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Women in Pakistan

An Analysis of their Present Status

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AN ANALYSIS ON PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

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Authors' Introduction

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Foreword

Pakistan is ranked 148th out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018* and as 133rd out of 189 countries in the Gender Equality Index 2017 of the UN Human Development Report. On a broader structural level, this abysmally low score can be explained by patriarchal norms and customary practices that are so prevalent in the Pakistani society as well as failure of the state to ensure that women have access to financial empowerment, healthcare and economic, social and cultural rights, which, among other things, manifests as low mortality rates and violence towards women.

The problems and challenges women face have been exacerbated over the past three decades because of rising Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. This paper aims to explore the myriad structural factors which undermine gender equality and well-being of women in Pakistan and their many manifestations. It further offers recommendations on how greater gender equality can be achieved to make life better for women. Pakistan is the world's fifth most populous country and the second largest South Asian country. However, Pakistan's ranking for gender equality remains one of the lowest in the world

Sources of Women Rights in Pakistani Law

Pakistan is a signatory to multiple international commitments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). That is not to say Pakistan does not have local law protecting the rights of women. The Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan provides that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law and that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex. Moreover, Pakistan has passed legislation including National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women, Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the name or pretext of Honor) Act, Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) and a National Plan of Action on Human Rights. Local commitments adopted include Gender Equality Policy Frameworks and Women's Empowerment Packages and Initiatives.¹ However, Pakistan has failed to adhere to these laws and conventions in their true letter and spirit or not ratified them in local law.

The CEDAW can be used as an example to illustrate how Pakistan is failing its international commitments. In 1996, Pakistan acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), thereby officially recognizing and granting all human rights to its female population. However, all Pakistani laws are not in resonance with CEDAW. As per Impact of Sharia on Human Rights Treaties,

“Upon accession to CEDAW, Pakistan entered a general reservation which affected the entire body of the Convention.

...

The reservation states, ‘The Islamic Republic of the Government of Pakistan to the said Convention is subject to the provisions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan’.²

The generic and unclear nature of this declaration raises doubts over the government’s commitment to the Convention. Furthermore, Pakistan has yet to ratify the CEDAW convention domestically. The Pakistan government has also failed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, hence failing to establish enforcement mechanisms for the CEDAW rights.

This is especially disappointing as at the time of signing the CEDAW after the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW, Beijing, 1995), Pakistan seemed to be already undertaking steps to ratify the CEDAW. Five successive governments later, there has been no significant progress on the matter and implementation of the CEDAW remains a distant dream. The 2002 National Policy on women was significant in its omission of the terms Equality and Justice, thereby confirming civil society’s misgivings about government’s commitment to the implementation of the CEDAW.³

Nonetheless, the civil society is still lobbying the government to sign the CEDAW Optional Protocol. The aforementioned Protocol gives women additional rights as it allows direct access to the protections of the Convention. Furthermore, the Optional Protocol provides an additional NGO participation in the advancement of women’s rights. The Protocol can also be used as a tool for social transformation and for providing opportunities to further develop human rights standards and mechanisms for implementation of the same.

Role of the Patriarchal Society and Customary Practices

Pakistani society is a patriarchal society and therefore has such values deeply embedded in the culture and traditions of the people⁴. There is a well-known metaphor about determining a Pakistani man’s worth i.e. *zar, zan, zamin* (wealth, women, land)⁵. Such patriarchal role reduces a woman to a scale by which a man determines his worth, while also propagating the idea that in order to attack a man, attack his woman leading to widespread gender-based violence.

Therefore, in order to protect their own honor, men have to protect their women using segregation and an institutionalized code of behavior which associates honor with virtue.

²<https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=dex7TKuoUhgC&pg=PA96&lpg=PA96&dq=Pakistan%27s+accession+to+CEDAW:+Sharia,+Muslim+States+and+International+Treaty+Obligations&source=bl&ots=69T4reaiA6&sig=mc3HxHP86XRHFuy6BB7Gq>

³<http://www.af.org.pk/Reports/NGO%20Alternative%20Report%20on%20CEDAW%202012.pdf>

⁴ European Journal of Social Sciences, Education and Research May Aug 2017

⁵ No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women by Shahla Haeri

Notion of Honor

In such a strong patriarchal society, women's bodies are associated with the honor of their families⁶. Therefore, the woman's body and sexuality need to be protected and regulated not just for her own sake but for her family, too. In the matters of honor, it is not a woman's actions but public perception that dooms her. There are numerous cases of honor killing in Pakistan where women have been murdered for the sake of honor by their brothers, fathers and uncles. For men committing honor killing, the woman has, through her conduct and behavior, violated the traditional honorable code and thus brought disgrace to the family. It is only by killing the woman; this "stain" on dishonor can be removed.

