hand-washing, sanitation, and detecting early signs of waterborne diseases. These interventions proved especially important in regions where access to hospitals and clinics remained limited by halted infrastructure throughout the crisis.

3. Essential Goods Distribution:

Early needs assessments had made it clear that families had lost much more than food. Many flood victims arrived in camps with nothing more than the clothes they were wearing - no valuables, no diapers for infants, no medicines for the elderly. The nights were growing colder, and increasingly unprotected.

Rizq therefore broadened its procurement model beyond food and medicine, to include other non-food essentials. Through a combination of in kind donations and targeted purchasing the relief team packed and distributed clothing, blankets, medicines, baby care items, mosquito repellents, sanitary products and personal care items. These items were especially prioritized for women-headed households, as well as for families with infants, older persons and people with disabilities.

This flexibility in procurement came from lessons learned in earlier relief campaigns where other rigid models had failed to respond to rapidly changing on ground needs. In the 2022 floods, Rizq once again deliberately chose agility over uniformity of scope.

4. Shelter and Livelihood Recovery:

With floodwaters still standing after weeks, families were likely to remain displaced for months. Some, tragically, would never be able to return to the homes they had lost. In the wake of this bleak reality, safe shelter, and then stable housing and livelihood recovery, emerged as necessary core priorities for any holistic relief effort.

During the immediate crisis window between August and December 2022, Rizq distributed more than 350 tents, tarpaulin sheets and waterproof coverings, often in collaboration with the Pakistan Air Force and local partners. These temporary shelters protected families from the harsh elements outdoors, while Rizq developed more sustainable housing plans in the background.

Then, in the second phase, Rizq began to construct semi permanent shelter homes in partnership with donors such as TikTok and Cargill. More than 400 eco-friendly homes were built, using locally appropriate designs that could withstand future climatic stress, and inspired by Yasmeen Lari's eco-friendly Barefoot Social Architecture (BASA) Model.

These were prioritized for the most vulnerable families identified through community mapping exercises. Minority Hindu communities, left entirely out of the net of state relief efforts, were given special priority. But beyond simply constructing the homes as a one-off giving exercise, community members were trained in construction and masonry techniques, to be able to repair and rebuild additional homes, and acquire livelihoods in the process.

At the same time, Rizq recognized that for the most impoverished small farming communities affected by the floods, 'recovery' would only be a real prospect when their fields came back to life. This led to the rapid design, team-building, community mobilization, and formal launch of the Kisaan Dost Program in South Punjab's poorest, worst flood-affected districts. Under KDP, smallholder farmers received certified seed packets, fertilisers, pesticides, and training on resilient farming practices - not only were these farmers then able to recover fully from the shock of the floods in time for the wheat season, they also achieved yields 45% higher than their baseline average. Through this program, flood-affected farming communities were able to build back better than before. The success of the Kisaan Dost program marked the formal establishment of Rizq's Agriculture and Livestock Division.

5. Community Resilience and Awareness

At the heart of Rizq's entire Flood 2022 response was the Rizq Youth Republic. Within 48 hours of the first alerts, more than 2,000 youth volunteers had been mobilised through universities, community networks and social media. These volunteers became the backbone of Rizq's response. On ground, these passionate young individuals assisted with beneficiary identification, registration and crowd management. They helped set up distribution sites, managed token systems, coordinated with local authorities, and supported and delivered basic health and hygiene awareness sessions in the heart of some of the worst-affected communities. On the back end, other volunteers supported data entry, logistics tracking, media documentation and digital fundraising throughout the relief campaign. Their presence helped transform the flood response from a purely transactional exercise into a community owned effort.

OPERATIONAL MODEL: EXPLAINED

Behind Rizq's multi pillar Flood 2022 relief response sat a clear operational spine; from Lahore, Rizq HQ functioned as the central nerve centre, directing relief strategy, fundraising, procurement frameworks, communications and overall quality control. From there, a network of regional teams and local coordinators led implementation, tailored to context-specific needs, in each flood affected district.

