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Women, Peace, and Security in Pakistan

Summary

- Conflict and crisis have adversely affected the social and economic circumstances of women and girls in Pakistan. A gender lens is needed in responses to crises.
- Ensuring women's participation at all levels in decisions related to peace and security in the country is essential.
- The women, peace, and security (WPS) framework is useful for enhancing women's participation in peace processes and applying a gender lens to postconflict reconstruction.
- Implementation of the WPS agenda in Pakistan requires concrete measures at social and political levels that would challenge existing gender stereotypes and pave the way for greater participation among women in peacebuilding and peace processes.

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Introduction

The women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda—an effort rather than a formal program—calls for women's participation in decision making and incorporating a gender perspective in response to conflict and crisis.¹ In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325, the first time the international community formally recognized either the impact of conflict on women or the need to involve them as active agents in peacebuilding.²

Sixteen years later, acceptance of the difference in impact of conflict on men and women is widespread. Recognizing that women and girls are the most vulnerable segment of society when conflict strikes, the WPS agenda defines the essentials for greater protection of women and girls during and after conflict. Similarly recognizing the role that women can play in peacebuilding and postconflict reconstruction, the agenda also emphasizes the need to include women in peace processes and to integrate gender equality concerns in postconflict rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In a society such as Pakistan, where patriarchal norms and structural inequalities have restricted women and girls to the margins of the society, entrenched challenges hinder women's meaningful participation in public and political spheres. Existing inequalities exacerbate sociocultural differences and disparities in access to rights and services, magnifying the gender divide in conflict and crisis scenarios.

Impact of Conflict and Crisis on Women and Girls

Crises arising from conflicts and disasters have adverse effects on all of society, but the impact and experience is not necessarily the same for all. Gender hierarchies and power inequities exacerbate

insecurity for women and girls in particular. From more extreme examples where rape is used as a weapon of war to common issues of mobility and other restrictions that result from deep-rooted patriarchal norms, the consequences of conflict and disasters for women and men differ in their severity.

An analysis of history of conflict in Pakistan shows how human insecurity has proliferated in the country. Statistics from the South Asia Terrorism Portal reveal that approximately sixty thousand people have been killed in various incidents of terrorism since the start of Pakistan's fifteen-year "war on terror." The economic cost of war until 2016, the Economic Survey of Pakistan estimates, is just over \$118 billion.³ These statistics have severe implications for the most vulnerable segment of society. In Pakistan, women are often confined to the household and participate in public domain only minimally, if at all, which increases their vulnerability to violence, exploitation, and abuse in crisis situations. Sexual violence and abuse in the aftermath of a crisis or conflict limits women and girls' access to economic opportunities as well as their access to basic health and education.

Violent extremism has adversely affected women's mobility, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP). In Swat, for example, the Taliban banned women from working altogether and from leaving the house unless accompanied by a male family member. This affected not only women's access to health-care facilities in the region but also household incomes.

Limited access to relief items is also an issue that women displaced because of the military operation in KP faced, because many of them did not possess a valid registration document. During the 2009 military operation in Malakand, many displaced households headed by women did not receive their cash and food entitlements.⁴ Anecdotal evidence from the recent displacement in Waziristan suggests that women once again faced this challenge because they did not possess national identity cards.

Implementing Women, Peace, and Security

As the United Nations took steps to institutionalize WPS concerns, many member states developed National Action Plans (NAP) to implement UNSC Resolution 1325. As of November 2016, according to the International League for Peace and Women (PeaceWomen), sixty-three member nations had developed one. A civil-society effort in Pakistan attempted to do so after the tenth resolution's tenth anniversary in 2010 but the project stalled.

Although developing a 1325 NAP has been a popular approach, reviews of WPS implementation reveal that NAPs and frameworks for WPS implementation, however encouraging, are not necessarily effective. Gaps in implementation remain, particularly with financial allocations.

The challenges in implementing a WPS framework lie in the overall struggle for gender equality in Pakistan. Women's participation in peacebuilding, for example, is linked to women's social, economic, and political participation in the country. Implementing WPS concerns will require serious commitment from policymakers and civil society representatives to address the larger gender inequality issue. Recognizing women's agency in peacebuilding, strengthening their voice in peace and security matters, building their resilience, and reducing their vulnerability are each imperative.

The implementation of WPS concerns does not require a formal action plan but instead developing measures that would allow the elements of the agenda to move forward.

Recommendations

Commit to enhancing women's political participation. Addressing WPS concerns will require change in political processes, particularly by putting women in decision-making positions. More

women need to assume central party positions and tickets to contest on general seats. Local governments always have an enormous role and responsibility when disasters strike. Women councilors at the local government level have played effective and meaningful roles during crisis situations, during the 2005 earthquake and 2010 flood, for example. They were actively involved in relief activities and highlighted issues that women and children faced in the aftermath of the disasters at the local government level.