Recently a high-profile case of Qandeel Baloch received much publicity after the Facebook celebrity, was murdered by her brother. While the matter caused an outrage all over the world, Pakistan had a mute reaction with most quarters blaming the victim for inviting such an assault.⁷

As per a 2018 Human Rights Watch report, about 1,000 women were murdered in the name of honor over a period of a year⁸. It is also believed that hundreds of honor killings, especially in tribal areas of the North of Pakistan, go unreported each year. Traditionally honor killings have been more prevalent in rural areas, however, over the past few years there are increased number of cases in urban areas, too. Police too generally ignore honor killings viewing it as an internal family matter.

The Pakistani civil society has been working tirelessly to eliminate this evil from their society. As changing perceptions can take years and generations the civil society has focused more on deterrence through the Criminal Law Amendment 2004. This amendment in the Criminal Procedure Code made the offence of 'honour' crimes non-compoundable.⁹

Despite this honor killings are still prevalent in the society. While the 2004 Amendment was a victory for the civil society and lobby groups, it will only make a difference when the actual killings are reported to the police. The prevalent culture, however, seeks to reward the killers with social acceptance rather than ostracization.

Dowry

Another such demeaning tradition is that of dowry as it reiterates women's low gender status. Before marriage the groom's family usually demands considerable sums of money and other goods such as beds, televisions, cars, etc. Refusal leads to gender-based violence and abuse against the bride. Usually the bride's parents are rendered penniless by such demands, and yet marriage is considered so significant in Pakistani society, that parents will do all in their power to

⁶ European Journal of Social Sciences, Education and Research May Aug 2017

⁷ https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/qandeel-baloch-s-death-takes-twitter-by-storm-pakistan-sees-mixed-reactions-116071600415_1.html

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/pakistan#3775af>

⁹ <http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/news-archive.php>

get their daughters married. As a result, many families, especially in rural areas regard the birth of a daughter as a curse and female infanticide was a common occurrence.¹⁰

Child Marriage

Another such customary evil is child marriage. As per UNICEF estimates almost 25 percent of women aged 20-49 in Pakistan are married before the age of 15, and 31 percent of women are married before eighteen years of age¹¹. Although, due to a lack of documentation and data collection, there are no specific numbers with regard to child marriage, there is still ample evidence in regular media reports that show that young girls – some as young as six months – are married (or committed to be married) to persons much older than them or to boys of the same age.¹²

In fact *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2006-07)* mentions that around half of the sample of girls between 15 to 18 years of age were already pregnant or taking care of a child painting a clearer picture of prevalence of child marriage.¹³

In order to combat this the Child Marriage Restraint Act has recently been revised in all provinces: in Sindh the minimum age of marriage is now 18 years for both men and women; while in Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the minimum age of marriage for girls remains 16 years, and 18 years for boys. Nonetheless, child marriages persist as the state cannot take action until the marriage is reported. However, with both parents and extended family being comfortable with child marriage, the reporting incidence is a bare minimum.

Violence against Women

Violence against women takes shapes as sexual violence and/or domestic violence.

In a strongly patriarchal country such as Pakistan, sexual violence such as rape and sexual assaults are considered the strongest tools for punishment or revenge¹⁴. Sexual violence is used as an exhibit of power and authority over women¹⁵

As most women are terrified of such sexual violence, the threat of sexual violence is also used as a control mechanism to limit economic opportunities and subjugate women. Furthermore, there is misbelief amongst the people that women who are subjected to sexual violence enticed or incited the perpetrator¹⁶. However, as many feminist theories have explained, sexual violence is about power and not pleasure.

