

EXPLORING WOMEN'S VOICES

WOMEN IN CONFLICT ZONES: THE PAKISTAN STUDY

*Community Conversations
in Balochistan and Swat*

BY NAZISH BROHI AND DR. SABA GUL KHATTAK
EDITED BY BEENA SARWAR



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK
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—Patricia Cooper, Founder/Convenor of the Women’s Regional Network:

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Ethnic Hazara Shi'ite women hold placards during a demonstration in Quetta.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Naseer Ahmed

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a new initiative that recognises the need for women to participate in any dialogue on peace, stability, security, economic and social development, as a means of increasing the success of these efforts.

THE WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK



Founded in 2011, the Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of individual women civil society leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India working together to strengthen women's rights and security, learn from each other, and construct common agendas across borders. It is a platform that brings together women's rights organisations and experts from South Asia, to thematically focus on the linkages between security and extremism, corruption, and the militarisation of aid and development as they impact women's lives. The Network aims to help build enduring and productive relationships among women leaders in South Asia, to ensure that women's concerns and voices are included in all levels of dialogue and agenda setting.

The Network recognises the need for women to participate in any dialogue about peace, stability, security, economic and social development, in order to increase success of these efforts. It was indeed the result of such efforts in 2010 that led to the Network being formed.

At a regional consultation in Nepal in 2011, we identified the rise of extremism, the persistence of corruption and the militarisation of development and aid, as they impact women's overall security. The latter was one of the most important areas of deliberation and future action. Subsequently, the Network was formally

launched to address these concerns, with the understanding that it would expand beyond the then participants, to be more broad based.

The Network in Pakistan promotes and supports the efforts of women working for national and regional stability and economic, political and physical security. In these efforts, we are claiming the spaces available within various existing frameworks, for example, the Constitution of Pakistan, the Pakistan Penal Code, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the National Plan of Action, Gender Reform Action Programs, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Social Charter.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Afghanistan, Pakistan and India together make up one of Asia's crossroads. Long before this region became synonymous with protracted conflict and bitter interstate rivalries, it was a hub for the exchange of goods, ideas and people across the vast Eurasian landmass. Civilisations and strategic regions intersect at this location, placing them forever in a symbiotic relationship with the world around them. In recent decades, it has become hard to narrate an Afghan, Pakistani or indeed, an Indian story entirely divorced from the reality of internecine conflict — internal and international.

A replay of 19th century rivalry over Afghanistan has trapped the landlocked state in a conflict where the conflict parties have metamorphosed, their internal alliances shifted and the agenda of their external supporters changed. What has remained constant is that the fabric of daily life has been rent, apparently beyond repair. Since 1980, the country has seen more than its share of death and bereavement, injury and disability, displacement, poverty and erosion of liberties. The ouster of the Taliban in 2001 held out the promise of peace and democracy that now stands largely compromised.

Pakistani society reflects the consequences of many wars being waged simultaneously. Unresolved issues with India are only a point of departure. Since 1979,

Pakistan has been a base for groups fighting in Afghanistan, and the first refuge of displaced Afghans. Over the last couple of decades, the country has also become an operational base for militant groups that are engaged in violent activities. In addition, the extreme ideology that these militant groups follow leads them to carry out attacks against individuals and communities at home, in the name of religious sectarianism or ethnicity. Ordinary Pakistanis become collateral damage in the process. The Pakistani state's response to the situation is ineffectual. The end result is that a conflict situation prevails over much of the country.

The Indian experience challenges traditional understandings of "conflict". Traditional inter-state conflicts

GENDER STATISTICS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2012 WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT

INDICATORS	Afghanistan	Pakistan	India
Adolescent fertility rate (birth per 1000 women ages 15-19)	93	28	36.4
Account at a formal institution (female, % age 15+)	2.6	3	26.5
Age at first marriage, female	21.5 (2010)	—	—
Contraceptive prevalence	21.2	27 (2008)	54.8 (2008)
Female headed households (% of households with a female head)	—	10.4 (2007)	—
Female legislators, senior officials and managers (% of total)	—	3 (2008)	13.10 (2010)
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)	5.4	2.5	3.3
Improved sanitation facilities (% of population)	28.5	47.4	35.1
Labour force participation (female, % of total labour force)	15.8	20.8	25.4
Labour force participation rate (female, % of female population ages 15-64)	16.1	23.4	30.3
Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	61.4	67.2	67.7
Lifetime risk of maternal death (1: rate varies by country)	—	—	—
Literacy rate, youth female (% of female ages 15-24)	—	61.5 (2009)	—
Literacy rate, adult female (% of female ages 15 and above)	—	40.3 (2009)	—
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)	460 (2010)	260 (2010)	200 (2010)
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)	27.7	22.5	11
Proportion of women in ministerial positions (%)	7.4 (2010)	7.5 (2010)	10 (2010)
Women who were first married by age 18 (% of women ages 18-24)	40.4	24 (2007)	—

Accessed at World Bank, Gender Equality Data and Statistics, <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/thematic-data> on October 24, 2013.

Photo credit: Ellen Jaskol



arguably affect fewer people than the plethora of conflict situations in India arising from insurgencies and counter-insurgency operations, communal violence, struggles over control of natural resources or rivalries between militant groups. Falling below the official conflict radar does not make these situations less deadly or people's lives less fraught. If anything, here the lack of accountability that characterises most conflict situations is exacerbated by the fact that these situations remain unrecognised, undocumented and largely unchallenged outside their locations.

Across the region, security agendas set by the states have undermined the rule of law and accountability. Escalating defence expenditures, declining social funding and predatory development models that exploit national resources and marginalise and displace communities have deepened structural inequalities. The growing democratic deficit and rampant corruption are reinforcing extremist, militant and fundamentalist ideologies. As such, the region has become a playground for private and state actors with global geo-strategic interests. It is the people, especially women, who pay the price.

Additionally, the overlap of patriarchy with conflict has particularly devastating consequences for women—the threat of sexual violence as part of the conflict; the culture of impunity; brutalisation, including rising family violence; impoverishment with no access to credit; no capital; no title to any land; and displacement that ruptures social support networks. Conversely, conflict also disrupts the patriarchal order and creates opportunities for women's agency. Women may join fighting forces,

become peace activists, or heads of households and economic actors. In their efforts to engage with the system, they may be able to make it better work for them. The promise of peace appears to contain the promise that this agency will not be reversed. The unfortunate reality is that some backsliding usually occurs.

Conflict in the region exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, particularly gender inequalities. It magnifies socio-cultural differences, uneven development, disparities in access to welfare services, and gender lines. This Pakistan Network Report is based on women's experiences, their fears and their courage, their priorities and solutions, as articulated in a series of Community Conversations.

These Community Conversations took place at a critical moment. International society was creating norms around the inclusion of women and calling for an end to impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. More than ever before, women's experiences and needs in conflict, post-conflict and peace-building phases were being taken into account. The International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia had recognised rape as an act of torture. The U.N. Security Council had adopted resolutions on "Women, Peace and Security" (starting with S/RES/1325 in the year 2000), including the mandates and frameworks of the Beijing Platform for Action, and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The decades-long efforts by women's movements, around the world, are now coming to fruition. The Network contributes to this process of change through our Community Conversations that highlight women's

stories and perspectives, and by strengthening women's efforts to secure their inclusion at the peace table and all other decision-making spheres.

CORE VALUES

The Women's Regional Network is animated by a vision of women working collaboratively within and across borders to ensure human rights, equitable development and the full participation of women in building a just peace. At its launch, Network members identified three interlinked areas of concern — security, militarisation and extremism, and corruption — as a priority for all three countries.

At the Network we:

- > Honour our collective vision of the alliance and believe in the importance of a shared mission.
- > Ensure women and women's issues are an integral part of policy discussion at all levels.
- > Commit to working as part of a regional and global movement to build our collective voice, power, and influence.
- > Work independently from any political party, government, or religious institution.
- > Promote and sustain leadership that is participatory and inclusive.
- > Ensure transparency, accountability and responsible use of our financial resources.
- > Support appropriate strategies to ensure each participant's personal security is safeguarded.
- > Sustain our alliance through open, on-going, and in-depth communication.
- > Identify and resist militarisation of civilian authority/institutions and development aid.
- > Strive for excellence while being creative, bold and courageous.

The Network's linkages in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are autonomous but work in close coordination with each other. Individual members connect WRN to other individuals and organisations working for women's rights in each of their countries. Network members in each country have invited others to join and establish working relationships with women's rights organisations in their countries.

THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

How do we take discussions about security, conflict, militarisation and governance beyond elite security policy circles? How do we bring more women's voices into this discussion? How do we integrate their experiences and concerns into the security discourse? It was brainstorming around these questions that generated the idea of Community Conversations.

As the idea crystallised, it became evident that there would be two dimensions, realised in two phases:

1. We would hear from women about their experiences, concerns and priorities.
2. We would share ideas with more women, enriching our knowledge base and also engaging more and more women on subjects they rarely, if ever, get to speak about.

The Community Conversations process we initiated in 2011 evolved organically in each of the three Network sites, adapting to different ground realities. The resulting documents reflect this diversity clearly — the methods are different, the questions are different, and the perspectives vary.

At the core, however, some things remained the same in every country. We sought out women who lived outside the capital and main cities. Our interlocutors tended to be women who do not normally work in the area of peace and security. We adopted a variety of methods in each site, each creating an opportunity for sharing. In each site, the conversations centred on security, corruption, militarisation and the delivery of development projects and assistance.

These Community Conversations have generated rich, detailed accounts from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India of the gendered experience of insecurity. Choosing not to force the Country Reports into a single, common style is the Network's way of allowing voices to be heard as authentically as possible. This empirical work is particularly unusual in this regional context.

The Conversations process anchors the Network's work firmly in the real world of women's experiences. As we move forward, our agenda will reflect what we learn from the Conversations. The bridges built by the process make us accountable to our interlocutors and their communities. In turn, with each Conversation, we hope to grow our network and draw more women into local, national and regional conversations about peace

and security. While the findings of each Community Conversation process remain particular, by identifying the common threads and themes, WRN will create a cross-border agenda on these issues.

SITE SELECTION

In Pakistan, the research focused on two conflicts: in Swat and in Balochistan. The respondents belonged to district Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, and from different districts in Balochistan province.

These sites were the most prominent violent conflict zones in Pakistan when we were planning the study. We wanted to study conflicts while they played out, rather than a historic study aided by hindsight perception. The idea was to probe into and magnify the voices of women marginalised in the conflict and to reposition them as important stakeholders in peace discourses.

The WRN Pakistan contracted two researchers with professional experience of working in these areas, as well as personal histories of involvement with feminist women's movements in Pakistan — Nazish Brohi and Saba Gul Khattak. Both have independently and collectively been active in documenting women's experiences in Swat. Nazish Brohi has additionally been engaged with women in Balochistan. She has also worked on gender concerns in conflict zones including Iraq and Afghanistan. Saba Khattak has headed the social sector as Member Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, and was Director of one of Pakistan's foremost independent research institutions, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). In addition to their activism, they have been involved in thematically relevant research such as women's political participation; sexual violence; impact of conflict; gendering disasters; women's rights to and access to land and empowerment initiatives.

Both researchers concurred that our site selection was broadly indicative of the multiple complex problems Pakistan then faced with reference to organised violent conflict. The conflicts in Balochistan and Swat had some structural similarities. Both were underpinned by historic problems from the time of accession to Pakistan, and experienced periodic uprisings. Both were deeply impacted by the 'War on Terror' and the nature of the conflicts mutated and conflated in its wake. Both have been governed with an erratic, uneven combination of colonial era laws, local tribalised structures

and had a discordant relationship with the applicable laws and Constitution of Pakistan. In both areas, non-state actors emerged through crises of governance to challenge the writ of the State itself. In both places, international and regional groups have been directly or indirectly active; the conflicts have been a focus of international attention and experienced military operations as a result.

On the other hand, the conflicts in Balochistan and Swat were also sufficiently different from each other to offer terms of comparison and a broader representation of the nature of challenges faced.

Swat is a district, hence the conflict was geographically contained whereas in Balochistan, an entire province (Pakistan's largest) has experienced shifting centres of violence and resistance and covers broad ranges of territory. Swat was also a contained conflict in terms of its actors, primarily the army against the Tehrik-e-Taliban (Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariah Muhammadi — TNSM in its earlier form), although locals also point to collusions between the two. Balochistan had multiple conflicts within it, carrying ethnic dimensions, sectarian divides, resource battles, and conflicts between old and new political orders in addition to state repression and generally high levels of crime and lawlessness. The role of the army and security apparatus in Swat was more defined and apparent in decisive operations whereas in Balochistan it remained opaque and undefined by the security agencies themselves.

In addition to variations of conflict, the two research sites also varied in context. Swat is a tourist district with exposure to and integration with the rest of Pakistan, relatively better development indicators such as rate of education and lower levels of poverty because of a high dependence on remittance economy. Balochistan on the other hand is Pakistan's least developed province, with the highest levels of poverty, historic marginalisation through resource neglect and high levels of alienation from the state experienced by people.

These differences and similarities provided a rich context for the research to locate and understand the evolution of conflicts from women's perspectives and the impact of the conflict on women.

A further filter was required for Balochistan as it was (and remains) the location of multiple forms of conflict. It was a deliberate decision to leave out certain germane issues, including the contests over Quetta city



Huma Fouladi, Human Rights Activist, Quetta (Balochistan)

between the Pashtuns, Baloch, Afghans and ‘settlers’ and the terrorism engineered by Al Qaeda and variants of Taliban. The research focused on the standoff between the state’s security apparatus and the ethnic Baloch resistance fighters, or the sarmachaar as they are called. The study also briefly examined another violent context, that of the target killing of the Hazara in Quetta, that a banned sectarian organisation was targeting because they are Shia.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was developed in consultation with advisory group of WRN. This research depended upon qualitative interviews with women to learn about their experience of conflict first hand. The aim was to obtain a grounded understanding of the issues confronting women and highlight those, in contrast to the mainstream reports that generally ignore women’s perspective and are written within strategic studies or policy frameworks. Even work/reports from a ‘peoples’ perspective’ often display blind spots about women’s roles and views on many issues that are considered ‘unimportant’; all too often they assume that women’s views will coincide with those of men. Therefore, this report has relied only on women to provide their perspectives, and the methodology deliberately privileges the voices of women through qualitative research.

The findings of this research are based on primary data collected for this study and read against findings of a wider engagement of the research team in the sites spanning three years of conversations on women and the impact of conflict in Balochistan and Swat. So

whereas data collection under this research fund was constrained, it also draws from a wider net of interactions and findings of the research team.

The primary data was collected through two formats developed for this study:

- 1) A set of guiding questions and probes for steering focus group discussions (FGD) —annexed.
- 2) A questionnaire for structuring interviews with the caveat that the interaction would remain flexible to allow the researchers to explore topics that may emerge and require inquiry — annexed.

PROCESS IN BALOCHISTAN:

In Balochistan, the group discussions took place with:

- a) Twenty-two professional working women of all ethnicities — Baloch, Brahvi, Hazara and Pushtuns based in Quetta city.
- b) Twenty young women of all ethnicities, from urban and semi-urban working class backgrounds; with secondary education or in vocational training programs. Their ages ranged roughly between eighteen to thirty years; they hailed from or were based in Quetta, Khuzdar, Hub/ Lasbela, Sibi and Kalat.
- c) Eighteen ethnically Baloch peasants and farmer women drawn from the most ‘troubled’ flashpoints — Kech, Awaran and Panjgur; they were uneducated, and had high poverty levels.
- d) Twelve Baloch women from less-privileged backgrounds who had been displaced by conflict and were sheltering in Hub in Balochistan.