Women's role in governance and grass roots politics needs to be enhanced by changes in local government structure. The current system of reserved seats creates gaps for women's meaningful participation. Because women are not elected directly, as Saba Gul Khatak explains in a Sustainable Development Policy Institute working paper, they do not have the same authority, financial clout, or voice on the councils as male representatives.⁵ Laws that ensure women's greater participation in local governments are essential to enabling them to make decisions independently and to have a central role in local government.

Take a gendered response to crises. Inadequate response to numerous crises and disasters in Pakistan has been widely discussed and acknowledged, certainly in discussions for this report. Applying a gender lens to response planning and implementation would help reduce the plight of women and girls in the aftermath of a crisis. National and provincial disaster management (NDMA/PDMA) authorities need to devise standard operating procedures to ensure women's and girls' access to relief items. Issues with women's registration needs to be addressed through a countrywide registration campaign dedicated to women. Civil society organizations have taken the lead in addressing registration issues but need more government support.

Further, institutions involved in immediate crisis response need the capacity to address specific issues related to more vulnerable segments of displaced populations. The NDMA and PDMA should train personnel to link displaced women and girls with health services, legal aid, and psychosocial support services in the aftermath of a crisis. Police, health-care providers, and the judiciary would also do well to anticipate issues that women face during and after crises.

Support women networks locally and regionally. A number of women-led local initiatives have supported the WPS agenda in Pakistan. Some involve supporting women groups and networks that work to build peace by strengthening regional connections and bridging the gaps in response to local crises. The Women's Regional Network (WRN), for example, is a network of Pakistani, Indian, and Afghan women leaders working to resolve peace and security issues that affect women and girls in the region. Similarly, local networks of women such as Aman o Nisa and TQK, which is based in the FATA, advocate for peace and contribute to the struggle against extremism in Pakistan.

Government and civil society each needs to recognize the efforts of such networks in linking women concerns to matters of peace and security. Regional networks such as the WRN have carried out extensive research on the experiences of women who live in conflict-affected areas, generating detailed accounts of conflict issues through a gender perspective. Feedback and recommendations from these forums and networks could contribute to efforts in formal policy circles so that policymakers focus appropriate attention to these issues. Policy and legal reforms supporting WPS will require greater efforts by the government to support related work on the ground.

Harness the role of the media. The media's ability to change stereotypes and harness support to address pressing issues across the country gives it a critical role in furthering the WPS agenda. Currently, media focus on gender-related issues is scant. It also continues to portray women through negative stereotypes as either the oppressor (mostly in domestic family scenarios) or the one being oppressed. Members of the media need to make conscious and serious efforts to change stereotypes about women in society. Debates on foreign policy, national security, and the economy, for example,

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This Peace Brief focuses on women, peace, and security concerns in Pakistan, examines the challenges to implementing that agenda in the country, and provides recommendations for a way forward. It was funded by the Asia Center at the United States Institute of Peace. Zeenia Faraz is a gender expert based in Islamabad.

rarely include women. Women need to be provided adequate space and opportunities to discuss wider issues related to peace and security and foreign policy.

Engage youth. A majority of Pakistan's population today is under the age of thirty. Effective engagement with young people would go far to addressing the core causes of conflict and help change the narrative around gender roles in the country, interviews indicate. Working with young people to eliminate gender stereotypes that put women and girls at risk is key to transforming societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Men and boys play a significant role in creating equal opportunities for women and girls and in furthering the gender equality agenda. Both young men and women need to be provided with social and political forums in which they can engage in dialogue and discussion on matters related to national security and foreign policy. Political parties need to commit to developing young leaders of the future by bringing young people into decision making and ensuring that they are engaged more effectively within the parties.

Notes

1. Barbara Miller, M. Pournik, and Aisling Swaine, *Women in Peace and Security through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (Washington, DC: Institute for Global and International Studies, May 2014), 2, www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/NationalActionPlans/miladpournikanalysisdocs/igis_womeninpeaceandsecuritythroughunsr1325_millerpournikswaine_2014.pdf.
2. Aisling Swaine and Catherine O'Rourke, "Guide Book on CEDAW General Recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security" (New York: UN Women, 2015), 10.
3. See www.pkrevenue.com/finance/economic-survey-20152016-war-on-terrorism-cost-118-billion-to-pakistan-economy-during-15-years/.
4. Sarah Chatellier and Shabana Fayyaz, "Women's Roles in Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Rehabilitation in Pakistan," Policy Brief (Washington, DC: Institute of Inclusive Security, August 2012), 3.
5. "Women and local government," SDPI working paper series #24 (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 1996), 11, <https://sdpi.org/publications/files/W24-Women%20and%20Local%20Government.pdf>.



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