¹⁰ To estimate an equation explaining the determinants of Dowry by Muhammad Imtiaz Subhani and Sarwat Afzal

¹¹ <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/child-protection-0>

¹² <https://dailytimes.com.pk/280275/child-marriage-in-pakistan-no-end-to-the-horror/>

¹³ <http://www.bedari.org.pk/child-marriages-a-position-paper-by-bedari/>

¹⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1348833/93-pakistani-women-experience-sexual-violence/>

¹⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318536680_Patriarchy_and_Gender-Based_Violence_in_Pakistan

¹⁶ *ibid*

Most cases of sexual violence are not reported in Pakistan, due to fears of associated stigma and ostracization. Moreover, there is a strong social, cultural, and religious barrier lead to women not reporting sexual violence.

Domestic Violence is also common in Pakistan. The instances of domestic violence are barely reported as it is seen as a private matter in the families. Although Pakistan has numerous laws outlawing domestic abuse, it still faces challenges in implementing these laws. The biggest challenge is to bring domestic abuse from family domain to a public one. However, most women prefer instead to suffer in silence rather than risk the associated stigma or ostracization. It has been suggested that a key reason, women suffer in silence is the economic dependence and that to protect women, they must be made economically independent.

Lack of Economic Opportunities and Gender Pay Gap

As per the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, Pakistan is second to bottom with vast majority of its female population not economically participating.¹⁷ Although women are around 49 percent of Pakistan's population, they form only 24 percent of the labor force. Of this figure a vast majority is undocumented and unrecorded, working either in fields or home-based work. However, these jobs have low pay, no job security, and low productivity and are time consuming.

Even amongst the women who seek to be employed as skilled workers, they are usually paid much less than their male counterparts. They are also subjected to harassment and discrimination. Although Pakistan is a signatory to the CEDAW Convention, it has yet to ratify it domestically. In fact, the 2002 National Policy on women was significant in its omission of the terms Equality and Justice.¹⁸ Although Pakistani constitution offers safeguards against discrimination on basis of gender, there has been no statutory effect to the same. With the exception of the West Pakistan Maternity Benefits Ordinance 1958 and Protection Against Harassment at Workplace Act 2010, Pakistan has not enacted any other laws to protect women professionally. Law and finance are seen as "men only" domains and women are largely ignored and impeded with numerous glass ceilings.

In cases where a woman does break the glass ceilings due to excellent academics or unique skill set or even family connections, they are at risk of being subject to sexual harassment. In fact, sexual harassment in Pakistan can be studied through the case study of Ayesha Gulalai. She was a sitting parliamentarian at that time at the time of reporting the charges (2016) and former member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Gulalai came forward with allegations of harassment against Imran Khan and claimed that she had been receiving lewd messages and overtures from him since 2013.

¹⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

¹⁸ <http://www.af.org.pk/Reports/NGO%20Alternative%20Report%20on%20CEDAW%202012.pdf>

However, allegations were largely rejected by the general public and Imran Khan went on to win the election the following year and become the prime minister of Pakistan. The supporters of Iman Khan viciously attacked Gulalai, attacking her credibility and character and even cast aspersion on her sister for wearing shorts while playing squash. Shorts are the official uniform professional squash. Other female party workers defended Khan and dismissed Gulalai's accusations on basis of their own experiences. Gulalai even offered to reveal the text messages Khan had sent her but by this point the entire public narrative was against her.

The incident revealed the gender politics of Pakistan. Instead of providing the safe space to discuss her harrowing experience, Gulalai was treated like a spectacle of mockery and disdain. Her experiences were completely ignored and discredited and no one considered the whether a survivor of harassment should be given a benefit of the doubt, if she publicly raises her voice, instead of being accused of making false allegations.

Nonetheless, the situation is gradually improving. Efforts to achieve better health, education and economic self-reliance for women are supported by pro-women legislation, and somewhat improved career structures, particularly in urban areas. The advent of highly qualified career women in a variety of new fields, from IT experts to banking, television and film artistes, education, medicine, politics and more has opened up new vistas for positive change.

Lack of Social Security

As per 2013 report by the World Bank, one third of entire Pakistani population lives in poverty. These people are usually from rural areas and do not possess any specific skills. In the rural areas most of these women work on the agricultural fields as unpaid family workers. If one is brave enough to move to the more urban areas only avenues open to them are to work in the low paid informal sector as nannies or cleaners. To tackle this issue of social security, previous government started Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) to supplement financial capacity of people. However, the program has been criticized for being too politically biased and funds are assigned on basis of political background. Furthermore, a poor country like Pakistan does not have financial capabilities to sustain a large-scale income supplement program. This lack of female social security is one of the key issues being faced by Pakistani women and if resolved can be a catalyst for resolving most issues faced by Pakistani women.