Within Balochistan, the site and respondent selection was meant to reflect a sampling of all ethnicities, with a specific focus on two ethnic groups, the Baloch and the Hazaras, who tend to bear the brunt of the current conflicts. While the Baloch and Brahvi are two separate and distinct languages, for the purpose of this research, both have been included as ethnic Baloch. This is because the Brahvi speakers assert themselves as Baloch, a 'self-identification' that Balochi speakers do not contest. Both linguistic groups are accepted across Balochistan and indeed across Pakistan as Baloch.

From within this group, ten respondents were selected for detailed, in-depth interviews. Eight of the detailed interviews were conducted with ethnically Baloch women and two with Hazara women. The selection of ten respondents was based on responses in the Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and the researchers' recommendations, based on their observations about which women were the most willing to tell their stories and whose stories had remained unvoiced.

PROCESS IN SWAT:

The researchers conducted ten detailed qualitative interviews and one Focus Group Discussion with eighteen participants, in order to obtain the views of women who deal directly with the research focus issues, in their professional and personal life. Previous research and interviews show that working women constituted the biggest threat to the Taliban world-view, and as such, faced the most repressive treatment and threats including in several cases, outright brutality and murder. It was women's mobility (leaving their homes and entering public spaces), assertion of their autonomy and working for money that the Taliban condemned and attacked. Therefore, the qualitative interviews focused on women who had studied and worked at some point. The women interviewed came from different fields and included teachers, health professionals, lawyers and non-government/development workers. Their ages ranged between the late twenties to the early fifties (most were in their thirties). Some had experienced displacement while the others had stayed on in Swat during the conflict. Each respondent thus represented a range of experience and reactions to conflict. The FGD consisted of a diverse set of women – housewives, political party activists, social activists, a midwife, and two college and university students. They had varying education qualifications, ranging from

very limited schooling (primary), to matriculation and Bachelors degrees; a few had even done their Masters. All of them were articulate in responding to the different sets of questions, and expressed their views without reservation.

While these interviews and discussions were conducted within the ambit of this project, the findings of this report also draw from sustained research conducted by the team in both research sites.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The first section of this report provides the background to the Women's Regional Network and the reasons it was established. It outlines the objectives in undertaking this regional research initiative and what the authors hope the findings will contribute to. Within the ambit of the Pakistan research, the report explains why the specific sites were chosen and how the research itself was carried out.

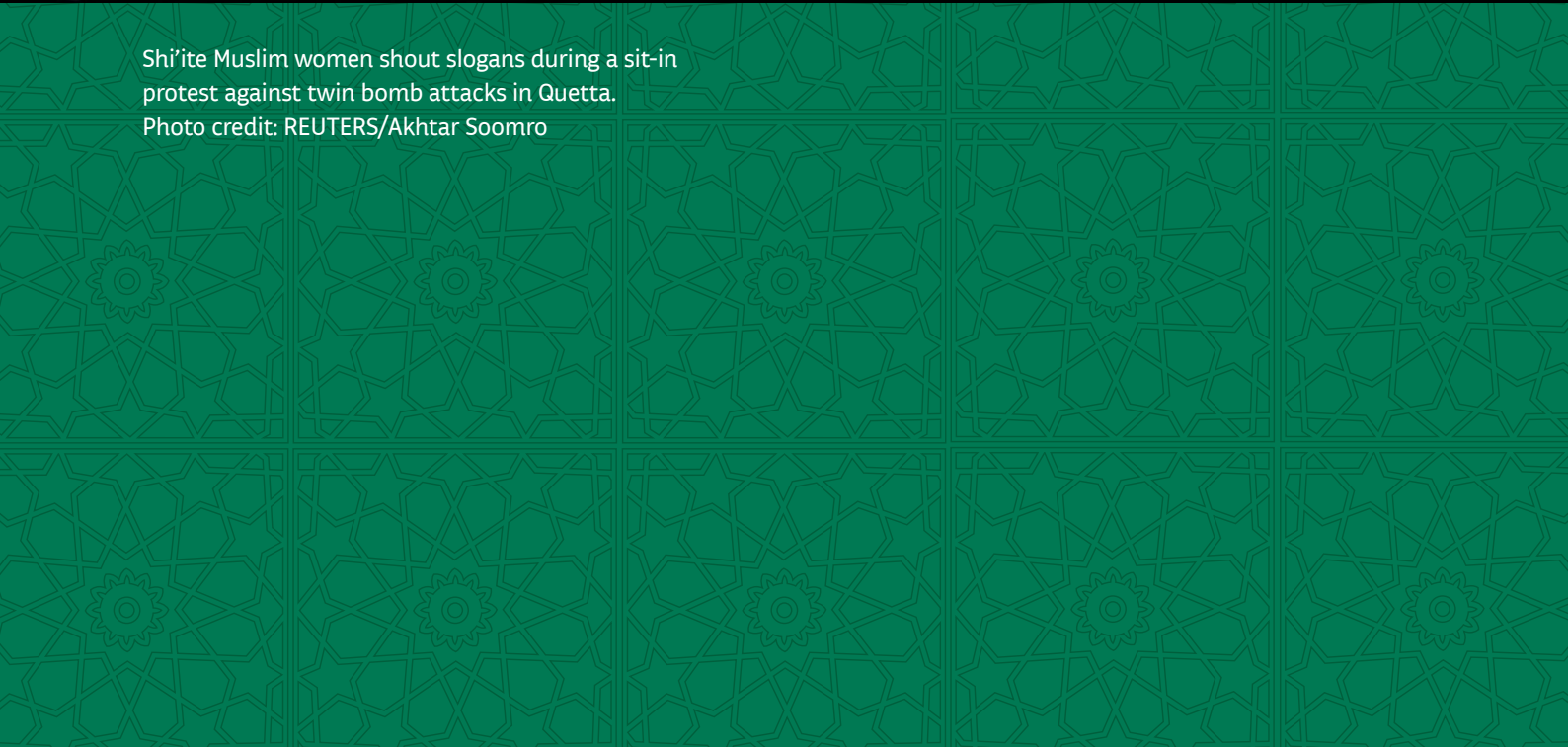
The second section focuses on Balochistan, one of the research sites. It explains the background of the current conflicts to contextualise their genesis, and narrows in on two particular conflicts among the many intersecting ones in the province: the standoff between the State's security apparatus and the Baloch nationalist insurgents, and to a lesser extent the killings of the Hazaras in Quetta city by armed, extremist, factional organisations operating in the name of Islam. This section highlights the main findings of the study, including women's perspectives on the identified research themes of militarisation, security, corruption and access to justice.

The third section focuses on Swat, the other research site. As in the previous section, it explains the background of the conflict including the build up over past decades, and contextualises developments that led to the showdown between the Taliban and the Pakistan army. It highlights the main findings, including how women in Swat reflect on theses of militarisation, security, corruption and access to justice.

The fourth section examines the commonalities and differences in the research contexts and conducts a brief comparative analysis. It also identifies the main concerns requiring redress, developing policy recommendations and suggesting ways forward for civil society actors.



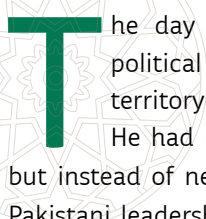
Shi'ite Muslim women shout slogans during a sit-in protest against twin bomb attacks in Quetta.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Akhtar Soomro



SECTION II: BALOCHISTAN

The army interventions in Balochistan have strengthened feelings of alienation among the Baloch, including economic grievances like the exploitation of natural resources, particularly gas, being extracted without making these resources available within the province or creating opportunities for redistribution of wealth.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT



The day after Pakistan's Independence, the political leader (khan) of Kalat declared his territory in Balochistan an independent state. He had meant to create room for bargaining but instead of negotiating as the Khan expected, the Pakistani leadership forcibly annexed Kalat. When the army moved to overthrow the Khan of Kalat on treason charges, locals launched a guerrilla movement that was crushed. This was followed by a series of conflicts between Baloch nationalists and the state — localised uprisings in 1948, 1958 and 1962, then a widespread insurgency in 1973.

The 1958 movement was prompted by the imposition of One Unit.¹ In its wake, the Pakistan government arrested and hanged the insurgents' leader, Nauroze Khan on treason charges. In the early 1960s another insurgency developed in response to the Pakistan army's initiatives to build garrisons and cantonments in the province. This led to over two thousand casualties until a ceasefire was declared when the One Unit scheme was dissolved. The year 1973 saw the first widespread insurgency, after Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dissolved the nationalist provincial government of the National Awami Party. This led to a bloody showdown as Baloch guerrilla groups faced a deployment of around 75,000

army troops. Over five thousand Baloch fighters and over three thousand army soldiers were killed by the time General Zia-ul-Haq took over power in a military coup of 1977 and ordered the army to withdraw; he also announced general amnesty.

Army interventions in Balochistan have strengthened the feelings of alienation and exploitation among the Baloch, exacerbating their existing economic grievances due to natural resources like gas being extracted without either providing these resources within the province, or creating opportunities for redistribution of wealth. The significant centralisation of Pakistan's federal system, coupled with interference in provincial administration, has led to a damaging political discourse of subjugation.

The recent (at the time of writing, still on going) insurgency can be traced back to 2003, though it exacerbated in 2005, at a time when Pakistan was again under military rule. Initially a low-intensity conflict, it was catalysed by the army's announcement that it was building new military cantonments. On-going simmering resentments — for example, over the development of Gwadar port and the price of natural gas — also came to the fore. Baloch fighters began targeting infrastructure installations such as electric pylons and gas pipes. The conflict escalated after Shazia Khalid, a woman doctor accused an army doctor of having raped her. The incident took

¹ Imposed by military dictator Ayub Khan, this administrative system merged all the provinces of West Pakistan into 'one unit'.

place in Sui, the very location from where gas was being extracted, and over the price of which there was much wrangling and on going tension. Sui was also the home ground of Akbar Bugti, a former governor of Balochistan and at the time the most vociferous of Baloch leaders challenging the federal government. The rape of Dr. Shazia Khalid catapulted Baloch nationalist, anti-army sentiment to new heights and led to a series of attacks on law enforcement personnel. The central government and President General Pervez Musharraf dismissed Baloch sentiments as the petulance of Baloch sardars resisting development and progress and their greed for greater share of resources. When an army operation in 2006 killed the elderly Baloch leader Akbar Bugti, it created a flashpoint that led to the biggest ever Baloch nationalist urban protests, riots, strikes, and displacement of crisis proportions. Over eighty thousand people had to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Since then, as a precondition of any negotiations, the insurgents have demanded an end to the Pakistan government's military operations and intelligence agencies' activities in Balochistan. Instead, they have faced an on-going series of forced disappearances and torture of Baloch men, as well as death, in what Amnesty International has termed a "kill and dump" policy. People in Balochistan squarely accuse the security agencies, namely the Frontier Corps and the intelligence agencies, for these human rights violations.

The Baloch nationalist parties boycotted the 2008 elections on the grounds that the polls were being held under the presidency of General Musharraf, the architect of and chief accused in Akbar Bugti's assassination. This allowed the election of non-representative persons into the provincial assembly. The Election Commission of Pakistan has said that according to corrected electoral rolls, a whopping 65 per cent of Baloch votes in the 2008 election were fake. The PPP-led government ushered into power by the 2008 elections formally apologised to Balochistan for previous wrongs. It announced a special incentives package — the Aghaaz-i-Haqooq-i-Balochistan (Initiating the Rights of Balochistan) — under which it paid arrears in gas royalties as the Baloch demanding, amounting to Rs 120 Billion. It also changed the formula for distribution of financial resources in Balochistan's favour¹. However, these policy changes did not amount to much as the security forces continued their policy of picking up Baloch men, marked by on-going enforced disappearances and discovery of mutilated

bodies. While the number of those disappeared and killed remained controversial and highly contested, the impact of the cases was far reaching and galvanised people to reject the federation and its symbols.

The 2013 elections, that the Baloch nationalist political parties participated in, seemed to bring Baloch sentiment back from the brink, although the Baloch militant groups (known as Sarmachar) who believe that independence is the only solution, boycotted them. The provincial victory of nationalist groups and the election of Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch as Chief Minister were widely hailed and gave much hope. Dr Malik is the first middle class, educated professional to be elevated to the highest provincial post in Balochistan while being outside the traditional Sardari (tribal leadership) system. However, the distrust of the security apparatus remains deep-seated. During the time this study was conducted, people were cautiously observing whether the disappearances, torture and killings, military operations and harmful intelligence activities would be halted.

The second conflict within Balochistan that this study attempts to reflect is the targeting and mass killings of the Hazaras, an ethnic group with Central Asian features that make them physically distinct from the local population. The Hazaras are also Shia Muslims. Militant groups motivated by extremist Islamic ideology that terms Shias as non-Muslim have targeted the Hazara in mass bombings and assaults because of their religious sect. There are many Shias among Pakistan's various ethnic groups, but the Hazaras are easily recognisable and thus more easily targeted.

HAZARA KILLINGS BACKGROUND

Sectarian violence in Quetta plays out like ethnic genocide according to the Hazaras. The Hazaras are predominantly Shia, while the Baloch and Pashtun are mostly Sunni. Since 2001, the nature of violence has taken a sectarian and indirectly communal turn, with non-state actors targeting the Shia community.

In June 2003, militants shot dead 11 Hazara police recruits who were traveling in a van to their training centre in Quetta. The following month, militants attacked a Hazara mosque during Friday prayers leaving 50 dead; the police defused two bombs that would have killed those trying to flee. In March 2004, an attack on an Ashura procession of Hazaras combining bombing and firing killed over 40 people. Hazara leaders, politicians, businessmen,

labourers, vendors, sportspersons, artists and youth continue to be targeted. The number of casualty-maximizing mass bomb attacks has increased. On September 3, 2010, the Al Quds day of solidarity with Palestinians, a Shia rally was bombed killing over 70. Another 70 were killed in 2011 in various incidents including the bombing of a Hazara Eidgah. The pattern has continued.

The banned militant outfit known as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and its offshoots has taken responsibility for most of these attacks. The province is increasingly becoming a nexus of sectarian outfits and other terrorist organisations besides the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, such as the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, and Sipah-e-Muhammad. The government of Pakistan banned all these organisations in the years following the attacks in New York on September 11, 2001.

Unlike the Pashtun-populated areas of the province, the Baloch areas were until very recently largely secular. This has evidently changed as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is now recruiting from the Baloch population, despite its banned status, and five of the most prominent leaders of the organisation in Balochistan are said to be Baloch.

THE LENS AND THE NARRATIVE

The women we spoke to, young or old, middle class or poor, all knew about the historical deprivation of the Baloch and placed the current insurgency on that continuum. Most were unable to recount the events or map the political details of the earlier insurgencies. However, they believed the on-going conflict to be in continuation of the previous ones. Interestingly, when asked what exactly triggered this insurgency off during the Musharraf regime, they had varying answers.

The rural, uneducated, poor women from Gishkore did not pinpoint any particular event, and attributed it to an angry, deprived and frustrated generation becoming 'jawaan' (youth) and wanting to retaliate. They also said that since more people from the jawaan generation had gone to school, they knew more about how the world lived and how they were deprived and that they took a stand because Punjab was avaricious.

The women from Quetta traced it from the Lal Masjid² attack; they said that the killing of the tribal chief Akbar Bugti was the final straw.

The women from Panjgur and Awaran thought it started with the army's decision of building a military

cantonment in Dera Bugti.