Within 12 hours of the initial NDMA and media alerts, a cross departmental team at HQ began information gathering and preliminary analysis. Within 36 hours, a comprehensive internal proposal was drafted, mapping potential operational areas, outlining HR roles, budgets, procurement strategies and designing communication and media frameworks.

Within 72 hours, assessment teams were on ground in priority districts such as Taunsa and Rajanpur, using a combination of local contacts, partner NGOs, and district administration offices to understand needs. Tools like Kobo Toolbox were used for GPS enabled data collection, including photographs, geotags and metadata. In low connectivity areas, manual data collection and paper tokens were used, digitised later at the hub.

Rizq's beneficiary identification process was clear and transparent, as area wise tokens were distributed ahead of time, and lists were compiled with names, CNIC numbers, family sizes and contact details. Safety and neutrality guided the selection of distribution sites, often in government schools or air force camps. Local sardars and government representatives were engaged as needed for crowd control, while Rizq teams maintained authority over beneficiary selection and protocol.

Rizq's relief inventory management followed a dual system: (1) A central warehouse in Lahore, known as Rizq Hub, managed all large scale packaging, labelling and dispatches, and (2) on site warehouses in field locations received and verified supplies before final distribution. Gate passes tracked every vehicle leaving and returning, and at the end of each day, operations leads submitted closing reports that included distribution counts, inventory flow, challenges and media logs. These were consolidated into a master 'flood relief tracker' that allowed leadership to make data driven decisions daily.

Despite this structure, the field realities of the operation remained ever-evolving, complex. Roads would disappear overnight, teams would have to travel by boat rather than trucks, political intermediaries would exert pressure - even in times of deep crisis - for preferential treatment, and mobile signals dropped without warning, hampering coordination. In many cases, the ability of the on-ground operational teams to adeptly work with local knowledge, improvisation and relationship building skills turned out to matter as much as formal planning documents.

IMPACT

Floods 2022 remains one of Rizq's largest and most defining campaigns. The scale of impact was highly significant - over the course of the response effort, more than 1 million cooked meals were served in partnership with World Central Kitchen and Monal, particularly across South Punjab and Sindh. Rizq distributed more than 35,000 ration packs along with over 3,000 hygiene kits and mosquito nets. Over 350 tents and temporary shelters were provided during the emergency period, and more than 400 disaster-safe, eco-homes were constructed in later phases for long term rehabilitation.

Rizq's relief operations stretched across three provinces, with more than 100 locations covered in districts such as Taunsa, Rajanpur, Rojhan, Jacobabad, Sukkur, Qambar Shahdadkot, Dadu, Umarmot, Mirpurkhas and Jhal Magsi. More than PKR 100 million were mobilised in corporate and individual donations. Partners included World Central Kitchen, Global Medic, Pakistan Air Force, Total Parco, Cargill, TikTok, Monal and regional non governmental organisations such as SRSO and NRSP. Over 2,000 to 2,500 volunteers, largely youth, were engaged across packaging hubs, data cells, media teams and field missions. This youth-first model was a culmination of Rizq's investment in leadership-building over the past five years, particularly through civic education, immersive volunteering, and disaster training modules introduced post-COVID.

Beyond the numbers, the impact is best understood through the stories of those who lived it.

A mother from Rajanpur, Shakila Bibi, recalls the nights when survival felt impossible:

“I AM A WIDOW AND MOTHER TO FIVE CHILDREN. WHEN THE FLOODWATER CAME, IT DID NOT JUST TAKE OUR HOME, IT TOOK EVERYTHING. OUR RATION WAS WASHED AWAY, OUR STOVE DROWNED, AND THE CROPS WE DEPENDED ON WERE FLATTENED BY THE WATER. FOR DAYS, WE HAD NOTHING BUT SOAKED ROTI CRUMBS, AND I FEARED MY CHILDREN WOULD NOT SURVIVE. JUST WHEN ALL HOPE WAS SLIPPING AWAY, RIZQ’S TEAM ARRIVED IN OUR VILLAGE. THEY CAME WITH KITCHENS THAT COOKED MEALS, HOT FOOD THAT I HAD NOT SEEN IN OVER A WEEK. MY CHILDREN CRIED, NOT FROM HUNGER ANYMORE, BUT BECAUSE SOMEONE REMEMBERED US. RIZQ DID NOT JUST FEED US, THEY SAVED US. THEY RETURNED AGAIN WITH RATION PACKS AND HYGIENE KITS. THAT IS WHEN I KNEW WE WERE NOT ALONE.”