Lack of Agency

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, women severely lack agency especially in their own healthcare. As previously discussed, most women in Pakistan are not economically independent. Furthermore, they lack the ability to freely travel or have healthy relationships unless approved by their male family members. Women who rebel against these social structures are at severe risk of violence and abuse. In worst cases, such rebellion may be seen as a slight on honor.

Lack of Healthcare

As per UNWOMEN report¹⁹, 13.3 % of Pakistani women between the ages of 18-49 are undernourished. This is a significant segment of Pakistan's women population which is at a severe risk of malnourishment. A woman in rural area is twice as likely as one in urban area to be malnourished.²⁰ As previously discussed most of these women lack any agency over mobility or healthcare leaving them at the mercy of male family members to provide them healthcare. Even in cases where a woman is provided with healthcare, there aren't enough doctors or these women are priced out by high costs of healthcare.

A key reason for this is that there isn't enough funding for state-run health centers. Pakistan has traditionally allocated a minimal percentage of its GNP to healthcare, which sometimes doesn't even cover administrative expenses. Of the minimal amount that is leftover, most of it is used by tertiary healthcare leaving primary healthcare neglected. However, the state recognizing the long-term dangers has initiated policies and implemented policies such as lady health workers program, which has had a far-reaching affect and improved health for thousands of Pakistani women.

Another key point with regard to women healthcare is the high maternal mortality rates in Pakistan. As per UNFPA, Pakistan has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in South Asia²¹. While the statistics can be eschewed due to vast population living in rural areas with little to no access to medical facilities, research has found around 70 percent of all births take place at home, even in urban areas. This therefore means nearly one in five (15 percent) women is likely to develop complications that may require a higher level of professional skills. However, nine of every 10 births (85 percent) can be conducted safely by properly trained midwives.²²

Policies

The National Commission on the Status of Women

In the year 2000, the government of Pakistan took encouraging steps and established The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW). The mission statement of the NCSW is to emancipate women, remove discrimination and strive towards equality of opportunities for women. The discrimination expressed in social issues is to be eliminated for a life of fulfillment.²³ Currently, the NCSW is mandated to review laws adversely affecting women, and functions only as an advisory and examining body.

However, the NCSW has faced criticism as there are no guarantees that its recommendations will be tabled before the parliament and it doesn't have the power to directly approach the

¹⁹ http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=948&fbclid=IwAR1F5XfCGOcakRuBkYJwsTz1JeLYklyLxrZQ0RQc_lgesvgCEIXkviFg7S0

²⁰ http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=948&fbclid=IwAR1F5XfCGOcakRuBkYJwsTz1JeLYklyLxrZQ0RQc_lgesvgCEIXkviFg7S0

²¹ <https://pakistan.unfpa.org/en/topics/maternal-health-8>

²² <https://pakistan.unfpa.org/en/topics/maternal-health-8>

²³ <http://www.pildat.org/csodirectory/csodetails.asp?detid=43>

parliament. While it was established as a statutory body, it lacks the same status, mandate, autonomy and even funding of other statutory bodies²⁴. Therefore, the NCSW isn't always able to fulfill its mandate and the policy issues with regard to women empowerment still linger.²⁵

However, the NCSW's role is to promote social, economic, political and legal rights of women in accordance with international covenants and Pakistani law. It has made efforts to pass or amend the following discriminatory laws:

1. The Reproductive Health Care and Rights Bill, 2013;
2. The Registration of Marriage Bills for Hindu and Christian Marriages;
3. The Christian Divorce Bill;
4. The Representation of People Act, 1976 (to ensure women's right to vote);
5. Political Parties Act 1974, for effective participation by women in all decisions by political parties;
6. The Human Trafficking Ordinance, 2000;
7. The Criminal Law Amendment 2004. (Amendment in the Criminal Procedure Code to make the offence of 'honor' crimes non-compoundable).²⁶

In 2010, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan was approved by the parliament thereby devolving greater power and responsibilities to the provinces. Subsequently, provincial legislation paved the way for establishment of four Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women. Provincial chapters of the Commission are functioning in all four provinces.