Women from Kech said the insurgency was started when Pakistan decided to build the Gwadar Port, and began dispossessing the indigenous groups from there, which angered the Baloch youth.

The explanations were localised according to their experiences and relevant developments (in Quetta women had the most exposure to media and non-Baloch experiences). This may also contribute towards their local ownership of the Baloch insurgency, that the women articulated as having developed in response to their needs — even when they themselves did not claim to support the insurgents.

Interestingly, none of the women mentioned the Dr. Shazia Khalid rape case that Akbar Bugti had positioned himself on, that escalated the skirmishes into a full-fledged showdown. These narratives are important as they congeal into people's oral histories. For instance, women from Kech, Quetta and Noshki say their area was forcibly annexed into becoming part of Pakistan. In fact, however, this is true only of the Khanate of Kalat, within which these women's areas do not fall — so there is ownership and extrapolation of Kalat's history over that of Balochistan in general.

Wider stakeholders and analysts contest these hovering starting points. According to the Human Rights Watch, it was the two assassination attempts on General Musharraf during his visits to Balochistan in 2005 and 2006 that triggered the army crackdown there.

The Frontier Constabulary (FC), a paramilitary force, says the conflict was catalysed after shots fired on December 15, 2005 at an army helicopter wounded Major General Shujaat Zamir Dar, Inspector General of the Frontier Corps (IGFC), and his deputy Brigadier Salim Nawaz (the current IGFC) on their visit to Kohlu.

The Karachi-based Collective for Social Science Research traces the uprising back to 2003 when separatist groups began attacking infrastructure and installations (Gazdar et al, 2010).

According to Abdul Rauf Khan, the then-Home Secretary in a briefing of the Parliamentary Committee in 2004 headed by Chaudhry Shujaat, the outbreak started as far back as in 1998 with rocket attacks in Quetta, firing at FC posts in Sui and PPL gas wells.

Some Baloch nationalists and many analysts make the

case that the current conflict began with the rigged elections of 2002 that kept out nationalists, creating a vacuum that allowed an umbrella group of ‘religious’ parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), to come into power. This was also what paved the way for the rise of the Taliban in Swat.

The shifting adaptations of the genesis of the current conflict show people’s localised interpretations, and therefore ownership, of it. Since the 2013 elections, there have been some emerging signs that this affirmed ownership and participation may be weakening.

The current Baloch insurgency is led by men from the educated middle class. With the exception of the Bugtis and Marris, the most popular leaders belong to this category. The middle class is also a strong factor of unity because it resists all agreements, individual or collective, between Islamabad and the tribal chiefs, and knows how to take advantage of the rivalries among the latter.

As a result, the geography of the resistance has changed, shifting from rural to urban areas and from the north-east of the province to the southwest. The sociological shift within the nationalist movement stems partly from the historical evolution of the movement itself, partly from the destruction of tribal structures in the most restive areas such as Dera Bugti or Kohlu, and partly from the increased involvement of areas where tribal structures are not dominant. All these factors combine to strengthen Baloch nationalism in these areas while marginalising the sardars (tribal leaders).

BALUCHISTAN RESEARCH FINDINGS

SECURITY

The women we talked to looked back to their childhood as the last point in which they felt completely secure, because as children they were not aware of threats. They pointed out that they were lucky because children growing up now no longer have that comfort, as they see death and suffering all around them. Women from all over Balochistan said that while women feel insecure, even men are not safe. They were categorical that men face a much higher risk of being killed; men’s security is much more threatened than women’s since they are out in the public sphere more.

The Hazara Community

Younger women and students in Quetta said they felt constantly at risk. Hazara women said that they felt like they were walking targets whether in their homes, offices or in public spaces. The Hazara women were not being targeted as women per se, but because of their ethnic rather than their gendered identity. “No one throws acid on us; they just shoot us dead,” as one woman put it. A Hazara principal of a school narrated how her brother came into work one day and opened his computer, to find that the screen wallpaper had been changed into a banner saying ‘Shia Kafir’ (infidel). Hazara girls said they used to feel secure walking around in their own neighbourhoods, but now step out only when there is no other choice.

“It is different from the kind of target killings in Karachi or other places. There, people are also at risk, but for their political affiliation and ideological position or some family connection. Here, we are targeted simply because we exist — as Baloch, or as Hazara. It is not about what we do or what we believe, it’s about what we simply and without choice, are.”

The Hazara women pointed out that previously when they went out into non-Hazara areas, this was seen as transgressing boundaries. If they were targeted in that situation, they were seen, in a manner, as asking for trouble. But now the assailants come into Hazara areas. The two massive attacks in which hundreds of Hazara were killed, took place on Alamdar Road where the wealthier Hazaras live and in Maryabad, home to working class Hazara. In other words, the community is targeted across the board, in their own areas or outside, whether they are well-off, or poor, male or female.

“Earlier the threat was in the public space, in bazars, transport, crowded spaces and such but now people come and lob grenades and bombs inside our houses,” said a young Hazara woman in a group discussion. “They just fling bombs over our boundary walls and speed off, so even the private home is no longer a safe refuge.”

Another Hazara woman spoke of the emotional and psychological toll of insecurity on the entire community.

“We live in an overall environment of fear. If the men of our families are even half an hour late, we panic. The uncertainty is killing, never knowing if someone is coming back or not. If we didn’t have cell phones, we would’ve died a hundred deaths. But then sometimes they jam phone lines also.”

A young, educated and professional Hazara woman described poignantly her feelings while sitting in protest with the dead bodies in the dharna where Hazaras refused to give burials till their political demands were met.

“I was at the Quetta dharna for three days and four nights. My whole family was there, women were there, the entire community was there. In the media, everyone was saying we sat in sub zero temperatures. I don’t know, I can’t remember feeling cold, nobody complained of the cold. There was a volcano inside me, that lava of emotions heated me, I was boiling, seething with rage and despair. It didn’t matter that it was cold outside, no one noticed. Those nights are etched in my memory – and the one defining moment that has scarred me, which I remember second by second in slow motion and heightened clarity is when they finally picked up the bodies to bury them. The screaming, shouting, wailing, hysteria, people falling unconscious, it was qayamat (hell). And the bodies kept being taken away. One by one, it went on and on, there were so many bodies, and the emotional explosion did not stop till the train of bodies stopped. I’ve never had pure feeling eclipse my consciousness before. The burning pain wiped everything else out. It was Karbala. It was so intense that it seemed like there were no humans around me, only agony shimmering from every direction.”

Threats to Working Women

Women who were employed said that working in the human rights and development sector was extremely risky, and they now avoided doing ‘field work’. They receive threatening letters saying that women will be targeted if they work with NGOs, whether they are in hijab/nikaab or not. The men making the threats perceive the women working with NGOs as being “immoral” and representative of modernity. There are suspicions about western funding, mixed gender gatherings, travel

associated with the job, and the language of individual rights. In the conservative perception, all this adds up to “licentiousness”. For instance, women pointed out that government schoolteachers are paid low salaries compared to NGO teachers. The militants ask why NGO teachers get more money – what additional work is required of them? They don’t just make just empty threats. Women working for NGOs have been killed in Hub, Mastung and other places.

The women doctors said they were petrified of being given ‘polio duty’. Doctors were being targeted so that they don’t report violence and torture cases as they are legally bound to, said a woman doctor. The teachers were worried about being given ‘election duty’ and had applied for leave without pay. One Baloch girl said she used to work with her brothers, stitching clothes for the family’s tailoring shop. After militants blew up the shop because her family had rented it from a Punjabi settler, her family went into massive debt.

Most women preferred government service of any kind because it is considered respectable. For one thing, the state is involved, and secondly, there is a long history of public employment in backward areas where there is no other employment generation. Additionally, the timings are easy because official work day ends at 3.00 p.m. Women pointed out that in previous generations, women were not as aware as they are now. Because there was a stronger need for community approval, women did not commonly go into public spaces. Just as there was an increasing acceptance of such mobility, and opportunities were emerging, security replaced social taboos as a deterrent.

Women who were working and earning spoke about public reactions to women’s empowerment and the pushback they have had to face. In Khuzdar, the maulvis send letters to newspapers saying that girls and women who are seen alone outside their homes will be targeted and acid thrown on them. The conservatives make these threats although they are well aware that women are taking up jobs out of economic desperation. In some cases, there is no longer a male earning member, while in other cases the mobility of traditional male earners has been restricted due to fear. Women also said that although elder decision-makers of their communities don’t like families allowing their women to become empowered, overall, there is greater acceptance about women working outside the home than before.

Women are also dragged into the middle of family

feuds, and suffer violence such as kidnapping because of tribal fights. Lamenting the inadequacy of short-term solutions, a majority of the women in the group discussions felt that greater levels of poverty trigger and sustain such practices.

Women also narrated cases that illustrate how people are misusing the situation to their advantage. In one case, a girl who wanted to break off her engagement to a man her parents had arranged her marriage with, she was forced to continue with the relationship when her fiancé produced a fake letter from the Baloch Liberation Army warning her of her fate should she step out of line.

Violence in the private sphere

There were two primary sources of threat — one by the ‘others’, unknown perpetrators who target women (and the men of their family) motivated by political considerations, regardless of the gender angle. The other was the ‘known aggressors’, those within their circle of known people, such as husbands, fathers, abusive family members or sardars, who feel entitled to threaten them because they are women.

Women from the Hazara community reported experiencing less abuse and violence within their homes and community, as families are generally more progressive and support women’s rights.

A Hazara woman from Quetta and a Baloch woman from Khuzdar talked about the blurring of lines between unknown perpetrators and known sources of threat, such as when family or community members give information that leads to a kidnapping, or if they disclose someone’s political beliefs and activities to outsiders, knowing that this will lead to some kind of punishment. This shows the general breakdown of trust inside communities. Pashtun women said the public private divide is misleading because each strengthens the other. If they get harassed on the streets, their families react by inflicting violence on them and not allowing them to go out.

So women face multi-layered problems. One layer is threats from the unknown enemy, in the public space. Another is the threat from people in the private sphere — in the home, extended family and tribe, a threat that is unrelated to the political situation and that will remain, regardless of who is at the helm of political power.

Within the private sphere, women saw the threat of domestic violence as a lived reality. One Baloch woman spoke about tribal norms exacerbating hurdles such as not getting permission for schooling. She narrated an incident in which a sardar got a girl’s name struck off from the matriculate board list when she defied her family to study. However, women also spoke about the tribal system undergoing a change. In Hub, Lasbela, for example, a Baloch woman observed that traditional thinking is changing, even for the sardars. In some cases, women can get the Sardar to ‘approve’ their divorce, to avoid being socially ostracised by the community.

An educated, working woman from Mastung commented, *“If men dissent, the state kills them. If women dissent, the family and community kill them.”* Interestingly then, it is intolerance for dissent that runs through both the state and society.

Steps taken for security

The conflict has clearly led to women’s mobility in the public sphere being drastically curtailed. Many have had to discontinue their education or leave their jobs. Sometimes this is due to pressure from their families who cite security reasons. In some cases, women’s own sense of security is so threatened that they prefer to not venture out.

“In my family, we’ve got those group sms low charge services usually used by politicians and banks, where you send one message for a small amount of money, to a great number of people” said one respondent. “This way the men can inform their friends and relatives when they reach home safely. Every day. Before that we were spending hundreds of rupees checking every day if people we know are alive or not.”

“In families where educating girls is a norm, we have to move in packs,” said another. “Like if some woman wants to study at the university, another at a college and a third at English language centre and fourth in some other course, it’s not possible. The families decide one place and all the girls of that extended family have to go there, travel there and back together, whether they like to, or want to, or not.”

The Hazara community in general did not trust state protection and deputed its own guards and patrols. Some younger Hazara women also said they did not feel protected with the FC around. Still, many Hazara women said they felt that they may be worse off without the FC.

"We have started our own welfare system to raise funds to ensure that at least one male member per Hazara family can go out of the country. The assumption is that he will take care of his family and find a way for them to be able to leave as well. We are raising money for the travel expenses and initial survival money for one man per family. That is a lot. But we have sent hundreds already."

Juxtaposing the following experiences of two young women who are forced to cover themselves for very different reasons shows how women have to bear the brunt of social pressure and security threats.

A young Pashtun woman said that she had to fight with her family to get permission for higher education.

"In order to remove suspicion, I not only wear the burqa, but also gloves and socks, even in the Quetta summers. I don't even wear sandals, I wear boots so not a single centimetre of skin shows. That way I can prove to the community that I want to study for its own intrinsic value, not because I want to look good or make friends or something. When they see the trial I put myself through every single day, they say okay, maybe she really does want to learn because it's 120 degrees hot."

A young Hazara woman had to argue with her family to allow her to work, not because they considered it wrong but because Hazaras are being targeted.

"I wear a burqa covering every centimetre of my skin except my eyes so no one can see my skin and recognise my ethnicity. On my eyes I wear dark glasses. I wear gloves and socks even in the unbearable Quetta heat, otherwise I am a walking target. My brother takes me to work. He wears a helmet on his head so his face can't be seen. I cannot breathe in that get-up. But it's a choice between that and not working, so I take it."

MILITARISATION

Perceptions about security agencies

The women we spoke to were unsure that political will could change this situation. The interviews and discussions were conducted during the build-up to the national elections in 2013, so while there was heightened interest about political developments, women were not convinced that a political leadership could handle and put a reign on the State's security apparatus. An educated Baloch woman gave her reasons for not voting in the forthcoming polls:

"The FC is supposed to protect us. But then they are complicit in the disappearances the intelligence agencies tell them to do. Or when attacks on Hazaras happen, that day they are not around. These paramilitary and law enforcing institutions are genetically anti-people. They torture innocent people. A political government will just be a new façade."

There was some difference between the experiences of women from different ethnic groups with the FC, the primary paramilitary force in Balochistan. The Hazara women spoke of a recent case where FC men had diffused a bomb meant to target the Hazara community; several FC men died in the attempt, preserving countless Hazara lives. But the Hazara community in general did not trust state protection and deputed its own guards and patrols. Some younger Hazara women also said they did not feel protected with the FC around. Still, many Hazara women said they felt that they may be worse off without the FC.

The Pashtun women had no direct experiences with the FC but generally felt they did not protect people. One woman lawyer said that the deputation of the FC in Balochistan was itself a testament to state failure because the FC is supposed to guard borders and the police were there to control domestic law and order. The FC was deployed in Balochistan because the police was not effective. However, the situation in Balochistan shows that the FC is not effective either.

Some Brahvi speaking Baloch women said that FC personnel have taken it upon themselves to start morality policing as well. When they conduct raids and search operations inside private homes, they harass people by breaking alcohol bottles and asking whether they were Muslims or not, and by asking their relationships to each other. They also stop women on the roads and ask their relationship with the men they are traveling with.

The ethnic Baloch women said the FC was among the core problems they faced. They said that when people were forcibly disappeared, they were not ambushed in isolated places in the middle of the night, but in broad daylight with witnesses around. FC personnel, they said, picked up men from bazaars, homes, public transport, and off the streets. Their lack of regard for eye-witnesses indicated their sense of impunity. While the FC was earlier drawn primarily from the Punjab, those deployed in Balochistan are now mostly from Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. Older Baloch women in Quetta said that they were scared of even being near FC personnel, whom the sarmachars target. FC personnel risk being attacked and killed anytime. Women were frightened of being caught in the line of fire.

About the army, many women said that the army comes in with full power but this only deteriorates the situation rather than improving it. The rural and non-literate Baloch women said that the conflicts take place because they are poor, and poverty leads to conflict. The urban and educated women believed that conflict creates and leads to poverty.

