

WOMEN'S ROLES IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION IN PAKISTAN

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From August 2010 to August 2012, The Institute for Inclusive Security implemented a program in Pakistan with support from the US Institute of Peace titled Pakistani Women Moderating Extremism. The initiative supported the formation of a national coalition of women leaders dedicated to curtailing extremism and promoting social cohesion. This second policy brief of a two-part series explores the impact of crisis and disaster on Pakistani women and the critical role they play in reconstruction and rehabilitation. It also provides recommendations for increasing women's inclusion in Pakistan's crisis-response, recovery, and rehabilitation mechanisms to better address extremism and counter radicalization.



*A woman leads a class in a makeshift girls school in Mingora, Swat. (Photo by Sara Farid, 2010.)**

Crisis in Pakistan

Over the past decade, Pakistan has experienced devastating loss of life resulting from extremist violence. According to the Pakistani government, “Terrorism and Islamist militancy have taken about 35,000 Pakistani lives since 2001, including some 5,000 security personnel, and cost the country up

to \$100 billion in material and financial losses.”¹ In 2011 alone, more than 7,000 Pakistanis were killed and around 6,700 were injured in terrorist attacks, operations by security forces against militants, ethno-political violence, drone strikes, and intertribal and cross-border clashes.²

* This photo titled “Against All Odds” is by Sara Farid, a Pakistani photojournalist. The photographer can be contacted at sara_farid@gmail.com.

Violence driven by extremist ideologies is taking a devastating physical, emotional, and psychological toll on Pakistanis; surveys indicate growing levels of fear, anxiety, depression, aggression, suspicion, intolerance, and insecurity among those who have witnessed or been affected by terrorist violence in Lahore, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi.³ “Fifty-four percent of people living in [the Federally Administered Tribal Areas] have shown symptoms of acute stress, post-traumatic stress disorders, depression, fear, anxiety, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance.”⁴ Children also appear to be increasingly traumatized by the violence surrounding them. A school director in volatile Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) has noted rising aggression and despondency among her students, some of who have started drawing disturbingly violent images in art classes depicting bomb blasts, drones, and weapons.⁵

Pakistan’s violent conflicts have also resulted in massive internal displacement of populations and the immeasurable destruction of infrastructure, livelihoods, homes, and schools. “Between 2008 and 2009, over three million people were displaced because of army operations in Swat and FATA.”⁶ Renewed fighting between the government and militants in January 2012 caused more than 100,000 people to flee Khyber agency.⁷ While approximately two million people have returned to

their homes, currently half a million are registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country,⁸ the majority of whom are traumatized, living in unhygienic and insecure conditions, and lacking access to basic essentials like food, water, and shelter. Those who have returned home face “violence, food shortages...or lack of employment”⁹ as well as the “massive challenge of resettlement because of the destruction of infrastructure.”¹⁰

Additionally, the Taliban have burnt more than 400 schools in KPK’s Malakand division and over 60 schools in FATA, especially targeting girls’ schools.¹¹ During the 2009 military campaign in Swat, more than 500 schools were either destroyed or partially damaged.¹² Such destruction has deprived approximately 150,000 students of education and left 8,000 women teachers jobless.¹³

The costs of Pakistan’s conflicts are practically immeasurable. Compounding significant loss of human life is the immense economic, political, social, and psychosocial damage caused by extremist violence. In addition to curbing radicalization and tackling violent extremism, Pakistan also faces the daunting challenge of providing support to displaced and conflict-affected populations, reconstructing destroyed communities, and rehabilitating those traumatized by violence.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) travel by road as they flee military operations in Swat, Buner, and Lower Dir on May 10, 2009 in Malakand, Pakistan. (Photo by Getty Images AsiaPac courtesy of Zimbio, 2009.)



The Impact of Conflict on Women

The impact of terrorist violence, armed conflict, and displacement on women is particularly acute. Women are directly targeted by extremists, who seek to limit their rights and mobility. In Swat, the Taliban issued a *fatwa* against women working; they were also banned from leaving their homes without the accompaniment of a male relative,¹⁵ which has significantly limited women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Suicide bombers regularly target public markets, where women must go to sustain their families. Their workplaces have been bombed, as have their children's schools. For instance, girls' schools are often the targets of terrorist attacks—70 percent of the 440 schools destroyed by the Taliban in Swat were for girls.¹⁶

Crisis and resulting displacement impact women and girls differently from men and boys. As the mainstays of family and community life, women generally “look after the sick and children in situations of stress and scarcity.”¹⁷ Because women become extra burdened by the fundamental health and survival needs of their families during crises, tasks are often delegated to daughters, who are removed from schools to assist at home. This naturally increases the imbalance between the genders, even after the end of the conflict.¹⁸ Crisis-induced

“Gender inequalities with respect to enjoyment of human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, education, health, in particular reproductive and sexual health, and exposure to violence, make women more vulnerable before, during, and after disaster.”