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

The campaign proved that Rizq as an organisation, could grow rapidly under pressure, but it also exposed very real limits and blind spots for the team. Rather than see these as failures, Rizq treated them as hard-earned lessons that would duly inform any future relief response effort.

One of the foremost challenges was movement itself to the flood affected areas. With highways and roads submerged, and bridges washed away, access to many of the worst hit communities was simply cut off. Trucks could only go so far before boats, tractors, walking, or even wading through the water had to take over. Routes that were feasible in the morning became impassable by afternoon, and so Rizq’s relief teams had to constantly reroute and reorient themselves, negotiate new passageways, lean heavily on local knowledge and accept that in a disaster of this scale, agility of relief had to find a way through any type of roadblock.

Volunteer safety was another concern - particularly for those volunteer teams working in waist high water, or extreme heat, surrounded by rising cases of malaria, diarrhea and waterborne infections. Exposure to contaminated water and lack of nearby medical facilities created a constant undercurrent of risk. Rizq responded by putting in place stricter Standard Operating Procedures, PPE, medical kits and real-time check-ins, but the experience made clear the fact that disaster safety training had to become a core part of how RYR was prepared to act on ground, long before any disaster struck.

Navigating local power structures and politics was an equally complex endeavor. In those districts where feudal or political actors had a chokehold on resources, any attempts to run fully independent, need based relief would be met with quiet resistance, underhanded challenges. At times, there would be pressure to route aid through local influential figures or to prioritize particular groups for visibility. Holding a neutral and principled line required societal savviness, but also constant dialogue, careful documentation of beneficiary criteria and a willingness to step back from arrangements that compromised dignity or fairness of relief. The floods of 2022 clearly underlined for Rizq that in any future response effort, early relationship building with administrations, tribal elders and community leaders would be as important as the relief items themselves.

A further challenge lay in managing the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation. In the early weeks of the disaster, donations flowed in abundantly as compassion soared, media attention was intense, and the public's emotional response was immediate. As time passed and cameras moved on, raising funds for longer term needs like permanent housing, livelihood restoration, psychosocial support became far more difficult. Yet, those were precisely the areas where communities needed the most sustained support. The experience reinforced a critical insight, that from day one, any disaster strategy must carry two tracks running in parallel one for urgent survival, and one for rebuilding life after the water recedes. It also prompted Rizq to think about allocating and segmentizing fundraising outreach strategy for disasters - pre-planning for those funding nodes that would be warmer to long-term rehabilitation, and reaching out accordingly.

There were also internal learnings that could not be ignored. Aid duplication by different actors was a real problem, and it highlighted the need for stronger coordination and shared data. There was also a need for hybrid systems to be built that could function both online and offline, using tools like Kobo Toolbox where possible and reverting to manual tokens and paper lists where connectivity would disappear. The emotional toll on staff and volunteers, who were witnessing loss and desperation on a daily basis, pointed to the need for more structured peer support and mental health care within the organization.

Collectively, these challenges became a turning point. They made it clear that climate induced disasters would not be rare, one off events, but a recurring feature of Pakistan's future. Any organization that wished to respond meaningfully would need to move from ad hoc heroics to long term preparedness.

FUTURE ROADMAP

In 2022, Rizq chose not to simply move on once floodwaters receded. Instead, it treated the campaign as a blueprint for what a climate-aware, truly community-centric relief campaign must look like in Pakistan. The question is no longer whether Rizq can respond to the next disaster, but how it would be structurally prepared to do so with more foresight, safety and strategic depth than before.