Women and Voting

Most women in the rural areas do not have their national identity cards²⁷ and they live in seclusion, without any legal identity, as dictated by the local customs and traditions. As a result of this lack of national identity cards, these women cannot vote. Historically, Pakistan has barely had female participation especially in the rural areas. However, the recent election has seen a change of trend. In the most recent election in 2018, more than 3.8 million additional women registered and voted²⁸. The most remote tribal areas of Pakistan, which are administered federally, as opposed to having their own administration, saw a 66 percent increase in women voters in 2018 when compared to 2013.²⁹

²⁴<http://www.af.org.pk/Reports/NGO%20Alternative%20Report%20on%20CEDAW%202012.pdf>

²⁵ <http://www.af.org.pk/Reports/NGO%20Alternative%20Report%20on%20CEDAW%202012.pdf>

²⁶<http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/news-archive.php>

²⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/02/the-rising-voices-of-women-in-pakistan/>

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44901521>

²⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1769046/1-women-minorities-represented-polls-eu-observers-report-says/>

The Role of Women in Political Parties and the Problems and Impediments they Face

While Pakistan is proud, and rightly so, of having a first female head of state in Benazir Bhutto there do still many issues faced by women want to be a part of political process. The narrative surrounding the election of Benazir Bhutto usually ignores the dynastic politics which resulted in her becoming the head of state. As a matter of fact, women are simply given token representation by political parties who want to seem progressive and inclusive. Although most political parties have women wings, these wings hardly contribute to the running of the party affairs or policy.³⁰ Furthermore, while there are reserved seats for women in the parliament, these women hardly have any success to show in getting their policies approved.

It is also important to mention that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has no women at senior management levels. The ECP has tried to be inclusive and encourage more female participation in elections, and at one point even ordering a re-election, as women weren't allowed to vote³¹. However, this raises a serious credibility issue where the commission's body does not represent its own position.

However, the political parties are now realizing that sustainable development can only be achieved when women too have a voice decision-making at all levels. Pakistan People's Party has paved the way for this change by repeatedly electing women in strong positions of power, including recently electing Sherry Rehman as the leader of the opposition in the parliament. Once the roles of women lawmakers are strengthened, these lawmakers can lobby for policies which improve, health, education, livelihoods and land rights.

A significant step was taken by the Pakistan People's Party in the National Assembly (2008-2013) when Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) was formed whereby women from all political parties were able to form a cross-party alliance to pursue a pro-women agenda and work together on women's issues. This has given an important platform to raise women's issues and concerns on the assembly floor and enact important pro-women laws.

While there has been progress in including more women in the political process, a perusal of key positions of the three major political parties show a severe lack of representation. The central working committee of PML-N is exclusively male. While there are a few women members on the executive committee, the party's constitution has no allocation of women representation. The PPP party leadership comprises of five men only. The PTI's central executive committee is composed of only eight women (out of total 80 members). Considering that women comprise of 49 percent of Pakistan's population this lack of political participation is shocking.

³⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401914>

³¹ <https://nation.com.pk/21-Feb-2018/dir-women-allowed-to-vote-in-lg-re-elections>

Women Movement in Pakistan

Women Action Forum (WAF)

Women Action Forum (WAF), formed in Karachi in September 1981, is considered as the leading champion of women's rights in Pakistan. WAF is a non-partisan, non-hierarchical and non-funded network, and is supportive of all aspects of women's rights and related issues irrespective of political affiliations, belief system or ethnicity. It does active lobbying and advocacy on behalf of women in the country and stages demonstrations and public-awareness campaigns. WAF is committed to a just and peaceful society based on democracy. The common issues on which the women collective have worked over the decades are challenging discriminatory legislation against women, the invisibility of women in government activities, dress codes for women, violence against women their seclusion. WAF considers all issues as "women's issues" and has taken positions on national and global developments. It allies itself with democratic and progressive forces in the country as well as linking its struggle with minorities and other oppressed people.