— UN Commission on the Status of Women¹⁴

displacement also often “results in extreme social and familial disruption, increased work demands for women, greatly increased vulnerability of women to sexual violence, and high incidence of psychosocial trauma.”¹⁹ Women and girl IDPs in Pakistan have faced “gender-based violence, trafficking, and specific health issues,”²⁰ and women in refugee camps often lack “access to showers, latrines, emergency supplies, and doctors—with [detrimental] implica-



Pakistanis stand near their tents at the Chota Lahore relief camp on May 21, 2009, in Swabi, Pakistan. (Photo by Getty Images/Paula Bronstein courtesy of The Frame, 2009.)

tions for their health and hygiene.”²¹ This is partly due to *purdah*, or customs that prohibit women from interacting with men outside their families, but also because women's specific needs are rarely taken into account when designing camp structures and management. Following natural and man-made disasters, women therefore must cope with and respond to upended social relations, increased exposure to violence, psychosocial distress, and the loss of security, protection, shelter, and livelihoods.

Yet, despite women's social and economic role, as well as their demonstrated ability to help restore and rebuild devastated societies, women are rarely consulted in planning relief efforts or developing reconstruction policies. Their exclusion has led to the creation of gender-insensitive interventions that increase women's vulnerability and limit their access to the crucial resources communities need to recover, such “education, training and employment,



A woman, internally displaced by military operations in Swat, holds an empty container in one hand and her child in another, as she queues for rations in a relief camp on May 8, 2009 in Mardan, Pakistan. (Photo by Getty Images AsiaPac courtesy of Zimbio, 2009.)

and housing reconstruction.”²² For instance, even though about 12.2 percent of all registered IDPs in 2009 were female heads of households, a disproportionate amount of women did not receive adequate food and cash entitlements because compensation policies often only target, and distribute goods, to registered male heads up households.²³ This “inadvertently undermines[s] women’s authority”²⁴ and stymies women’s ability to rebuild their lives after violence. Ignoring the critical role women play in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation and excluding them from shaping these processes is therefore detrimental not only to women themselves but also to the recovery of their families and communities.

Gaps in Response

As the nature of terrorism seen in Pakistan today is a relatively recent phenomenon—until 2001, the country had never experienced a single suicide attack²⁵—local, national, and international communities have yet to develop effective prevention, first response, reconstruction, and rehabilitation mechanisms to address extremist violence, especially ones geared to the unique needs of women and girls. While Pakistan has many government

agencies and policies in place to respond to the various natural disasters that have devastated the country in recent years, these stop short of comprehensively addressing the needs of communities following *man-made disasters*, such as terrorist violence and armed conflict. For instance, following the 2008–2009 military operations in Swat, the disaster management authorities were charged with providing relief to IDPs; however, lack of coordination between civilian and military institutions greatly hampered and delayed their interventions. IDPs in Malakand expressed frustration with the government’s response, noting “inequality in aid distribution” and “little accountability and oversight.”²⁶ Many camps also didn’t provide adequate food, water, and shelter to the hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes.²⁷ Additionally, while the government has established three rehabilitation centers for extremist insurgents—which is a significant first step in establishing peace—they only rehabilitate militants captured by the Pakistani army and thus do not target other radicalized elements in society.

Despite policymakers’ efforts to address violent extremism, uncoordinated and gender-insensitive responses have left marginalized communities wanting for services and, paradoxically, in some cases, more prone to radicalization. For instance, the lack of an organized, local first-response system following terrorist attacks has left many communities unsure of where and how to seek help, and from whom. Interviews with two women survivors of bomb blasts in Kurram Agency and Peshawar indicate that immediately after the blasts occurred, there were no emergency rescue teams or nearby first-aid facilities to treat the victims.²⁸ (Women in particular face enormous challenges seeking emergency medical care from men who are not family members due to customs that prohibit them from doing so.) Mass confusion following such events also caused widespread fear and panic among those affected, further exacerbating their trauma.²⁹

"We need female volunteers trained in advance by the hospital to cope with emergency situations."

— Dr. Arham Hai,
Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences³⁰

There also exists "no comprehensive policy and legislative framework for awarding compensation money to the civilian victims of conflict and terrorism in the country."³¹ Survivors of terrorist violence are in dire need of recovery assistance; currently left to support themselves, many are adopting more extremist views out of frustration and anger. For instance, according to a human rights defender in KPK, survivors are becoming more prone to radicalization because they feel ignored and neglected. One woman she encountered who was severely disabled in a bomb blast openly acknowledged that she began sympathizing with the Taliban because they could provide her medicine and services she could not afford otherwise.³²

According to various reports, extremist groups began to fill this void by "providing food, medicine, and cash to millions of IDPs and flood affectees in need of assistance"³³ following the 2005 earthquake, 2009 military operations in Swat, and 2010–2011 floods. By providing victims medical care, transportation, education, and other essential services, extremist groups are winning the "hearts, minds, and influence"³⁴ of populations "especially vulnerable to jihadi indoctrination."³⁵ Gaps in relief and recovery assistance have left many conflict-affected communities in need of short-term access to basic services as well as longer-term access to education, skills development, and livelihoods, which is fueling radicalization and exacerbating the conditions that breed extremism in the first place. Moderate forces desperately need to fill this vacuum to curb rising extremism, and women are perfectly positioned and well equipped to do so.