One of the most significant shifts was an institutional one. Rizq formally established a Relief and Resilience Division as the central command for all emergency operations. This unit now houses pre-defined response protocols and a vetted network of logistics and implementation partners. Disaster response has thus moved from an ad hoc effort to a standing organisational function.

Partnerships forged in the crisis have been strengthened, as Rizq has further built upon its working relationships with NDMA, PDMA bodies, international humanitarian agencies and corporate CSR wings through MoUs and joint planning processes. For example, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, one of Rizq's first partners for postflood farmer relief, has successively partnered with Rizq again in 2024 to build climate-resilient homes for flood prone communities, and again in 2025, to rehabilitate farmers struck by catastrophic rains and floods. Additionally, for its eco-housing efforts during the 2022 floods, Rizq won Citi Foundation's Global Innovation Challenge on Homelessness, partnering to establish a Rizq Housing Innovation Lab dedicated to researching, developing, and implementing innovative, affordable homes for flood-prone communities in Pakistan, a stalwart against future disasters.

Additionally, Rizq's online donation portals with real time updates, geotagged impact dashboards, volunteer management platforms and inventory trackers now anchor Rizq's emergency workflows. First scaled during COVID-19 and Floods 2022, these tools have been refined to support faster decisions, clearer accountability and transparent communication with donors, farmers, and communities.

Perhaps most importantly, the Rizq Youth Republic is being reimagined as a trained national youth-led response network, one where volunteers would undergo modules in first aid, food safety, community engagement ethics and basic disaster management, and where city and regional teams would be organised with clear roles that can be activated when a crisis hits.

The floods of 2022 were a moment of grief for Pakistan, and a moment of reckoning for Rizq. They revealed the scale of climate vulnerability in the country, but also the possible depths of community courage and youth leadership. The Relief and Resilience Division, Kisaan Dost Program, the Housing Innovation Lab, strengthened partnerships, digital infrastructure and an institutionalised RYR are not isolated projects or outcomes. They are pieces of a single, emerging model for Rizq, where building more resilient systems and communities must lie at the heart of a truly compassionate relief effort.



Youth Republic

Rizq Youth Republic: Nurturing a Generation of Compassionate Leaders

AT A GLANCE

Rizq Youth Republic (RYR) is the youth engine of Rizq, and a national network of school and university chapters, city hubs and young volunteers, all of whom have channeled their compassion into organized civic work. **Over the past decade, what began as a small circle of students collecting surplus food has grown into more than 100 chapters, over 5,000 alumni and upwards of 800 active core volunteers across Pakistan.**

Through RYR, young people have helped raise more than **PKR 70 million for food security** and emergency relief, powered some of Rizq's largest campaigns, and carried the spirit of service into their own campuses, neighborhoods and careers. For many, RYR has become both a first encounter with structured social action, and a lasting reference point for what ethical leadership can look like in practice.

BACKGROUND

Rizq itself began as a youth-led response to systemic injustice. Three university students at LUMS, faced with the stark contrast between tons of wasted food and millions of hungry families, started collecting surplus meals in their personal cars and redistributing them across Lahore. In those early years, almost every facet of Rizq's operations depended on volunteers; students on motorbikes that brought in trays of food after weddings, friends staying up late to pack rations, or young people running small food banks in negotiated or borrowed spaces.

WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

RZR grew out of years of the cofounders observing how young people show up when they are given trust, responsibility and a clear moral directive. Again and again, Rizq saw that the youth were willing to work hard, take risks and stay present in difficult situations if they felt connected to a deeper sense of purpose. At the same time, many of them shared that they struggled with questions of identity, direction, and how to contribute meaningfully to society.

Through its work on food insecurity, Rizq also came to see that many social problems are not simply the result of a lack of resources, but an amalgamation of habitual indifference, normalized inequality and an underdeveloped sense of collective responsibility. Addressing hunger, in that sense, was also about addressing the values that shape how people live with one another.