“What development work is the army doing? Nothing. I’ve never seen them develop anything except their cantonments and military bases. I don’t know what you are talking about. Maybe in Swat, I know nothing about that, but nowhere in Balochistan are they doing anything developmental or remotely constructive. They cannot even do their own job, so how can they take on jobs of others? They can’t catch anyone in Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, who openly takes responsibility (for the target killings). The only time they did catch them, those people broke out of a prison in the cantonment and ran away. And they expect us to believe that and trust them. It’s ridiculous, really,” said one woman.

A college student who aims to work as a journalist after graduation (and whose college has been closed for over a year in Khuzdar) says,

“There is greater involvement, I am sure Afghanistan and India feature in this, in the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Baloch ethnic crisis. I don’t discount the foreign hand, but they cannot do this entirely on their own. It’s murky. In any case, that’s what the intelligence agencies are supposed to deal with. It’s stupid that they go around saying there are foreign interests doing this — well then bloody stop them. That’s their job. If they cannot, then say you cannot and disband yourself. Why else are you around but to deal with this?”

The forced disappearances have had an incendiary effect on Baloch politics and convinced more people about the brutality and hostility of the state towards the Baloch than anything else. While the figures differ significantly and remain contentious, all the Baloch women knew of at least one person who had been disappeared, magnifying the effect and the experience into that of ‘thousands and thousands’. The figures vary wildly, depending on who is quoting them. The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has been able to verify less than four hundred and fifty total reports of disappearances. But the affect felt by those in Balochistan far exceeds the actual number in proportion. The outrage and anger has eclipsed the otherwise central issue of the province’s resources that the state has been exploiting with no accruing benefits. The matter of disappearances has become the single biggest issue for condemning the state.

It seemed, overall, that the sarmachar had not managed to convince Baloch women of the rightness of their cause and justification of their actions. It is the Pakistani state that has convinced them of the rightness of the independence cause — through its forced disappearances — rather than the sarmachar’s narrative of a predatory state exploiting the province’s resources. All the women said that a decade ago, they had not agreed with the need for independence.

“Baloch nationalist militants kill innocent people of course, no one denies that. They have killed teachers, shop owners, tailors and labourers. But when they shoot, they kill an individual. The FC, by disappearing people, kills nearly the entire family, the survivors become a ‘zinda lash’ [living corpse]. We get no closure, not for years, till the dead body shows up tortured and brutalised. Our men have died for centuries in tribal feuds. But in tribal code, whoever kills is responsible for bringing the body back to the family.”

Another woman who stopped going to university midway through her Master’s, asks, “The army opposes drones and Guantanamo because they say it produces more terrorists. How can they not see they are doing the same? Even dedicated university students have now become radicalised.”

“Initially, it was the young men who had leadership potential, outstanding students and politically affiliated men who were rising to represent the new voices in Balochistan who were disappeared. And it was categorically done by the [intelligence] agencies. Now it’s become a standard operating procedure that the police and the CID also use. Now it’s not just that profile of men but also ordinary commoners, shopkeepers and such who suffer such things. Sometimes they’ll just say you have been identified in a robbery or kidnapping bid or your phone was used for some crime and take away a common man. Then the families of these men run pillar to post to find out what happened. Sometimes no one ever knows because all law enforcing agencies ask the other ones. They all say we don’t have him. They have no coordination, no database to show which agency has which person. How can they, when they refuse to even declare arrests?” says a woman who teaches at a local college.

Impunity

According to the women, the police refuse to either register or investigate cases of kidnapping, abduction, arrest or disappearance against the FC, the army or ‘the Agencies’. They say it is beyond their reach and scope.

The courts are either unwilling or unable to enforce the law. They either don’t hear cases, or are unable to get their orders executed, even the demand for a list of the missing. If they do manage to send out any court orders, the security apparatus simply ignores them and refuses to follow instructions.

Government officials seem unable to put any curbs or oversee the intelligence agencies. Some of the women, especially those not from the Balochi speaking community, were willing to consider that the new incoming government could possibly change the policy of blanket immunity to security forces. They felt this would be possible because they thought no political government would have any legitimacy or be able to survive unless they could address this burning issue.

Women pointed out in interviews and group discussions that the impunity was not just for the security forces but also for banned groups such as sectarian organisations and the Taliban. According to the women, anyone was free to do anything – the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi could kill Hazaras, the Taliban could kill people in general, the corrupt politicians and Sardars could exploit locals and the criminal mafias could kidnap citizens for ransom and carry out extortion rackets. There was a general impunity for anyone to do anything to anyone else, and there was no semblance of law and order.

Women from Lasbela illustrated how the criminal elements shift to accommodate emerging power centres.

“The Taliban used to be a problem for us after 9/11, especially after Lal Masjid but they went away when the Khuzdar people came. The Taliban used to extort money for jihad and after 9/11, ran recruitment drives and even convinced some men and boys to go with them to Afghanistan as fighters. Some of them died there in the fighting. We’ve now heard that some are alive and senior in the Taliban hierarchy, and are sent to live in other places. Very few came back. People used to tolerate them in Hub till the men from Khuzdar came. These were either the sarmachars or those with sympathies for them, because of what the security agencies did to them in Khuzdar. They made not just the Taliban leave, they also chased out the Tableeghi Jamaat² men who were present in Hub, although they didn’t fight and kill or anything.

² Tableeghi Jamaat is a proselytising organisation; the name literally means ‘society for spreading faith’

These Khuzdar guys told the Taliban, you are fighting another's war, we are fighting our own. Things had become bad after Lal Masjid, the Taliban had grown strong and were attracting people's attention and getting money, but the Khuzdar men told them to get lost or join the Baloch cause, and to stop harping on about America and Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan and India and help them pick up mutilated Baloch bodies killed by their own state. So the Taliban went away. The Taliban get the men killed by US troops, the Khuzdar people get us killed by the agencies. That doesn't make either the US troops or Pakistani agencies right. Of course they are wrong. But the point is we are suffering and dying in both battles. How can one be a just death and the other a useless death? Who decides?"

Coping Mechanisms

Khuzdar had a very high number of forced disappearances. Women say an entire generation of young men has been jailed, killed, tortured or hidden away. A substantial part of Khuzdar's population has left and relocated. This was once a vibrant cultural centre of writers, publishing several newspapers and magazines. All these publications have been forcibly closed or banned. People in Khuzdar are cut off, living hand to mouth and in despair. Tribal leaders have been killed and found beheaded. Over twenty journalists have been killed. Senior medical officers of hospitals have been assassinated, people gunned down in buses, businesses closed down because of strike calls and shutter downs several times a week (45 days between September and October 2012). Women say that killings are a daily affair, and now proxy death squads operate for all conflicting parties. These death squads patrol the city. The women named the Shafiq Mengal group as an example.

As a young Baloch woman tells, "Now we have electricity breakdowns for ten hours at a stretch in Khuzdar, but people are too scared to even go protest against power cuts. They can be picked up and killed for demanding electricity."

Khuzdar is also the site of an FC garrison that has been there for a long time. There are unconfirmed reports that the garrison has expanded its base, purchased more lands and drastically increased in size.

As a coping strategy, a substantial number of people from Khuzdar have moved into Hub. However, it has not been a case of being accepted with open arms, even though there are close familial ties between the Baloch of Khuzdar and Hub.

Here is the reaction in Hub:

"Now we have disappearances in Hub as well. This was not the case before the people from Khuzdar arrived. Ours was a peaceful area that did well economically because of proximity to Karachi. Now it has strikes every three days, with shops and markets closed; there are corner meetings, disappearances, violence, antagonisms and constant overwrought politics. If people don't agree to shut shops, the sarmachar come after you, threaten, intimidate, and beat up you. Maybe they can even kill us, though I haven't heard of that happening so far." —a middle-aged worker woman from Hub.

"For the past six months, there have been no TV news channels in Hub. We get all entertainment channels but no news channels. The cable operators say that they receive death threats. We don't know who is sending these threats, whether it is the Baloch or the agencies who don't want us to watch the news. We don't know. But if we want to know what's happening in the news, we have to call someone in Karachi to ask. There aren't any newspapers there either." — an educated girl who's family migrated from Khuzdar to Hub.

"Hub used to be safe. My mother's kidneys failed so I used to take her for dialysis to Karachi on my own, in a bus and come to Karachi alone all the time. But not anymore. Everyone worries about safety. Plus the people from Khuzdar are outsiders, so families tell us to be careful and not trust them because they are not really from among us and we don't know them." — a young woman resident of Hub.

Women from Gishkore, belonging to the most economically impoverished groups we spoke to, said that the general insecurity and threat from militant groups and security apparatus has further lessened the options available to the poorest. Some women knew of families who had started getting their daughters married off at earlier ages, especially if the natal family did not have enough young men present in the villages to protect the family. The logic was the girls would be safer, more secure and happier with new protectors, namely the husbands.

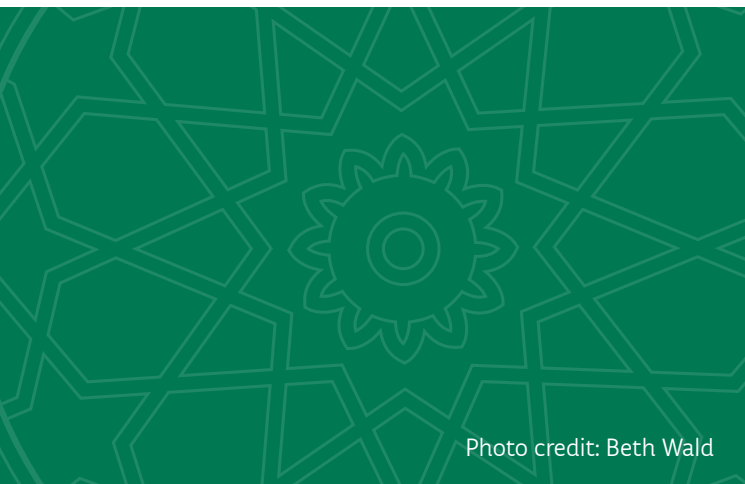


Photo credit: Beth Wald



Women from Awaran said that just before the national elections of 2013, the FC security forces were telling people to go out and vote for who ever they wanted, whereas the Baloch insurgent groups were telling them to boycott elections, in order to prove that the state and its efforts had no legitimacy. Stuck between two competing claims, many people from Awaran had moved to Karachi by the hundreds for a short stay, intending to return after the elections, in order to avoid being caught in the middle of the two sides. The women said that those who did not have the means to relocate to either Karachi or some other place in the country were fleeing into the mountains.

CORRUPTION

There was consensus across all women's groups that there is corruption at every level. It is not just the powerful political elite that is corrupt, they pointed out. From shopkeepers to pharmacy compounders, everyone was complicit in maintaining a corrupt system.

Women from across the province pointed out that every government job has to be paid for. This initiates a cyclical corruption circuit that targets the poor and increases poverty. Private offices are corrupt but at lesser level.

An educated woman from Quetta observed, "You need a sifarish — a high powered recommendation to be successful in the private sector. That's it. They don't demand money. The government systems are the worst."

The educated women respondents said that while local and provincial level corruption was more obvious, international corruption was embedded in structures so it is rendered less visible. Women who were not educated agreed that corruption permeated all strata including the international level, but could not engage in a discussion on the specifics.

The capture of Balochistan's resources by the rest of the country is a leitmotif running through the Baloch grievance narrative. Yet the women who said that the Centre appropriates all of Balochistan's resources did not know anything about the National Finance Commission Award or the Aghaaz-i-Haqooq package — both federal initiatives to correct this particular grievance. The women who spoke about international and national corruption and links did not know about Saindak, Gwadar and Reko Dik — the major foreign investment initiatives that have become controversial. Even women who were literate and had some access to media had no knowledge about these developments and their impact. Women had not even heard of these in passing reference.

Women said they had no idea what happened to the aid channelled through the state, as they did not get any benefits. Women from Gishkore said whatever assistance they got after the floods, including bedding and rations, was all through NGOs. They said that if aid was given to government, it was simply siphoned off, so it would be better if aid flow were halted — this would force officials to live within their means. And they said that international actors must be aware of this reality but choose to ignore it.

According to the FC inspector general, a standard 50,000 personnel are deployed in Balochistan. According to the last census (1998), the total population of Balochistan was 6.6 million. This gives a ratio of one FC jawan for every 132 people in the province. Going by official estimates that the population had grown to 7.8 million in 2005, the ratio is one FC per 156 people. (This does not include the figures for the army, police, levies or the Balochistan Constabulary.)

Compare this to the ratio of doctors (1,564 registered doctors as of 2005), which is one doctor for every 4,198 people in the province according to the 1998 census and

one doctor per 4,987 people according to 2005 figures.

The Baloch consistently hold the FC responsible for forced disappearances, torture, killings, abductions and harassment. Similar accounts of the FC's standard operating procedures are given in testimonies across Balochistan. Quetta's Kuli Camp and Turbat's FC camp are referred to as the Abu Ghraibs of Pakistan.

In 2005, in a testimony to the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan, the Inspector General of the FC declared that the Baloch are against the FC because the FC stops them from smuggling goods across the border.

They said there was no point complaining about corrupt officials to higher ups because everyone was in the know; there was no secrecy to the corruption. Secondly, the senior officials would either ignore the complaint, or simply transfer the official in question somewhere else, letting people in some other place suffer the same problem.

Lack of awareness and information compounded the problem. One woman in Quetta narrated how she spent months trying to get her husband's death certificate to get his pension after his death. The hospital demanded that she pay them Rs 18,000 for it. She didn't have the money so did not pay. Years later, an NGO worker told her that she could get a death certificate from NADRA for a standard Rs 500 amount. However, she cannot now get the back payments.

Women said that inflation, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and lack of accountability were responsible for corruption at the local level, but the rich and powerful did not have any such compulsions. At those levels, they said corruption was because of people's powerlessness and lack of effective accountability and deterrence mechanisms. The professional working women in Quetta said that the problem originated at the top and that corruption at the central federal level trickled down and distorted the system all the way to the bottom. They said problems were the only thing that trickled down, not the good things. They said they knew laws exist, but these laws were either too complicated to understand, or could not be executed. They raised specific issues of

misuse of funds by politicians and private corporations, who use illegal methods of price control.

The women also identified particular local problems that varied regionally. In Hub, for example, drug usage as well as the drug trade is a massive problem. Women from Hub said this is the grid on which gang wars take place. The gang wars are essentially drug wars, they said. Big money is involved and everyone is armed.

One young woman narrated a chilling incident: "My brother's friend was coming to visit us and one of the gangs shot him dead as he was entering our house. His body was lying on our front door. A single bullet in the nape of his neck, execution style. The gangs pay the police bhatta (protection money) to leave them alone so the police look the other way from their operations and violence. Earlier there was one gang, then two, now there are more. There is a lot of corruption. All the seats in the elections for instance were given based on money."

Women from Khuzdar spoke about the forms of corruption endemic to the conflict in their areas. The collapse of property prices has led to the homes of those who have fled being forcibly occupied. On the other hand, there are exorbitant fare hikes by transporters carrying refugees out of Khuzdar.

All the women from across all areas testified to the

general rise in crime since the insurgency and general law and order breakdown. Women blamed the Baloch and Pashtun equally for operating criminal gangs, in addition to the Taliban. One Pashtun woman said that the Taliban had kidnapped her cousin because he declared himself a communist and started preaching Marxism. His whereabouts are still not known.