The Women's Democratic Front (WDF)

The Women's Democratic Front (WDF) was formed in 2018 to unite women across the country to build a vibrant socialist feminist movement. The WDF aims to start a broad-based struggle against patriarchy, capitalism, national oppression, religious fascism and Pakistan's authoritarian political system. According to the newly elected WDF president Ismat Shahjahan and general secretary Alya Bakhshal currently the country was passing through a reactionary period in which patriarchy has taken on a brutal character, oppressed nations are resisting against state oppression for their survival and the working classes have been forced into contract work or part time jobs.

'Girls at Dhabbas' is another movement to reclaim public spaces for women. There are others such as Aurat March where women protest the sweeping patriarchy which strips rights and opportunities from women. There are also women founded and led organizations, working and lobbying for to strengthen women's position in society.

Effects of War on Terror on Women of FATA, KP and Balochistan

Terrorism in Pakistan has surged over the past decade and a half, mainly because of the war on terror. Up to 75,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the war on terror started and Pakistan has suffered a loss of 123 billion US dollars' worth to its economy³². While incidence of terrorism in Pakistan is now decreasing, the war on terror has significantly affected women in FATA, Balochistan and KP. Terrorism and the subsequent counter terrorism military action resulted in millions of women displaced. As per Aurat foundation, these women are suffering from four core issues³³ which are

³² <http://www.radio.gov.pk/19-11-2018/pakistans-unparallel-sacrifices-in-war-on-terror-cant-be-brushed-aside-with-meaningless-tirade-pm>

³³ <https://www.af.org.pk/Newsletters/nl%202009/nl28.pdf>

1. Human trafficking;
2. Violence;
3. Trauma; and
4. Health complications.

As previously mentioned most of these women don't have any formal identification, and therefore are unable to qualify for any state welfare programs³⁴ leaving them to the mercy of IDP camps. In fact, during the peak of war on terror, Mardan and Swabi became trafficking hubs and the full scale of women trafficking is still unknown. Most of these women are also suffering from war-related trauma. The IDP camps lacked enough health resources. There weren't enough toilets or kitchens so that they may be used frequently. Diseases such as scabies, fungus, typhoid and viral infections were rampant. There was poor sanitation and most of the water available was contaminated. Women were particularly exposed as the cultural and societal values dictate that they shouldn't complain or share these ailments with their elders, especially in matter of reproductive organs. This led to widespread insomnia, depression and anemia within the camps.³⁵

Even after the conclusion of counter terrorism operations these women faced innumerable problems on account of lack of a comprehensive resettlement plan by the government. Internally displaced women of KP, Balochistan and FATA faced the multiple problems issues on return to their homes including insecurity, shortage of food, lack educational infrastructure, health facilities, and psychological problems.

Even after the comprehensive counter terrorism operations in the North West of Pakistan, pockets of terrorists still existed which were being slowly eradicated using surgical operations and intelligence. Furthermore, most of the housing, schools, infrastructure and crops in the area had been destroyed. It is pertinent to mention that this disruption to social cohesion and economic stability is a key threat to gender equality. Sustained disruption invariably leads regression of gender equality.

Need for Fiscal Allocations and Equity

The gender budgeting entail mainstreaming women' needs into fiscal policies and administration, and to promote greater accountability for the government's commitment to addressing them. It is almost universally accepted by government all over the world that promoting gender equality and women's development is economically and socially beneficial to women and girls and to the societies in which they live³⁶. However, in Pakistan, with its high gender disparity, there is a need for gender oriented fiscal and policy changes. While there have been numerous attempts to introduce such policies, they have failed to translate into meaningful action due to traditional and cultural barriers and a lack of sufficient funds. There is also

³⁴ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/362263-plight-of-internally-displaced-persons-highlighted>

³⁵ <https://www.af.org.pk/Newsletters/nl%202009/nl28.pdf>

³⁶ UN Women, 2015, Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights (New York: United Nations).

fundamental misunderstanding in the parliamentarians on what gender budgeting is. The parliamentarians seems to believe that gender budgeting is about separate allocations for women and girls, not realizing that is a way to heal multiple social divisions including but not limited to age, sex, ethnicity, location etc.³⁷

Contemporary Gender Inequity

After years of advances in education, health and political representation, 2018 saw Pakistan register setbacks in all three areas³⁸. As per World Economic Forum report 2018, a stagnation in women employment and a declining representation in politics, coupled with greater inequality in access to health and education have resulted in increasing inequality between men and women in Pakistan. Furthermore, women are significantly underrepresented in intellectual fields such as law ,finance ,IT and business.