RZR was designed to respond to both these layers. Its purpose, overarchingly, is to nurture a stronger moral and civic consciousness within young people, to help them discover a sense of purpose through direct service, to provide them with clear pathways for sustained civic engagement, and to support volunteers to grow into the thoughtful, capable leaders they inherently are, latently, in whichever fields they enter.

At its heart, RZR treats Pakistan's youth not only as a workforce for its existing programs, but as a more compassionate generation being formed. The emphasis is as much on who volunteers become through their involvement, as there is on the immediate outcomes of their projects.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINED

Origins: from volunteers to a structured movement

RZR did not arrive as a fully formed platform, it began organically, with volunteers who simply started to come back to Rizq over and over. They carried crates, sorted surplus food, registered beneficiary families, and spent long, arduous hours at distribution sites. Over time, many of them found that these experiences had profoundly changed their perspective on human dignity, on inequality and on their own lives.

To give shape to this emerging reflection, the founders began holding small sessions with volunteers, on morality, their learnings on ground, even the nature of humanity as a whole. These conversations explored questions such as what it means to live with compassion, how to understand one's privilege and how to stay grounded while working with difficult realities on ground.

In 2017, co-founder Musa Aamir gave a TED Talk titled "Lack of Compassion is True Poverty". The talk resonated widely and drew in more young people who felt that this language described something they had each experienced, but had not fully named, or begun to articulate.

The first organized step towards a more formal youth platform came in 2018 with the "Alliance of Students Against Poverty" (ASAP) at Lahore College for Women University (LCWU). Students there began fundraising, volunteering and designing their own initiatives in partnership with Rizq. Rizq then began piloting similar models at other institutions through internships and campus-based engagement.

By 2020, these different strands were brought together under one umbrella, as 'Rizq Youth Republic.' RYR provided a shared framework for chapters across schools, universities and community hubs, while keeping local leadership and creativity at the center.

**"EVERY CHAPTER SHOULD FEEL LIKE THEY OWN THE MISSION, NOT THAT THEY WORK FOR RIZQ."
- FARAZ KHAN, CHAPTER LEAD**

This sense of ownership continues to guide the way RYR is built and facilitated.

Organizational model: central alignment and local autonomy

Today, RYR is a countrywide youth network, structured around a balance between guidance from the center, and encouraging local-level initiative-taking and decision-making autonomy. At the center, the Youth Republic Headquarters provides overall direction on Rizq's ideology, education, advocacy and volunteer support. HQ acts as the link between RYR and Rizq's senior leadership, ensuring that all youth-led work is connected to larger, evolving organizational strategies while still retaining its own identity.

The HQ team focuses particularly on two broad domains:

- 1. Education and advocacy**, which includes talks, study circles, reading groups, research projects and public campaigns that invite young people to think more deeply about issues such as poverty, climate, urban hunger and social protection. Most recently, this has evolved to include winter schools and course modules on social entrepreneurship and innovation.
- 2. Volunteerism and mobilization**, which encompasses the coordination of grassroots activities, fundraising efforts, and field-level engagements, as well as offering support to local chapters.

Beyond HQ, RYR is organised through a network of regional and city leads in major urban centres such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, with outreach into Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities based on need and opportunity. These leads manage all local partnerships, mobilisation and coordination.

At the institutional and community level, schools, universities and local hubs function as semi-autonomous chapters. Each chapter has its own leadership team, responsible for planning activities, building partnerships and managing volunteers, within a shared set of overarching principles and guidelines. This structure allows for chapters to execute the locally relevant initiatives they've identified as being the most appropriate channels for the overarching goal, while keeping all chapters anchored to the common Rizq mission.

Youth mobilization and engagement pathway

RYR's engagement model is designed as a gradual youth leadership journey, rather than a single touchpoint.

Phase 1: Chapter formation and grounding

When a new chapter is initiated, a member of the HQ team conducts an orientation to introduce Rizq's story, core values and working models. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the institution is executed to formalize the relationship, after which a chapter activation process begins. This includes recruitment, selection of the leadership team, and joint planning of the first set of activities. Youth Republic Chapter standard operating manuals and guidelines are shared to support quality and alignment without stifling the initiative of chapter members.