In Quetta, a Hazara woman said because of the law and order breakdown, security companies were making millions of rupees renting out guards and selling scanner machines and other such gadgets.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS

Women across all ethnic groups in Balochistan said they felt a sense of disconnect from state institutions. They did not feel that they could independently approach the police, the courts and judiciary, or administrative bureaucracy to get their issues resolved. Their first effort in case of a crisis would be within the family or to approach community elders. They said that it was men who usually mediated access to state institutions and that too, after all internal options were exhausted.

Women across all socio-economic groups and regions also said that only a woman who had no one to turn to and no other familial social protection would approach state institutions. It was generally the least preferred option. The women pointed out that the state itself was not pro-women and many had found its mediations regressive and alienating. They compared it to intra-community solutions such as arbitration of the Sardar, that they find preferable for two reasons — firstly that there was an in-built implementation mechanism with the community ensuring compliance, and secondly, that approaching such local centres of power did not isolate women from their kinship social systems.

Young women from working class backgrounds belonging to Lasbela district pointed out that the Sardari system of justice was affordable because it doesn't involve paying any bribes. Additionally, approaching it violates no taboos. Suggesting that the traditional Sardari system is not as strong in Lasbela as elsewhere in the province, they gave examples of progressive pro-women

decisions. These included allowing women the right to divorce and the tribal chief's promotion of girls' education. Women said they preferred the Sardari system because the formal legal one involves high financial and administrative, as well as emotional and psychological, transaction costs.

The educated Baloch women from Quetta were dismissive of state institutions as essentially anti-people. One woman stated the problem as, "They were not formed to protect people from threats, but to protect the State from the threat of the people. That's how they evolved and that is still how they are. It is genetic. They are programmed to protect the power elite from the suspicious masses, not the other way around."

The professional women pointed out that the courts themselves are powerless, citing the example of missing persons/ forced disappearances. They said that while conducting court hearings was important, the courts keep passing instructions to the security agencies who simply ignore them. So the courts can't get their own decisions implemented.

The poor and uneducated Baloch women were dismissive of the police and courts because state institutions existed at a meso-level that did not connect at all with their daily struggles and ground realities. They said even if poor people could access them, the poor had to be males. Poor women are seen only as an appendage to poor men. Women from the Hazara community also agreed that the formal system provides them no sense of security or justice. They said that there was a trust deficit and the police force inspired no confidence even before the mass Hazara killings started. They said they preferred to approach their own community elders. The Hazara women also said that their community members were more accepting of NGOs that they saw as helpful and proactive. So people also turned to such social organisations to solve their issues.

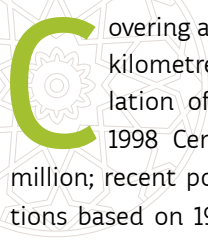


Residents walk on a bridge as they flee from Pakistan's Lower Dir district, where troops launched an operation against militants. Photo credit: REUTERS/Inam Khan

SECTION III: SWAT RESEARCH FINDINGS

Although Swat comes under the civil administration, until 1974 the area continued to be governed by quick and inexpensive Riwaaj/customs (having the force of law) that were in force under the Wali of Swat.

BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT



Covering an area of approximately 36000 square kilometres, Malakand Division has a population of 6,320,682 people. According to the 1998 Census Swat had a population of 1.25 million; recent population estimates for 2009 (projections based on 1998 census and growth calculations), placed the population of Swat at approximately 1.8 million. Administratively, Swat is part of Malakand Division, but not Malakand Agency. In that sense, it is different in nature from the “agency” identity especially because the presence of regular police force and courts was established in Swat when it merged into the NWFP in 1969. Prior to that, it was ruled by the Wali of Swat, whose family continues to enjoy wide respect in Swat even today. Although Swat came under civil administration, until 1974 the area continued to be governed by quick and inexpensive Riwaaj/customs (having the force of law) that had been in place under the Wali of Swat. After courts were established, regulations for administering criminal and civil disputes were promulgated and judicial powers were vested in the bureaucracy, local jirgas and religious leaders of Swat. This is seen to be an unpopular development that created resentment and led to the call for Sharia by Sufi Mohammad, a cleric from neighbouring Dir.

Sufi Mohammad formed the Tehrik i Nifaz i Sharia Muhammadi (TNSM) in 1989 with the stated aim of promoting peace and harmony. However, it should be noted that the formation of TNSM coincided with the retreat

of Soviet army and the ascendance of the Mujahideen in neighbouring Afghanistan. The TNSM's first success came in 1994 when it reacted to a judgment of the Supreme Court passed on February 12 that nullified the Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA) regulations that had governed Swat and Malakand since the 1970s. TNSM agitated for the imposition of Sharia and blocked the roads. This led to a confrontation with the government that ended with the Governor of NWFP announcing the Nizam i Shariat Regulation on December 1, 1994, whereby courts and names of judges were ‘Islamised’. A judge was now termed as a Qazi and an adviser was assigned to each Qazi to administer justice according to the Sharia. A new parallel judicial system was instituted where litigants had a choice about which one they could opt for, the ‘law of Pakistan’ or the ‘Sharia’. Not satisfied with the newly introduced system, TNSM agitated again and the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation was re-promulgated for Malakand Division and Kohistan with some amendments in 1999.

Sufi Mohammad led a lashkar/force of some 10,000 men in support of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US and subsequent US-led bombing of Afghanistan and ouster of Taliban. He returned with some 3,000 men and did not know if the remaining had been killed or imprisoned in Afghanistan. The Musharraf government banned TNSM and arrested Sufi Mohammad. However the move was basically protective custody for the old man, with whom people in Dir and Swat were angry for having returned, and abandoning their children in Afghanistan.



Photo credit: Kishwar Sultana

Though TNSM was banned and it had declared that it did not believe in elections, it still helped the candidates of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a new right wing coalition of nine religio-political parties, win the 2002 general elections by voting for them in Malakand Division. Cooperating with the MMA government and wresting more concessions, the TNSM supporters also emerged as Taliban supporters and recruits. Sufi Mohammad's son-in-law, Fazlullah, popularly known as Mullah Radio (for starting his populist FM radio) later joined the Tehrik i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which seemed to have merged TNSM into its own ranks. Fazlullah acquired political and religious authority and power when he methodically concentrated on strengthening his hold over Swat by recruiting men, running training camps, and issuing sermons over radio broadcasts. The latter were especially popular among women as he advocated Islamic mores and informed women about their rights, also telling them to ensure that their husbands were observing Muslims.

These developments were possible under a government led by the right-wing MMA coalition, whose candidates had been elected following the power vacuum in 2002 as the major leaders of all the mainstream political parties were in exile. Soon after elections, the MMA formed the (unelected) National Shariat Council in the NWFP, housed in the Chief Minister Secretariat, to govern the province's political and moral direction.

The provincial government passed a law, the Hisbah (Accountability) Act, that anticipated a regularised moral police force for the 'Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice', the chief of which, the Mohtasib,

could not be challenged in any court of law. They were to patrol streets to ensure strict compliance with Islamic public culture. In addition to regulating sexual propriety, the morality enforcement squad was also mandated to take anti-corruption measures to ensure everyday justice, such as punishing shopkeepers who manipulated weights and adulterated products.

Soon after 2002 elections, fatwas (religious edicts) were issued in Swat against an Afghan writer, Fazal Wahab, declaring his work un-Islamic because of his two books, one against the role of religious clerics and the other against the Taliban. In January 2003 unidentified assailants shot him dead in Swat, also killing two other bystanders. In 2004, the MMA closed down the (then) only women's crisis shelter for victims of violence, the Mera Ghar Crisis Centre, on charges of promoting adultery and obscenity (Brohi, 2006, page 61).

The Khyber Medical College and other institutes of higher education were forcibly segregated. Nishtar Hall, Peshawar's only public auditorium was closed down on charges of promoting vulgarity and un-Islamic values (Brohi, 2006, Page 91). In November 2004, a bomb explosion in Swat destroyed Mingora city's Palwasha cinema hall. At the same time, the Peace Agreement between the army and militants in Waziristan, known as the Shikai Accord, was breaking down and militants began to disperse to other areas including Swat while others dug in to fight pitched battles. MMA senior minister Siraj ul Haq instituted Tanzeem-e-Salaat Committees (vigilante groups to enforce congregational prayers) in Dir to ensure attendance in mosques at prayer times, including that of the Nazim, the DSP police and local elites. On

August 31, 2004, the NWFP Chief Minister and general secretary MMA, Maulana Fazlur Rehman announced, “All those who oppose imposition of an Islamic system are terrorists.”

Right afterwards, MMA declared that family planning was against Islam, and prohibited health workers from working on it. The provincial minister for religious affairs collected and publicly torched condoms, family planning literature, video cassettes, and music CDs in a “purity drive” to flush out “obscenity” from the province. By early 2005, reports of similar occasional torching in Swat started trickling into the news media. Later in the year, the provincial government passed a law that prohibited every person from any form of music or dancing at any place, whether in public or even in private spaces. The Tehrik-i-Nijaaat-i-Fahashi (Movement for Riddance of Obscenity) flushed out musicians from Dabgarhi area in Peshawar and set their musical instruments on fire before evicting them.

On 22nd May 2007, the MMA provincial government confirmed its peace agreement with Fazlullah. In return for allowing his radio broadcasts to continue, he agreed to support the government’s polio vaccination campaign, schooling for girls, and terminate militant training facilities. Meanwhile, in 2007, he also invited the clerics of Lal Masjid to deliver radio sermons that were broadcast on his FM radio.

In July 2007, the intense anger over the Lal Masjid incidents led to a wave of suicide attacks in tribal as well as non-tribal areas, including by TNSM. In October 2007, Musharraf ordered the Army and the FC to act against TNSM in Swat Valley, sending in 2,500 paramilitary troops to establish writ of state. During the heavily pitched battles, Fazlullah’s forces overran police stations and paramilitary outposts. In December Fazlullah merged with Baitullah Mehsud’s Tehrik-e-Taliban [the movement of the Taliban in Pakistan]. More than 200 policemen and soldiers were killed during fighting in Swat in 2007. The military operations initially succeeded in pushing back the TNSM cadres from the areas they had controlled. The TNSM then followed the same tactics as the Taliban in Afghanistan. Faced with the might of the Pakistan Army and the FC, it avoided a frontal confrontation with them. On Fazlullah’s orders, his followers dispersed.

In February 2008, general elections were held in Pakistan and the secular Awami National Party (ANP) and left-of-centre PPP formed a coalition government

in the province. The PPP-led government came to power at the federal level in March 2008. Shortly afterwards, TNSM re-grouped and staged a spectacular comeback; it pushed out the army and FC from the areas they had recovered and re-established control over nearly 80 per cent of Swat’s territory.

On April 20, 2008 the NWFP coalition government signed a six-point accord with Sufi Mohammad’s TNSM. Proponents claim this created political space for the state to undertake strong action when the militants reneged on their commitments, as they were expected to do.

On February 15, 2009 President Asif Ali Zardari gave the approval to the NWFP government to enforce Sharia laws in Malakand Division. The next day, the NWFP government and TNSM finalised an accord, that introduced changes in the 1999 Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. The 2009 Nizam-e-Adl bill was tabled in the Parliament. All the major political parties, except Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), voted for the bill, which became a law.

Two months later, Maulana Sufi Muhammad addressed an audience of thousands in Swat, declaring democracy to be un-Islamic. He said that Islam did not allow elections or voting, courts or lawyers. He labelled the institutions of parliament and democracy as western impositions that must be eliminated after the implementation of Shariat. This again led to a direct confrontation between the military and the militant groups, including TNSM and Fazlullah’s TTP (April 26, 2009). By May 2009 the military had begun to impose curfews in Swat. On May 10th the military lifted the curfew to allow people to leave Swat, announcing that they should leave immediately. Heavy fighting ensued in Mingora and the rest of the Swat valley, 80 per cent of which was under TTP control. Beheadings and other forms of violence continued along with the fighting. There were pitched street battles, with both the army and the TTP/TNSM occupying houses and different neighbourhoods; both suffered heavy casualties and losses. This is often the reference point that women in Swat valley use when they describe their insecurity.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section looks at how women view the changing situation of their own security and that of the area, how they view the presence of the military and subsequent militarisation of the area, the presence and

scale/intensity of corruption and the issue of justice and rights for women. The women we spoke to shared their own stories and experiences of conflict, their sense of betrayal and helplessness, including their conflicted feelings about Fazlullah and the army as well as people on the ground who either joined or sided with one group or the other. Finally, they questioned why this conflict was inflicted on them and Swat so suddenly, with such intensity, and its subsequent disappearance without any clear ‘settlement’ -- the main leaders just disappeared or if they were captured, no progress on prosecuting them has been shared with the people of Swat.

The following sub-sections discuss women’s analysis of the four thematic areas identified for this research: security, militarisation, corruption and justice. There are many details of a personal nature that we have not shared because firstly, the parameters of the study do not require them, but also because they could result in the possible identification of our discussants.

SECURITY

We discussed security from multiple perspectives: physical, psychological, collective, personal, gendered, and geographical. One respondent said that the whole country is insecure, but many traced insecurity in Swat to the time when the army was deputed in Swat — that is, 2007-08. The Taliban, led by Fazlullah, were busy with building their madrassa and their FM radio, but no one felt insecure. The insecurity increased when the army came. Till then, asserted the women, Swat was peaceful and secure, with normal tourism and trade/business activities.

Women were aware of and brought up the paradox of associating security with the army. Many said that the presence of the army did not mean the return of peace and security, but those who faced threats especially needed the army’s presence. People felt more secure with the army presence than without it, despite feeling a sense of resentment against the army, they said. Around the time of the violent conflict, there was a total collapse of state structures and no protection of life and property. This left the women feeling vulnerable. Many feared that the Taliban could re-surface at any moment. Their fear was based primarily on two factors: a) the presence and support for Taliban in “sensitive areas” and, b) the fact that the top Taliban leaders, especially Fazlullah, had escaped and were said to be in Afghanistan. Women spoke about the resentment against check points on the roads erected by the army and police for security. They said that the long queues,

especially at school times, caused the children and women to be late and produced more inconvenience than security. They recognised that the check points were needed but simultaneously complained that no Talib was going to wait in line on the road to be caught by the security forces.

Women’s insecurity manifested itself at two levels. The first was the gendered context of physical vulnerability — rape and izzat (honour) issues, while the second was psychological — lack of access to public spaces that led to fears about the safety of their men when they stepped out. Izzat and honour issues restricted women’s movement and strengthened the perception of women as “weak” and needing protection. This leads to harassment through threats, with different groups of men trying to control women’s public visibility, for example, by ordering them to stay inside the home rather than working in a public context or working for women’s rights. The psychological aspects of insecurity also result from limited access to the public sphere. Some women said that they felt a constant gnawing worry about their men being picked by the military or becoming victims of a suicide bomb. One respondent said that when her son was picked up, she did not know for ten hours whether the military or the Taliban had done it. She faced uncertainty about who to approach for information and simultaneously confronted nervousness about registering an FIR (First Information Report) with the police lest those who had taken her son get vengeful. “Even after he came back and we enrolled him in an education institution outside Swat, I get nervous and fearful after dark,” she added.

Both the army and Taliban were seen to be menacing. Explaining the insecurity she felt, a participant said, “I have two sons — one with a beard and the other without. One was checked by the army as a suspect and the other by the Taliban...”

However, many women also said that their worry about male family members had been reduced to a great degree since the intensity of the conflict had subsided, although things were still not ‘normal’ in Swat.

