



**Esther**  
**EXPERIENCE**

## Projects

**Your contribution to the Esther Experience will help Release Women work with our local partners in two countries where women in particular suffer persecution.**



## Pakistan



For over a decade Release Women has been growing in knowledge and understanding about the plight of persecuted women in Pakistan. Our partners report on the abuse and intimidation of Christian women who find employment in factories and homes or who are in virtual slavery in brick kilns in Punjab Province. All are vulnerable to assault and up to 90 per cent report having been violated in some way. Our research revealed that women who follow Christ not only risk physical abuse and emotional trauma but are so disempowered that they feel unable to come out of this cycle of poverty and oppression. Release's

partners run Strength to Stand (S2S) groups which organise women into small community groups in which they can share their lives together, save money together, give out loans to one another with the mutual agreement of the group and help bring opportunities to start small businesses or pay for school fees or medical bills. At the same time, S2S groups offer an environment where women can have access to literacy, to Bible teaching, and to offering one another mutual support. These groups have the potential to transform the lives of many women in the brick kilns, villages and slums on the edge of cities where Christians live with little opportunity. Your contribution to the Esther Experience will enable our partners to continue running these groups which ultimately strengthen the whole community and enable the church to withstand further persecution.

*“These groups have the potential to transform the lives of many women.”*

*“We thank you and thank everyone who supports this work.”*



The traditional church in Egypt recognises the desperation of many of its women who live a life of poverty, resulting in poor education and health for themselves and their families. Christians are becoming more and more marginalised with less opportunity for employment and integration since the Arab Spring of 2011. Some Christian women are even seduced into marrying Muslim men to help them step out of poverty and have greater opportunities. Over a number of years Release Women has worked through a partner with the Egyptian church and has seen incredible transformation to their communities through S2S groups.

Mary, a facilitator of one of the groups, wants to encourage women like you to support S2S groups by holding an Esther Experience event. She told us:

‘One woman came to join a group as she expected us to hand out money like a charity but then she saw what we really did! She started reading the Bible more with the group and at home and saw her value in the sight of God. She said herself, “It is better than a donation!” She now attends all sessions as she realises her life has improved and even her economic position as she has learnt to save and manage her money. Tragically there are increasing issues with inflation. Some women have stopped sending their daughters to school because of the increased costs of items such as clothes, books and bags. We thank you and thank everyone who supports this work. God bless you and your work!’

These S2S groups are based in communities living within one of Cairo’s ‘garbage cities’, glorified rubbish dumps that are home to a large number of the capital’s Christian population. This particular group has little outside input or assistance and the Church wants to support it more effectively. Other groups have begun in areas where they face a lot of hostility and abuse and we have seen more lives changed because of these groups.

The money raised from the Esther Experience will enable Release Women to bring in-depth training to the church leaders in Egypt and to support community facilitators who will work with the S2S groups.