Phase 2: Volunteer roles and day-to-day engagement

Within each chapter, volunteers are usually grouped into three tiers: a core team responsible for strategy and coordination, active volunteers who participate regularly, and support volunteers who join in for specific events or campaigns. The RYR HQ team offers training and capacity building sessions to all tiers. These range from practical skills, such as project planning, communication development, fundraising, and food distribution protocols, to building spaces on emotional resilience, ethical leadership and working with vulnerable communities.

RYR chapters use digital platforms and social media both as learning tools and as youth mobilization channels. Chapter volunteers participate in online campaigns, learning series and live sessions with different speakers. Chapters are also regularly engaged in Rizq's national campaigns such as its flagship Ramadan food drives, Qurbani operations, Christmas drives and emergency relief responses. During COVID-19 and the 2022 floods, for instance, RYR volunteers formed the backbone of much of Rizq's on-ground mobilization and data collection.

Phase 3: Scaling impact and building an ecosystem

As chapters mature, RYR supports them in working with a wider range of partners, including NGOs, corporate CSR wings, public institutions and community organizations. These collaborations allow students to see in tangible terms how different sectors operate, while they contribute their energy and ideas to joint efforts.

RYR has also begun to formalize a longer-term volunteer journey. Volunteers who consistently demonstrate commitment and growth are invited to take on team lead roles, internship placements, fellowships and, in some cases, staff positions within Rizq. A growing alumni network helps keep former volunteers connected to one another and to the wider mission, even as they move into different professions, cities, even continents.

IMPACT

RYR has grown into a network of more than 100 chapters across educational institutions and community spaces. Over 3,800 young people have passed through its programs as volunteers and leaders, with more than 1000 currently serving as active core volunteers. Collectively, these youth have helped raise over PKR 70 million for food interventions, relief campaigns and related initiatives, and have contributed thousands of man hours to operations that have reached millions of food-insecure or disaster-stricken families, farmers and communities all across the country.

Beyond these figures are individual stories that capture the depth of RYR's influence.

Inspired by his time at Rizq, Sarim returned to his hometown of Burewala and began the "Random Acts of Kindness" project, applying the same Rizq-borne ethic of small, consistent acts of care in a new context, thus seeding a new wave of good.

For Eisha, involvement in RYR was as much about inner change as outward work. Participating in community service and leading teams helped her build confidence, emotional resilience and a clearer sense of her own strengths. She now leads CSR and Outreach at Rizq, and remains fondly, closely connected with the youth network.

Hassam joined RYR at seventeen and has remained with the network for over five years, and now leads the Youth Republic, managing hundreds of youth chapters and volunteers. When asked about what motivated him to volunteer with RYR in the first place, he shared,

"WE DID NOT SHOW UP FOR THE STIPEND. MOST OF US DID NOT EVEN KNOW IT EXISTED."

It was simply the experience of being part of something meaningful, and the relationships built along the way, kept him present.

Aqsa, who would later serve as the Outreach Coordinator for RYR, helped start the Kinnaird College chapter with just four sign-ups and an Instagram page. Over time, that modest beginning grew into one of RYR's most active chapters, illustrating how small groups of committed volunteers can create enduring platforms when they are well supported.

Thus, for many, RYR has become a reference point for how they each understand responsibility, community and leadership. It has introduced a different way of thinking about service, and as Rizq evolves in its approach to giving, to food security, and to sustainability, so does the youth network - a consciousness that builds together through action, through training workshops, through policy dialogues, and through shared giving. On campuses and in communities where RYR is present, conversations about hunger, climate and social justice are not confined to classroom walls or social media pages, they translate into concrete and collective actions on ground. In this sense, RYR's contribution lies not only in the programs it runs, but in the generational shift it engenders in the young people who pass through it and the cultures they influence afterwards.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Working with a large, diverse and evolving youth network at RYR has naturally brought with it a range of challenges both at the individual and structural level. On the micro level, each chapter is made up of students with different personalities, backgrounds and pressures. Thus, leadership transitions can be delicate, especially as new committees come in with their own styles and priorities. Conflicts can sometimes arise within teams, and managing them in a way that remains aligned with RYR's values requires time, patience, support - and high emotional intelligence.