Some respondents related insecurity to the army’s presence, but one respondent said that such criteria are misleading and irrelevant. She spoke about the layers of vulnerability that women experience during their lives. She stated that there is no specific point at which insecurity began for her. A girl is vulnerable before she is born as discrimination begins at the time a child is

formed in the womb, she said, adding that she does not trust her daughter with any man — not even with the child's father.

Discussing the different contexts of their insecurity, a respondent said, "I choose my words carefully when I am in a meeting with the community or conducting FGDs in villages as it is not written on their participants' faces if he or she is in favour of the Taliban or their sympathiser."

She also said that her mother always tells her not to carry a writing pad or laptop with her in a visible manner as these are identity markers of working women and make them vulnerable to an attack from anyone — no one knows one type of dehshatgard (terrorist) from another these days.

Another woman said, "Women gave the Taliban their jewellery in the hopes of receiving their rights but all they got was insecurity... Ordinary women will tell you that except for the check posts, there is peace, but I am insecure even today. Yesterday, some children had written the number 6 in red on the wall of my house as a prank; when I saw it I felt very insecure, wondering why someone had written a 6 in red on my wall. This is my state of mind that I get nervous about the smallest of things."

Many people in Swat fear receiving letters - during the days of the Taliban letters warning people to 'mend' their ways were common. One participant said, "We do not accept letters from anyone. We have even told our neighbours not to accept any letters on our behalf if we are not at home."

Physical Insecurity:

One respondent said that she and her father had received threats due to her work in the public sphere. Someone came to her office and told her not to pursue her line of work. However, she said that she was not intimidated because the man was not a Talib. She had a 9mm pistol that she kept for personal defence that her brother taught her how to use. Another woman said that in those days, her friend slept with a sharp knife under her pillow, saying that if anyone barged into her room, she'd rather kill herself (than be raped), as she would not have the courage to kill someone else.

Some women also said that they fear both the Taliban and the army, and that both are actually the same. One wears one type of uniform and the other another type of clothing, but essentially they have worked together. Women's physical vulnerability vis a vis both remains the same. Another respondent said that she feels secure in Swat (her work place is in Mingora and her home is in Thana) but that she and her family feel very insecure in Peshawar, especially Saddar area where they like to go shopping, as that is where suicide bomb blasts frequently take place.

One respondent said that she and her husband had to leave Swat and move to Islamabad. "We received numerous threats from the Taliban who announced our names on FM Radio; posters accusing us of obscenity appeared out of nowhere, our centres for skills training were attacked and the machines stolen. One day the Taliban announced on the radio that they thought we were in Islamabad and that their men would get us. We received threatening phone calls asking us to give a newspaper statement announcing our repentance. Our relatives also implored us, saying their lives are also in danger. During those days, the Taliban used to chop off people's heads so we published a statement/apology."

Her family had even got a respected Taliban leader to issue a statement in their favour but after the announcement that the Taliban would send men after her and her husband in Islamabad, the respondent said, "Every time the bell rang, we'd fear they had come after us."

Some women distinguished between the prevailing security situation in rural and urban areas. They said they feel more insecure in "sensitive" (from the security standpoint) or far-flung rural areas where Taliban presence and influence/support continues, for example, Kabal, Imam Dheri, Bara Banda, and Malam Jabba, where the army is under attack.

Respondents also highlighted the insecurity experienced across the community. While men are as vulnerable to bomb blasts as women, respondents emphasised the gendered context of women's insecurity, which is also a cause of insecurity for men. Men, they explained, feel insecure about their women.

One health professional felt insecure when the Taliban used foliage by a stream in front of her house as a hiding

place to launch attacks on the army – which then used her house, especially the terrace in the front, to position their men and machine guns to fire at the Taliban. She also described the fear she and her team experienced while going to their place of work, as the Taliban would tell them to wear long *chaddars* and cover their faces properly. She said the Taliban would walk casually around the hospital premises carrying guns and rocket launchers. People working at the hospital never knew what would happen to them the next moment. It was hard to live with the atmosphere of fear and intimidation, especially intimidation from men whom they knew from before, like the milkman, or the rickshaw and tonga drivers, who were transformed into Taliban overnight and equipped with the power to inflict death. Furthermore, it was particularly ‘hurtful’ and caused further insecurity when the army occupied people’s homes (including that of the respondent).

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Some talked about their children and old parents being traumatised by the extreme violence as no one had thought that the situation could deteriorate so rapidly. One respondent said that people were hit very hard economically. She explained that the Taliban had told their representatives and sympathisers to stop paying the full rent to their landlords for shops or houses. They could keep the money they saved, as long as they gave some of it to the Taliban. She said this was why poverty and vulnerability had increased so drastically in Swat. Another said that the conflict had destroyed people’s trading activities: “boutiques, beauty parlours, markets closed down. Domestic violence increased.”

Democratic versus Dictatorial System of Government

One respondent said that Pakistan’s problems could be addressed if the democratic system is made stable and sustainable. She felt that the fact that the government had completed five years had made people more aware of their rights. However, she said that democratic regimes could also be problematic if they did not allow

local government system to function and instead of legislation, the MNAs and MPAs concentrated on promising amenities like electricity and gas, which is not their job. She felt that parliamentarians should discuss policy and reform. If all institutions of the state (legislature, executive and judiciary) would keep within their parameters and not overstep them, Pakistan’s challenges would be greatly reduced, she said.

Most respondents said that they preferred democracy but they also felt that those who get elected should abide by a code of conduct; instead, when people are elected to parliament, they tend to disrupt the systematic working of institutions due to *sifarish* - the culture of giving and taking favours.

MILITARISATION

We found that the concept of militarisation was not widely understood except in academic discussions. The Swat respondents’ interpretation of militarisation translated into sharing their views on the military, its role during the violent conflict, and reflections on the army’s post-conflict presence. Just like women’s perception of the Taliban changed radically after they experienced denial of their basic rights, similarly many women’s views about the army also changed over time. From being viewed as the saviours of Swat, over the last two or three years, women’s perceptions of the army had become more critical and ambivalent. Recognising that the military was needed to maintain security, they were also aware that real peace could only be possible and tested after military presence had been removed.

The respondents had mixed views and conceptualisation of militarisation. Most translated it into the physical presence of the army in the area. While aware of the widely held belief that the army’s primary task is defend borders with other countries, they also spoke about the need for the army to be present in Swat to protect people. All appreciated the army’s role in development projects and maintained that the army was organised and methodical in the delivery of services and goods and that the infrastructure it built (buildings, roads and bridges) was superior in quality to that built by civilian/private contractors. One respondent said that the college where she taught was like a ruin after the conflict. The army re-built it with improvements, remedying many previous problems, like effectively fixing the seepage in the roof. Overall, the army’s renovation work was both efficiently carried out and improved the college building.

“Swat has been a war zone — a special area. Therefore, it was the need of the hour to have army as there was no writ of the government and no administrative control prevailed at the time. Now, that the situation is returning to normal, the army is not interfering so much. There are no more special conditions.”

“There are/were no laws. It was an insurgency. The Government concluded the Peace Accord, which was the need of the hour. We also needed the army to take action. We do have the Anti-terrorism Act of 1997 and anti terrorist courts. However, the military was needed at that point. We could not do without it.”

Another said, “The army was invited by our elders. This was necessary, as the civil government could not control the Taliban. The army also lost precious lives, so we can’t think ill of them. If this were only a domestic issue, the state would have been able to do something. This is our foreign policy issue. It was one man’s decision (Gen. Musharraf). Afghanistan needs peace and once it is established there, we’ll get peace also. However, the state is helpless and there are no devoted people to lead us. The democratic government has also followed the same policy as previous governments; the army calls the shots on foreign policy.”

Respondents also highlighted the human rights violations committed by the army. One respondent said that the army has tortured innocent people, treated them like prisoners of war and kept them as if they are in Guantanamo Bay; some are barely alive. She referred to the judgment of the Peshawar High Court that asked why so many men in custody were dying of sudden heart attacks. She also questioned the army’s role and inroads into Swat society and why Taliban leaders were allowed to escape unpunished. Women said that displaced people who had returned feared that their names may be on the army’s list of suspects; they were afraid of re-starting their small businesses for fear of being picked up, as anyone could be suspected of being a Taliban sympathiser, without any logic behind the accusation.

Some respondents pointed out the resentment of the displaced when they found that the army had occupied

their houses. One respondent, who had gone away, returned to learn that the army had tied up and beaten her servant accused him of being a RAW agent because his name sounded Hindu. She also heard that a person had been killed in the premises of her house, but she didn’t know who — it could have a talib or their sympathizer or an innocent person. The army was using it as both an officer’s residence and a strategic place from which to fire at suspected Taliban. The Taliban had also used the front of her house as a strategic place for their attacks. However, she said she had greater reproach reserved for the army than the Taliban, as she could not understand the rationale behind the violence imposed on the people of Swat.

Comparing the type of violence inflicted by the Taliban and the army, one respondent said that violence of the Taliban was very intense particularly when it came to strict imposing purdah (veiling) in accordance with their concepts, and banning education and health services. Because of this, the people were relieved when the army took over and restored women’s access to education, health and mobility. Others said that education had been a challenge under previous regimes also but the Taliban came down much harder on girl’s education and even killed the men who supported girls’ education. One respondent recalled the difficulties faced by health workers: “They were told that what they were doing was sin,” she said. In addition, Taliban told women government servants to stay at home or face the consequences, and killed at least two women councillors.

Given all this, women faced far greater challenges under the Taliban rule, and saw the army as having played a key role in restoring some normalcy under particularly difficult circumstances. However, most respondents concluded that complete normalcy would be established when the need for checkpoints was eliminated and there was peace in Swat without active army presence. Some respondents had misgivings about the army’s role and purpose. They maintained that the army and Taliban were one and the same. They questioned how illegal FM radio stations could operate without governmental approval, how Fazlullah could conduct his activities without any checks and asked why Fazlullah and his team were not captured while the local commanders were rounded up.

One respondent recalled that even the army personnel would not go near the bodies of those the Taliban had brutally killed and hung in the main city centre (which became known as Khooni Chowk, Bloody Square), to

take them down and give them a decent burial. In one case, the Taliban killed a venerated spiritual leader, Pir Samiullah, who had stood up to them; they blew up his dead body with bombs to prevent the locals from building a shrine for him. Respondents recognised that these tactics were aimed at drilling the effects of fear deep into the locals' minds.

Another respondent gave an example of this narrative, remembering an incident when she asked the army during a curfew to help her return to her hometown. They were kind and accommodated her in a truck they had hired to transport goods. She and her granddaughter were seated behind the boxes loaded in the truck. Curious about the contents, she opened one and found artificial beards inside. The boxes were unloaded at an FC post, leading her to conclude that the army was *behroopia* (masquerader). She also said that the Taliban and army worked in tandem: the army and police would vacate a check-post or *thana* (police station) without resistance when the Taliban showed up, allowing the Taliban to make inroads into Swat. In other words, the *thanas* were taken over peacefully as it was all a peaceful and planned affair. She concluded, *"This was a game – a government plan made up of bad policies – which used the Taliban, the people and the army. We just suffered."*

On rape, one respondent maintained that men from both sides – the Taliban and the army – were involved in rape. However, many said that the accusations of army soldiers having raped was hearsay as they had not been able to identify anyone. We have personally looked into this, and were unable to find a single such case. They said that there were incidents of elopement – young, immature girls, carried away by the romance of the uniform and power the army represents, had run away with soldiers. They said that the army was also popular with young girls because it opened up education opportunities for them and encouraged them to share complaints about usurpation of their rights that they promised to investigate and redress. Therefore, young girls would sometimes threaten to approach the army if an issue within the family was not resolved.

CORRUPTION

The respondents analysed corruption in two contexts: moral and financial. Most maintained that women were not as corrupt as men as they had less exposure to corrupt practices in the public sphere and fewer resources or opportunities for bribery.

Moral Corruption:

Two respondents said that violation of rights amounts to corruption. One respondent asserted that corruption is due to a system that remains unchanged even though the faces at the helm of affairs keep changing; this, she said, is why people's rights are violated. She quoted the Asghar Khan case³, saying that it proves that corruption is present nationally, and has been there for a long time. There was no accountability and since no one could hold the judiciary accountable, there could only be partial accountability. Another respondent explained that not doing one's job properly amounts to corruption; she gave the example of the Swat river, saying it has become one big gutter because no one cares about what is dumped into it due to lack of accountability. Similarly, she said there is lack of accountability with regard to violence and crimes against women, whether it is acid attacks or access to education and health services.

Speaking about the sexual rights of women, one respondent said that workers' migration from Swat – with husbands being away for years – raised the twin issues of women's sexual rights and harassment by their in-laws.

Discussants also highlighted issues around the sexual rights and harassment of women. One explained that in a conflict environment, many people take advantage of crisis. For example, during displacement, a large number of girls were trafficked and sold into brothels in Lahore and Punjab. Families were given a place to live but some landlords gave themselves sexual rights over the displaced women living on their property. Speaking about the sexual rights of women, one respondent said that workers' migration from Swat – with husbands being away for years – raised the twin issues of women's sexual rights and harassment by their in-laws. She said that in Swat and surrounding districts, fathers- and brothers-in-law routinely took advantage of the women married into the family during the husband's absence. In her words, *"The father-in-law is husband to all the daughters-in-law in the house."*

Another respondent highlighted how corruption puts women (and other powerless groups) at a distinct disadvantage. She said that people could buy proof with money. The in-laws of a 16-year old girl kept her locked in a room at home for several days and burnt her with acid. Neighbours heard her scream in pain but no one

raised a voice. She said that such cases took place primarily because there was no accountability. Finally when the in-laws were exposed, they could not be brought to justice as they bought everyone off.

One respondent raised the issue of misuse of power for political gains. She questioned why the mullahs were allowed to use the symbol of a book on their printed literature. They falsely project the book as the Quran, put the Kalma (Muslim prayer) on their flag, and ask people to vote for their party in the name of religion, which is a violation of election rules.

“The mullahs demand that people vote for them in the name of Allah. How can this be fair? Why doesn’t the election commission stop such practices?” she asked.

Financial corruption

All respondents said that corruption had long been present. One stated that there was corruption even during the times of the Wali of Swat and it still existed in every department today. Some respondents maintained that there was no increase in the level of corruption, which had always been high and pervaded all aspects of society. They said that it was present among clerks and peons as well as at ministerial level – in other words, corruption was present at the local, national and international levels.

Some respondents felt that the level and scope of corruption had increased compared to the past. They said that today a watchman could be bribed with a mere hundred rupees to allow an unauthorised person to enter an examination hall; ministers accepted bribes to provide the most lowly government jobs; that merit and the views of the institutional head of the department were irrelevant. They said that MNAs and MPAs felt entitled to interfere in the regular working of the institutions.

A health professional talked about the significant amounts of funds that had been allocated and donated to the hospital where she worked, yet they lacked proper instruments, they could not repair any machines, and only had aspirin tablets to give. She asked, “Where did the funds go?” She said that in some cases, hospital employees (mostly doctors) and their friends and families even pooled together money to buy essential equipment and medicines for poor patients. On a different note, she expressed concern about “our people”

having been “made dependent — they are now used to receiving help, material things.” She also said that while “a lot of funds” were given to the hospital, but “only the seniors received recognition from the government through various awards/medals. Some of them had siphoned off funds, yet they received awards from the government.”

“There was no appreciation of our junior doctors, our Class Four officers, our paramedics — there was no recognition of anyone who had worked in a dedicated manner in the hospital, in the midst of Taliban threats. Those who went abroad to represent Swat received awards.”