Human Rights Defenders and Women Activists

As per a baseline survey conducted by Democratic Commission for Human Development, 48 percent of organizations working on human rights for women have been threatened at some point³⁹. The survey further highlighted the dangers of being a women human right defendant in Pakistan, with 51 percent of women human rights defenders reported receiving a threat in the last six months⁴⁰. A number of human rights activists have even been murdered. A key reason why these activists are so threatened is that any challenges to traditions and culture are, especially in the rural areas, viewed with distrust and as promoting western agenda.

For example, in 2012, Maulvi Abdul Haleem, from Kohistan district in KP, warned female NGO workers against working in the district and said that perpetrators would be forcibly married to locals. He also declared NGO workers would be prevented from trying to 'influence' the locals, and declared that education and employment for women is un-Islamic. He stated that honor killings were a local custom and religious practice. Such pronouncements have filled the local women activists with fear and are instrumental in violations of women rights. The NGOs working in that area need the state protection to operate safely.

Effects of Globalization and Neo Liberal Policies on Pakistani Women

Although globalization has coincided with an historical high in female participation in labor, it has not resulted in equal pay or status. The International Labor Organization's *Global Wage Report 2018/2019* reported that Pakistan has an average hourly gender pay gap of 34 percent, more than double the global average⁴¹. This shows that a man earns on average 34 percent more for his labor for every hour than a woman.

³⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1125381/gender-budgeting-pathway-sustainable-development/>

³⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1452284>

³⁹ <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/12/women-human-rights-defenders-are-agents-of-change>

⁴⁰ <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/12/women-human-rights-defenders-are-agents-of-change>

⁴¹ https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/info/public/pr/WCMS_651658/lang-en/index.htm

The increased number of women in the formal workforce has also led to mixed experiences for women. While more women are now economically independent, it has also led to women facing a dual burden of working as well as taking care of the family and household. The women-centric neoliberal policies have mostly concentrated on civil and political rights while economic, social and rights have been mostly ignored or superficially addressed without being implemented in true letter or spirit.

Furthermore, while there are more women that ever involved in the political process, they are still severely underrepresented in matters of policy, especially in the north west of Pakistan where conservative religious ideology still prevails.

Recommendations

Ideological changes

- Focusing on financial empowerment of women and eliminating feminization of poverty.
- Actively opposing patriarchal norms, traditions and institutions and the inequalities they breed.
- Broadening accessibility to equal social, cultural, political and economic rights for women.
- Strengthening democratic institutions and process and decentralizing decision-making powers to local government.
- Challenging increasing extremism and fundamentalism that act as a catalyst for bigotry, hatred and divisiveness.
- Striving to end all form of violence against women.

Legislative changes

- Repealing discriminating laws and eliminating discriminatory tribal norms and practices.
- Women should be granted equal inheritance under the law
- Women representation on important regulatory and political bodies should be increased.
- Budgeting should be done with a gender centric outlook with feedback from prominent woman's rights groups.
- Ensure access to justice for women
- Effective redressal mechanism should be established.
- The ILO Convention No. 100 should be implemented in letter and spirit.
- Public funding should be invested on housing, education, health care and social protection.

Social changes

- Recreational opportunities for women and children should be available at all levels of society

- Women workers, formal or informal, should be registered with social security institutions
- Social protection programs should be introduced to reduce economic inequality and gender disparity.
- Awareness of the impact of conflict on women should be promoted
- The state should ensure safety and protection of women human rights
- Minimum wage should be fixed on scientific grounds and determined according to the rate of inflation and cost of living.
- Women-led business and enterprises should be encouraged and supported through tax breaks and low interest loans.

Implementation strategies

- Translate, implement and monitor international gender equality commitments through the state regulator.
- Ensure all industry regulators (such as SBP, ICAP, SECP, etc.) to have at least 20 percent women in decision-making positions.
- Make financial skills more accessible to women.
- Introduce policies which teach women how to create wealth.
- Offer tax breaks to women entrepreneurs.
- Offer tax breaks to SMEs employing women in 20 percent of its managerial positions.
- Provide safeguards over use of public places by women.