Coordinators and city leads also find themselves undertaking a significant amount of emotional labor. This is because RYR volunteers are often exposed to difficult sights and stories during field work, while simultaneously dealing with their own academic and family responsibilities. Building concrete pathways for their wellbeing has become an essential, if less visible, part of the RYR model.

On the macro side, sustaining RYR operationally has been an ongoing concern. While students have been successful in fundraising for Rizq's programs, resources specifically dedicated to youth development, training and coordination have been more limited. This has at times led to gaps in structured engagement during 'quieter' periods in the year when funding inflows are lower, and has highlighted the need for a clearer financial and staffing model for RYR as a distinct arm of Rizq.

As the network has expanded across cities, maintaining a shared ideological and cultural core has required deliberate effort. Chapters further from Lahore have not always had the same level of direct contact with HQ, which can lead over time to drift from the original ethos or a narrower focus on events rather than deeper formation. Communication gaps between regions and the center have occasionally resulted in duplication of work, missed opportunities, or feelings of disconnection.

These experiences have offered valuable lessons:

1. Ideology and purpose need to be revisited regularly and not only at the point of onboarding,
2. Youth leaders require mentoring, not only instructions,
3. Decentralization works best when paired with steady communication
4. Recognition and growth pathways matter deeply for sustaining long-term engagement,
5. A youth platform of this scale benefits from diverse and predictable revenue streams, not just project-based fundraising.

In response to these lessons, RYR has moved towards introducing regional communications roles, more frequent virtual and in-person check-ins, and a stronger social media presence dedicated to keeping volunteers connected. RYR is also now designing paid workshops, experiential trips and seasonal schools to support both learning and financial sustainability. Meanwhile, emerging work around mental wellbeing and peer support is helping to create a more held experience for volunteers working in demanding contexts.

FUTURE ROADMAP

Rizq Youth Republic has reached a stage where its past experiments, stories and systems can now inform a much more intentional second decade. The core question is now thus: how does RYR deepen the quality of chapter formation and impact, while also widening access to young people across different regions and backgrounds throughout Pakistan?

In the coming years, RYR aims to grow into one of Pakistan's key platforms for youth-centered civic leadership around food security, climate justice, social business, and broader questions of social equity. This includes developing a stronger YR Alumni Network, through which former volunteers can mentor newer cohorts and collaborate on projects, as well as continue to live out those dearly held values they first encountered within RYR.

YR is exploring structured leadership and ethics courses in partnership with universities and organizations, to give young people a more grounded understanding of moral philosophy, public systems and practical tools for change. The idea of focused courses and program streams on themes such as climate, food systems and inequality is also under consideration, with a view of educating and supporting the youth who wish to work more deeply in these particular areas.

RYR is also looking to strengthen its links with government youth platforms, local administrations and regional institutions, so that the experiences and perspectives of young volunteers can inform wider government-level conversations on policy and practice both in Punjab and at the national level. Expansion into more rural and peri-urban chapters will be approached carefully, with a curated strategy that emphasizes local leadership and long-term support rather than short-lived outreach or a flash of activity.

Central to all of this is a commitment to the wellbeing and growth of all the young people who choose to step into RYR. The network is seen not only as a way to deliver programs, but as a space in which Pakistan's youth can be mentally, morally and socially supported to become the best versions of themselves, to achieve their highest potential as young leaders and members of society, and to carry that sense of instilled grounding into whatever future paths they choose. Through alumni structures, leadership courses, mentorship and professional development, RYR hopes to become a stable home for young Pakistanis who want their lives to be both compassionate and effective.

The underlying impetus remains simple, that the Rizq Youth Republic is the embodiment of Rizq's desire to develop a more compassionate, socially-aware, and systems-minded generation to come, helping lay the foundations for a more just society for Pakistan's future. Perhaps, even, changing and reshaping the country's destiny altogether.

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