In addition to routine corruption, one respondent said that, “Militancy has given many people new opportunities for corruption and bullying and intimidation.” She said that people were willing to commit murder in return for Rs 500. Also, the poor law and order situation gave people opportunities to settle old scores under the garb of Taliban imposed conflict.

Our respondents saw politicians generally as corrupt, selfish (only interested in delivering speeches but lacking the ability to listen to the people and their problems) and useless. They viewed army as less corrupt, at least delivering value for money. Compared to politicians and their civilian contractors, the respondents felt that the army produces quality work and meets its targets and deadlines due to its methodical and organised approach.

To the question, what can women do to curb corruption, almost all respondents said that women nurture their families and therefore, they can inculcate awareness in their children and students. They can ensure that the community is also educated on the issue.

JUSTICE

Some respondents and FGD participants romanticised the time of the Wali as the golden era, but even so, over the course of the discussion they concluded that they preferred the regular justice system to customary or tribal justice. Although formal system cases got prolonged and woman had to go through azaab (hell) to obtain justice, this system gave women greater chances of receiving fair judgments, they said. They also distinguished between women living in urban areas and those in rural and remote areas, and the class context of women especially those who were educated and

knowledgeable about their rights, compared to those who relied upon men for access to any rights and to any form of justice. One also pointed out the anomaly that educated women from ‘respectable’ families were not expected to go to the courts. In most cases, women could access courts with the support of their male relatives. On the other hand those who were less educated, less aware of their rights, were often forced to go to the courts as they had fewer resources (less access to lawyers or educated male relatives); and in the process, they suffered more harassment.

“Justice” under the Taliban

All the research participants agreed that the Taliban time displayed the worst injustices not only toward women but the entire community. They spoke about restrictions on women’s movement, which was the hardest part to deal with on a daily basis. Even when Sufi Muhammad “allowed” women to go to the markets, young Taliban roaming the streets would threaten women with dire consequences if they were not accompanied by men. Women at the FGD said that they had supported Fazlullah in the hope of getting their rights — they did not realise that they would unleash such a rein of violence upon themselves and their communities.

Justice for women who were targeted by the Taliban did not elicit detailed responses. Some respondents were quick to point out that there were roughly half a dozen cases that were reported in the press. These included cases like the Taliban’s murder of the beggar mother and daughter whom they had warned to stop begging, and Shabana, the dancer whom they accused of being a prostitute; another visible case was that of Chand Bibi who was publicly lashed (but not killed) on charges of immoral, “adulterous” behaviour. It appeared that women had either moved on from a focus on specific women or they did not want to revisit the issues associated with the Taliban and their atrocities against women.

Rapes during conflict

Most respondents said that it was difficult to separate facts from rumours that prevailed at different times about the Taliban who raped, the army who raped, and the men who were not circumcised. Many respondents concluded that in all probability such rapes did take place but were not able to verify specific cases. The researchers’ prior attempts at verification of even a single case were unsuccessful, despite investigations.

Many women at both the FGD and individual interviews expressed concerns about the women who were sexually harassed or raped within the family. Many respondents asserted that this was not uncommon and that women often had to suffer the father-in-law or brother-in-law’s sexual aggression, fearing that if they spoke up, their husbands would be angry with them for ruining peace within the family. Some also said that there were instances of a woman telling her husband, who refused to do anything about the situation. For example, one respondent said that her brother-in-law (husband’s sister’s husband) used to help her financially and then began demanding sexual favours. She kept telling her husband who told her that she was imagining things. The brother-in-law eventually sexually assaulted her but when she told her husband, he refused to believe her. She was so upset that she took sleeping pills in an attempt to end her life. Another respondent familiar with the legal system said that rape within the family was not rare. She knew of many such cases, often with women whose husbands were migrant workers, or homosexual. Many women told her the truth, as they trusted her as a woman. Those who have no such resource cannot tell anyone, not even their parents, as the matter is so shameful. Women accuse the husband of beating them and insist on living in a separate home in order to move out of the joint family space where the abuse takes place. She said that the lawyer would communicate some of these matters to the judge quietly in English so that most people in the courtroom would not be able to understand; the judge always gave a sentence favourable to the woman.

The health professional said that it is difficult to medically mark the difference between consensual sex and rape. Prostitutes were also raped but they were more assertive about their rights than women from ‘good’ families who worried more about their own and the family’s honour, she said. She has dealt with many medico-legal cases and even when girls were sent to the Darul Aman (Women’s Shelter), the prettier ones would be ‘supplied’ to various officers/influential persons. She said that this is one area in which women’s rights discourses fail women, because once a woman enters the Darul Aman, she is considered as “tainted”.

Describing the practical difficulties of implementing judgments that are fair to women, two respondents described the case of a woman who won her inheritance case in court against her paternal uncle but he and his sons killed her as she was celebrating

WRN Stakeholder Meeting, Islamabad, 2012.
Photo credit: Kishwar Sultana



her victory. In such a situation, the government cannot protect women even when they are given justice. Therefore, the risks of accessing justice institutions may well be beyond the power of government to address, felt respondents.

Police and the role of women police

Most respondents felt that the role of the police in general has been problematic from the start. Police stations are not places that women like to visit, due to local culture and traditions. Having said this, all agreed that presence of women in the police is a positive step, although it has not brought any change in the thana (police station) culture. The women inducted in the police obey their male bosses, they do not serve women who work in, say the DIG's house, if such women need help from the police. Mostly, they are posted on VIP duty, or in girls' schools and colleges during examinations.

"We wanted a women's thana but they say security for such a thana would be an issue; even though it will be an all-women space, it is not okay with anyone (men) as no one approves of women in the public sphere. There are so many different sets of dangerous people freely roaming around, yet this all-women space is a threat. Women making groups is a threat. Women's access to courts is objectionable. They are not happy to work with us in any form."

Describing the layers of impediments that women seeking justice faced, a respondent said that women have little access to justice at the formal level, as men try to settle matters amongst themselves. Further, the process, which requires time, money and mobility, is

skewed against women anyway. Those seeking justice need connections and contacts, favours, recommendations and an understanding of the specialised legal language. The latter gives power over women to lawyers, who present the case in a court of law. The process of disempowerment begins from the first step, when an FIR has to be registered; it is the local police who write up the report, and can frame the FIR in such a way that it may actually go against the complainant. When a woman registers a case, no one comes forward to provide eye-witness testimony. In fact, a woman who goes to the police station on her own is automatically expelled from the definition of a "good woman" - to be one intrinsically implies stoically suffering exploitation and injustice. At the thana instead of facilitating the woman, the police ask, "Where is your man? Don't you have a man to accompany you?" Their attitude towards the woman is negative and insulting because she has come to the police station.

Being ill-trained themselves, the police also lack the technical expertise to investigate cases properly, nor do they have easy access to forensic labs. The only forensic lab in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is located in Peshawar, which presents practical difficulties. The difficulties of accessing the police aside, the male dominated courts also present significant challenges to women, including men who stare "as if they can unclothe women with their eyes". One participant said she started crying on the court premises after men stared at her like she was a prey to pounce on. She said there should be separate courts for women so they do not become a spectacle. Then there is the stereotype that any woman on court premises has violated norms of decency, and the fact that judges are also men who bring their own set of prejudices to the chamber.

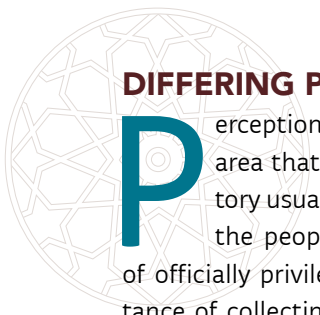


Hundreds of women raise their hands in the streets of Karachi as they shout slogans against military operations in the Swat valley region. Photo credit: REUTERS/Athar Hussain

SECTION IV: CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

It is usually the documented history that collides with people's narrative and it is the people's voices that are lost at the cost of officially privileged history.

DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS



Perceptions of conflicts solidify into 'history', an area that remains contested. Documented history usually collides with people's narrative and the people's voices are often lost at the cost of officially privileged history. This adds to the importance of collecting and collating women's experiences of conflicts as they emerge and recede. These views will contribute to forming the bedrock of memories and therefore histories.

In Balochistan, the trigger-points of the resurgence of the simmering conflict were widely contested, varying not only between men and women, but also between geographical locations. In Swat, women's accounts varied according to time (many supported Fazlullah before the conflict but changed their position after witnessing the violence of Taliban rule and their subsequent atrocities) and particular groups of women. For example, based on perceptions of women whom the Taliban had been warning against salaried employment in the public sphere, it appears that a gendered appraisal of events preceding the Taliban takeover and prioritising gender concerns earlier would have enabled both state and society to respond to the Taliban threat and prevented the Taliban from actually seizing administrative control.

HIGHER VULNERABILITY/ PROTECTION

In both Balochistan and Swat, men were more vulnerable in the conflict than women. This was borne out by

women's perceptions, men's opinions, and statistics of violence. It was men who were targeted and killed. Even in Swat, where the Taliban had misogynist brutal policies specifically aimed at women, the women pointed out that far more men were tortured, killed and persecuted, compared to less than ten women who were killed. They said both in scale and frequency, the atrocities against men were higher. The Hazara women in Balochistan pointed out that they were targeted as an ethnic community, and women died because they were Hazara, not because they were women.

So while women are vulnerable to gender specific threats and crimes and suffer in particular gendered ways, it may be misleading to assume that they are always the most vulnerable, which is how they are positioned in development speak, along with children. This assumption, correct in principle, may also have unintended costs, such as foreclosing opportunities for women.

During the floods of 2010, the humanitarian response's assumption of that women and children were the most vulnerable led to initiatives that strengthened communities' perceptions that women must be monitored and protected. Women said it was this 'protection' that led to their problems in the first place: it limited their mobility, interaction with state institutions and relief services, and underlined the need for male surveillance of their bodies. The humanitarian sector had a negligible presence in Balochistan, but was prominent in Swat. In Swat, if men and society in general were not so preoccupied with protecting and limiting women, women would

be able to play a more proactive role, such as possibly in conflict mediation and building bridges between communities. Women said that their initial support for the Taliban was also largely due to a rejection of the passive role accorded to them in which they needed constant protection. Supporting the Taliban was their assertion that they could and would be agents of change. This support challenged the perception that they needed to be confined to 'safe spaces', which for the community meant their homes. While the women acknowledged that they were wrong in their support of the Taliban, it raised an interesting point, that focusing on women's vulnerabilities often entrenches stereotypes about their needing protection, and compromises initiatives that could focus on their agency.

This raises a dilemma for women's rights advocates. The fact that women are not the most persecuted allows the perception that these are not their battles, or that women are incidental to the conflict. Yet they suffer specifically gendered consequences that are left out of the mainstream deliberations. How then to focus on women's agency and create spaces for their active contribution in peace building without fostering victim status onto them — that in turn reinforces stereotypes of needing surveillance and protection?

HOW IT PLAYS OUT

This was highlighted in the experiences of working women in Balochistan. The targeting of Baloch male youth has created an environment of fear where the threat perception is disproportionately larger than the actual incidences of disappearances and killings. Most families are intimately acquainted with fear for men of the family. This has led to the phenomenon of a larger number of younger women joining the workforce for the first time, as men are made to relocate, go into hiding or stay at home. This has led to a hostile reaction from conservative groups who have lashed out against working women. Women reported that Friday sermons in mosques were condemning women who worked outside the homes; women who stepped out faced increasing harassment, threats and general condemnation. The coping mechanisms women were turning to were counter-productive — such as mandatory covering of the body in burqa, and wearing gloves and socks in extreme heat. Women in Quetta also narrated increasing surveillance such as families calling employers to check on their presence as a way of 'safeguarding' them.

How then to focus on women's agency and create spaces for their active contribution in peace building without fostering victim status onto them — that in turn reinforces stereotypes of needing surveillance and protection?

Synergised public and private patriarchies

As signalled by the issue of protection cited above, public and private patriarchies work in tandem to reinforce women's subjugation to larger systems of power. While communities and entire groups may present a challenge to the state, as in the case of Balochistan, or be a demographic that the state makes specific allowances and accommodations for, as in the case of Swat, there remains in place an accord that allows regulation of women. So in either case, men continue to exercise control over women in the private sphere, and this is upheld in the public sphere. Women recognise this, and remain disenchanted with state institutions, citing the formal legal system as not being much different from the informal one.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT OF CONFLICT

Conflicts that engulf communities break down their physical and as well as social infrastructures. The public private divides are ruptured, and no longer present an adequate analytical lens. There is a spill over of hostilities, which cross the public private divide and pervade the capillaries. Conflict mitigation strategies must also piece back together social resource bases such as trust.

There are differences between time bound, limited conflicts such as in Swat, and protracted conflicts such as in Balochistan. In Swat, the Taliban took control of the area for three years, and in the collective narrative, the period was an abnormality, an aberration, a time when the community was ruptured and subjected to terrible atrocities from which they must now emerge. They look back to the preceding time as idyllic and the future as one where they must try to return to a past equilibrium, with new opportunities. On the other hand, Balochistan is more complex as communities cannot remember any prior idyllic period. Because the current conflict is remembered as the latest (and on-going) episode in a series of insurgencies, the impact experienced is cumulative, with grievances of the past congealing into

present discontents. This creates a historic trajectory of suffering. Opinions are more solidified and lack of trust in the state seems more formidable, requiring more urgent and long-term interventions.

The duration and phase of the conflict has an impact on people's opinions of the parties to the conflict. In Swat, people's perceptions of the Pakistan army have changed over the years. Following the military operation that ousted the Taliban, there was a high degree of goodwill for the army, which was seen as the liberator. The year after the army operation, the floods of 2010 provided another instance of people observing the army in action with its quick responses that saved lives and fixed the collapsed road and bridge infrastructure in the mountainous valley. But a few months after the floods, people expressed discontent, as they saw no signs of the army's exit. There emerged a gender divide where women were still supportive of army presence, as they feared a Taliban return, whereas the men articulated reservations about the army's growing presence and entrenchment. Two years down the line, the women had also become ambivalent — they were expressing reservations, and noting how army presence was adding to their problems. They cited the constant security checks, traffic jams, stop and search actions, that took place without diminishing the Taliban capacity for incursions back into Swat to inflict damage, such as the shooting of Malala Yousufzai. The condemnation of the Taliban has remained constant in Swat, and neither men nor women seem to have changed their perception or shown sympathies for them.

There emerged a gender divide where women were still supportive of army presence, as they feared a Taliban return, whereas the men articulated reservations about the army's growing presence and entrenchment.

In Balochistan the situation is different, if not the opposite. What has not wavered is how people perceive the state security apparatus. They focus more on the FC (Frontier Corps) and intelligence agencies rather than the army directly. Because of the distrust of state agencies fostered during previous insurgencies, both women and men's condemnation of security agencies remained constant. But people's perceptions of the

Baloch separatist groups had changed. Focusing here only on women's perceptions, we found women to be more sympathetic and supportive of the separatist groups in the early years of the militancy resurgence, roughly till about 2010. This cut-off date is conjectural, since women did not actually identify any particular point at which they changed their opinions, but pointed to growing atrocities perpetuated by the Baloch groups themselves. Women identified the killing and persecution of Punjabi settlers, especially working class people like barbers and tailors, the killing of suspected 'informants' and threats issued to suspected collaborators as reasons for turning against the Baloch separatists. However, at the time these interactions were being compiled, all the women we spoke to were in agreement with the cause of autonomy. A majority even supported the call for separation from Pakistan as they felt that being in the federation did not offer them any reprieve or promise. However, they also said that they no longer supported the separatist groups. They were critical of the 'sarmachaar' who they said were turning against the poor Baloch uncaring about their daily survival struggles. Women felt that the poor were expendable for the separatist political cause.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

While the ordinary men in Balochistan and analysts and activists were willing to talk about the presence of foreign powers and the vested interests of India, USA, Afghanistan, Iran, China and Russia in the province, none of the women discussed any international presence or interests. When prompted, they said they did not know either way. Most were not aware of foreign funded projects such as Gwadar port, Saindak and Reko Dik mining or the proposed gas pipelines. While the women were familiar with and endorsed narratives of historic marginalisation and resource exploitation of Balochistan, they were not aware of political developments and initiatives taken for redress, such as the NFC distribution and payment of outstanding dues or the Aghaaz-i-Huqooq package. So while there is a high degree of political interest and consciousness, they did not have access to information or ways of engaging with it.

On the other hand, they appeared to have access to media regarding killings and disappearances. Also, disappearances became a political issue after General Musharraf removed the Chief Justice (CJ) in 2007. There



Photo credit: Ellen Jaskol

was across-the-board support for the movement to restore the CJ that all forms of media provided prominent coverage to. In these developments, a build-up of information on the disappeared of Balochistan became more visible, while the other policy initiatives, like NFC, outstanding dues or Aghaaz-i-Huqooq-i-Balochistan package, have received little consistent coverage over years. These initiatives have limited application and people had not benefited directly from them. Thus, there were structural limitations within the media in terms of coverage, as well as issues of access to information, in Balochistan.

CORRUPTION

It was difficult to develop a conversation around corruption as it was seen to be so pervasive that it was non-remarkable. Women's starting point was often that it was a problem that could not be resolved. They saw corruption as a symptom of other structural issues and systemic collapse, which did not provide a valid entry point for structural change — it was not possible to change the structures through rooting out corruption. Ending corruption required other variables to be in place. The women saw that it is defeatist to hold that 'nothing can be fixed till everything is fixed' — a view that insulates against change. Their conversations indicated that they saw prior efforts for political change as a more responsive strategy.

When probed, women identified people's powerlessness, lack of accountability and absence of deterrence mechanisms as the reasons for high levels of corruption. However, they felt they could not challenge or

change this status quo — indeed, as one woman pointed out, women could not address these issues within their own homes so how could they imagine doing it for the whole province or country? Many women also pointed out that women can bring change by ensuring their children follow their values, but this appeared to be a vague solution.

MILITARISATION

As noted earlier, the concept of militarisation along with its nuances and linkages did not feature in women's lexicon. While women understood and problematised the army and other armed forces of the state, they did not posit militarisation as a system or as an undercurrent in social capillaries. So women in Swat for instance did not see the need to support the de-weaponisation of their region as homes have 'always' had weapons, and saw guns as part of their culture. In Balochistan, women did not see links between the country's nuclear capacity as tested in their province and everyday problems they had with security agencies. Speaking about the army in Swat, or FC and security/intelligence agencies in Balochistan meant discussing the physical presence and inconvenience caused by the presence of these forces. There was some appreciation for the army's role in Swat especially during the initial phases of conflict, followed by subsequent ambivalence, while in Balochistan the perceptions had not undergone major changes. This was because the Baloch struggle has not yet ended in victory for anyone; the physical manifestation of the violent state was still represented by armed men and the check-points they manned. Simultaneously, the army

was seen to be relatively less corrupt as it delivered infrastructure development in an organised and efficient manner. Therefore, it was perceived to be relatively better than the civilian administration and its political bosses. This was an impression that is carefully cultivated and nurtured by the armed forces as a means of earning goodwill of the community by ‘winning hearts’ and legitimating its presence. This also fed into militarisation with people being taught to believe that the armed forces are the only force that can “deliver” security and development to the citizens as well as come to their rescue during times of natural disasters and crisis. This role is seen in tandem with that of invincibility.

SECURITY

Women from Balochistan and Swat were aware of the human rights violations taking place and spoke about these in detail, distinguishing issues of insecurity from a gender perspective. They also spoke about the oppression of protection and control that women face since birth, and the structural causes of insecurity in conflict settings for both men and women. While these have been discussed in detail in the respective sections, what is important to highlight here from the gendered personal security perspective, is the role of rumours about rape and other forms of violation of women’s bodies, and the pressure in the public sphere to uphold the community and state’s parameters of morality. While there were widely circulated stories of rape by the different parties in conflict (Taliban, Army, FC, “uncircumcised men”, insurgent groups) and many women believed and reproduced the stories, none of the respondents we spoke to in FGDs or individually could identify a concrete case of a woman being raped. The stories about “uncircumcised” men indicate the presence of foreign non-Muslim infiltrators among the ranks of the Taliban, the Baloch insurgents or others and are a veiled reference to the interference of foreign powers in Pakistan’s conflict areas where they have high economic or strategic stakes).

JUSTICE

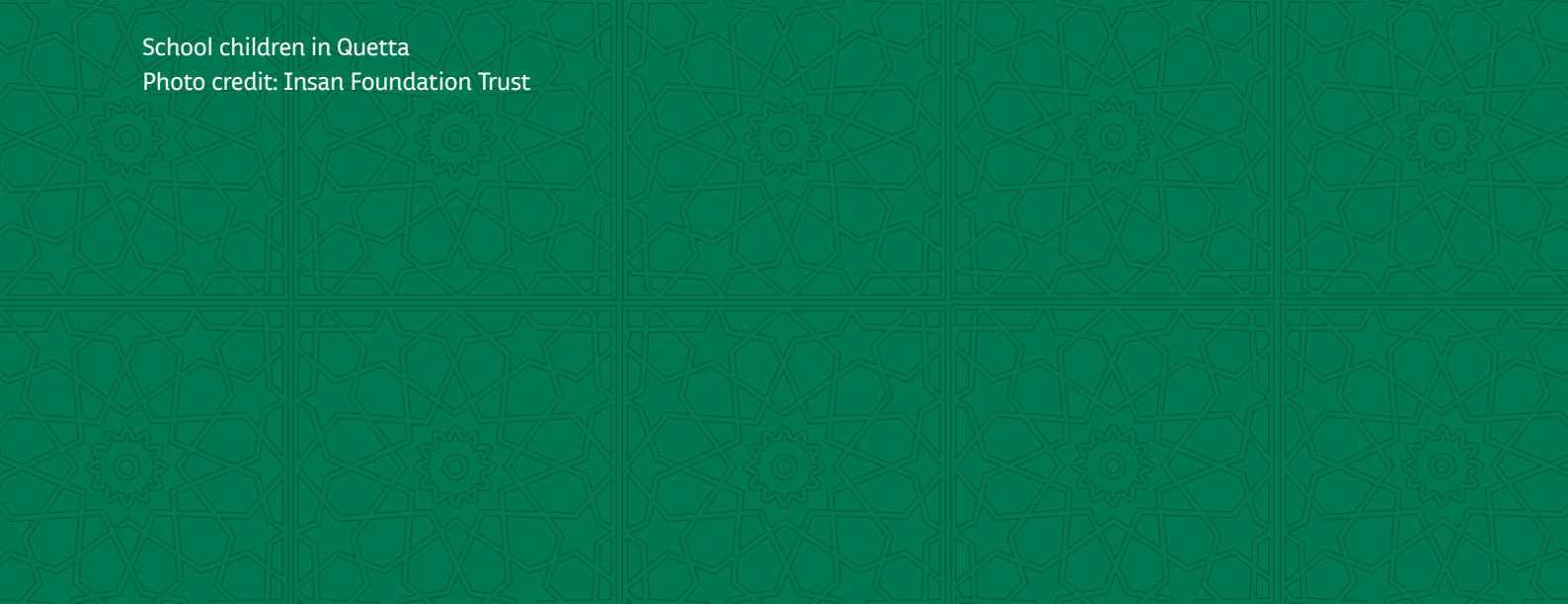
Women in all settings were clear that they had little hope of getting justice from state or community institutions. However, this did not mean that they were resigned to their fate. In all settings, they were actively pursuing the issues that they face. A factor that has contributed to significant change is the presence of organisations that raise human rights issues locally. Over the last two decades, such institutions have multiplied. Simultaneously, the private media channels have also made inroads on selected issues of human rights. Thus, for women in both Swat and Balochistan, the issue is not one of not being heard or not having a voice but one of securing rights for their community. Specific women related issues are pushed from the public sphere back

A factor that has contributed to significant change is the presence of organisations that raise human rights issues locally.

into the private sphere but women’s NGOs and CBOs are often vocal, especially in cities and small towns. Women also know that if they show solidarity for one another and speak from the platform of an organisation, state institutions including police tend to respond in a more positive manner. However, the larger issue of injustice due to traditions and patriarchal control shall continue whereby women are divested of their property and other rights in the private sphere on a regular basis due to imposition of *riwaj* (traditions/customs) or the closure of the private sphere to scrutiny by the state and its male dominated institutions.



School children in Quetta
Photo credit: Insan Foundation Trust



SECTION V: RECOMMENDATIONS

PROCESS

The research findings were shared with civil and political society actors in three separate stages. Mid-way through the research, a workshop was held in Lahore to share the research methodology and preliminary findings and recommendations were sought. The audience was a focus group of women's rights activists and development sector professionals invited from across the country. The complete research was presented and discussed with the WRN at an international meeting where participants and members from Pakistan, India and Afghanistan commented on the report at length and discussed the recommendations. Next, a sharing was conducted through a seminar organized in Quetta, held once the research was completed. The methodology, key findings and executive summary was circulated and experts' opinion sought. The audience were representatives from political parties, civil society groups and women's rights researchers and practitioners drawn from across Pakistan.

The following set of recommendations are drawn from the findings of the research and finalized with the experience sharing and endorsement of the groups and individuals participating in the above mentioned process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAKISTAN'S STATE

- Ensure de-weaponization of society and civilian control over state security apparatus
- Monitor bilateral and multilateral aid to ensure that it does not impact the democratic institutions and processes negatively
- Create opportunities for local actors to take leadership in peace building and social cohesion including women in local, national, regional and international peace discourse
- Centralize a commitment to human rights and women's rights as the starting point for all conflict and peace negotiations
- Institute public and transparent compensation schemes for victims of both, terrorism and state repression
- Breakdown impunity by taking stringent action against officials abusing powers and inform people about redress mechanisms in case of excesses
- Provide security to women and conduct publicized action in cases of violation of women's right to ensure deterrence

- Monitor activities of religious seminaries and mosques and take action against propaganda of hatred if the state is serious in restoring peace in Balochistan and KP
- Sensitize police, military and paramilitary personnel on national and international commitments on human rights

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CSOS

- Locate, probe into and understand the evolution of conflicts from women's point of view and magnify their voices in the conflict
- Reposition women as important stakeholders in peace dialogues and advocate for women's participation in peace processes and conflict resolution at all levels
- Build women's capacity in mediation, conflict resolution and conflict transformation
- Develop and disseminate illustrated literature and public service messages on women's rights and provisions and implementation and redress mechanisms
- Utilize the Right to Information Act and publicize its provision to ensure accountability and transparency about state actions
- Record and disseminate stories of women survivors and life experiences of courageous women peace-builders
- Conduct responsive research to understand conflicts including about the political economy and develop early warning signs
- Develop women's human rights defenders' programs

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

- Foster relations among women leaders in South Asia to build an enduring environment of inclusion where women's concerns and voices are integral to agendas of peace and development and in conformity of the SAARC Social Charter
- Develop Balochistan and KP specific program for political and economic development and protection of women's rights
- Channelize resources for peace and social cohesion, placing primacy on human security and make interest driven agendas subservient
- Promote denuclearization, disarmament and dewatering in the region



Survivor of the Earth Quake in 2006.
Photo credit: Ellen Jaskol

ENDNOTES

- 1 The elected government that was ushered in after General Musharraf's ten-year rule in 2009 announced measures to address Balochistan's historic grievances of exploitation and resource transfer. The 7th NFC (National Finance Commission) Award changed the formula of division of provincial share of resources taking into account needs of Balochistan. Its share in total transfers increased from 7.9 to 9.5 per cent of total transfers. This brought its Relative Per Capita transfer (referring to transfer above that due by population) to 1.857 - the highest in Pakistan. The federal government also introduced the 18th Amendment to the Constitution that devolved more authority to provincial governments, including being entitled to entire proceeds of excise duty on oil and natural gas. As part of the province specific initiative titled Aghaaz-i-Huqooq-i-Balochistan, the federal government agreed to pay to Balochistan arrears collected from sale of gas from 1954 to 1991, totalling Rs120 billion. (Sources: The State of Economy: Devolution in Pakistan, Fourth Annual Report 2011, Institute of Public Policy; The Balochistan Conflict, PILDAT Issue Paper, March 2012; Zaheer Abbasi, "Balochistan Payments" in *Business Recorder*, March 31, 2013).
- 2 The Musharraf government initiated military operations against the management of Lal Masjid, the 'Red Mosque' in Islamabad, where the two brothers who ran it had called for the imposition of Shariat in Pakistan while female students at the madrassa (run by the mosque management) were aggressively pushing their version of morality upon women. The army action resulted in 154 deaths and capture of 50 militants while triggering increased militancy in the tribal areas as well as in KP province of Pakistan.
- 3 The Asghar Khan case, also known as the Mehran Bank case, can be summarised as Air Chief (retired) Asghar Khan's petition to the Supreme Court in 1996 that asked for the accountability of those who distributed Rs 140 million (the army and intelligence agencies through Mehran Bank) and those who accepted the funds (politicians) to ensure that the PPP would not return to power. This case, finally heard in 2013, had important implications for accountability of armed forces, intelligence agencies and politicians alike.

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ANNEX

QUESTIONNAIRE

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CORRUPTION

- > How widespread and routine is corruption? What forms does it take?
- > Do you feel there is more corruption at local, national or international level (and see a continuum of corruption across these levels)?
- > Is society and government more corrupt now than 5/10 years ago? Why?
- > Does corruption have a different impact on girls/women? Is it more difficult for women to jobs or access basic needs such as hand pump locations? Are women (local self governing officials/leaders) less corrupt?
- > Can women or have women played a role in checking corruption-related practices?

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON "SECURITY"


- > What point in your life did you feel secure? What has changed between then and now?
- > What makes you feel insecure? Which places do you feel the most insecure?
- > Which are your biggest fears for yourself and your family?
- > Which political set up do you feel the most secure under? What political steps will make you feel more secure?
- > Are the sources of insecurity for girls/women different from men?
- > What steps have you and your family taken to increase your security? How has your life been affected?

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON MILITARIZATION

- > What impact has increased military/paramilitary presence had?
- > How do you feel about increased military presence in civilian spaces, in development and welfare activities and positions of authority?
- > Are you familiar with emergency laws? Are they relevant for you?
- > Do you think armed groups and military are able to get away with human rights violations? Why is the state not able to stop atrocities? How is the situation allowed to continue?
- > How are women/girls impacted by militarization? What steps do women take to lessen the impact?

LINKAGES

Do you think there is a linkage between militarization, insecurity and corruption?



Founded in 2011, the Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of individual women civil society leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India working together to strengthen women's rights and security. WRN is animated by a vision of women working collaboratively within and across borders to ensure human rights, equitable development and the full participation of women in building a just peace. At its launch, members of the Network identified three interlinked areas of concern—security, militarization and extremism, and corruption—as a priority for all three countries.

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