Women's Roles in Reconstruction and Rehabilitation

All too often, women are uniquely portrayed as victims of conflict despite the resilience they have shown in the face of disaster and their capability in rebuilding lives and communities. As evidenced by recent calamities, Pakistani women have played an enormous role in effectively responding to crises and helping their communities recover after they strike. For instance, many women physically helped repair and rebuild homes, as well as cultivate livestock, following the floods in Punjab.³⁷ Normally excluded from decision making at the local level, flood-affected women also formed women's-only *Pattan Dehi Tanzeems*, or village organizations, to increase their influence in relief and reconstruction. Through these PDTs, local women assisted with food distribution as well as designing and building houses, which noticeably increased their access to resources and home ownership, and subsequently their influence within the community.³⁸ Two Pakistanis were also the first Muslim women to become female search-and-rescue workers for Focus Humanitarian Assistance, an emergency-response group affiliated with the Aga Khan Development Network. Called to rescue victims of

"Women must be at the heart of all recovery and reconstruction processes. For decades, they have been the lifeline of their communities, leading survival systems and mutual aid networks, including among the internally displaced and refugee communities. Women are not just victims, they are survivors, and they need to be part of the solution. The reweaving of the social fabric of life is the foundation for reconstruction and a necessary part of the healing process. It is women, in their families and their communities, who are playing this role."

— Noeleen Heyzer,
Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and
Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific³⁶



Internally displaced women meet in a “women-friendly space” to receive counseling and discuss issues they are facing in their camp. (Photo courtesy of Aware Girls, 2012.)

flash floods, mudslides, and earthquakes in perilous situations, they have placed their lives at incredibly high risk to save others—particularly women who cannot receive assistance from men because of *purdah*.³⁹

Pakistan also has a wealth of women-led civil society organizations leading humanitarian relief programs for IDPs and providing education, healthcare, psychosocial counseling, and livelihood skills training to populations affected by violence and displacement. In addition to providing direct service delivery, women are undertaking various initiatives—both personally and professionally—to help communities recover after disasters. For instance, Falaknaz Asfandyar, the widow of a former provincial minister assassinated by the Taliban in Swat, established a network of relatives and friends to support community reconstruction initiatives after military operations in the region. She personally raises and contributes funds to rebuilding projects, and one day hopes to open a girls’ school in her home.⁴⁰ Amna Khan, who survived a bomb blast at the International Islamic University in Islamabad in October 2009, formed a women’s support network at the university to provide counseling to the survivors.⁴¹

Members of Amn-o-Nisa, a national coalition of Pakistani women leaders who have collectively mobilized against extremism, exemplify creative grassroots leadership in this regard. Through their respective organizations, members from Balochistan and Punjab established “women-friendly” spaces in IDP camps to provide women and children healthcare and counseling services—a critical first step for healing and recovering after conflict. Others are training local leaders and district government officials on disaster-response strategies and human rights protection. One member facilitates interactive role-play sessions to teach communities how to mitigate and respond to natural disasters. At a personal level, Dr. Shabana Fayyaz, an assistant professor at the Defense and Strategic Studies Department of Quaid-I-Azam University, mobilized her family members and students to dedicate resources and recruit volunteers to help IDPs in Swat.⁴²

In areas hard-hit by extremist violence, women are also on the front lines of rehabilitation efforts. “According to Nasat Iqbal from the government’s Social Welfare Organization, women are playing a major role in promoting education and leading rehabilitation projects. In Malakand, the Jamia



Head teacher Parveen Begum, who has received threatening letters from extremists, teaching in Swat Valley, where girls are defying Taliban attempts to stop them going to school. (Photo courtesy of BBC News, 2009.)

Subhaniyya Rizvia is building one of the first religious and vocational schools for women in the tribal belt.⁴³ One member of Amn-o-Nisa who is a lawyer and human rights defender is providing pro bono legal services to widows, female orphans, and those injured in bomb blasts and advocating for their right to compensation and essential services.⁴⁴ Bushra Hyder, a member from KPK who directs a school, works with groups of students and mothers affected by violent extremism to address the trauma her community is experiencing. Recognizing increasing aggression and disturbing images in art classes, she began counseling sessions with the children and their mothers. She then invited the mothers to conduct storytelling sessions in classrooms to educate students about the negative consequences of intolerance and violence. Ms. Hyder also created “peace clubs” of students who visit survivors of bomb blasts at a hospital in Peshawar to help both the survivors and students better understand and cope with their trauma.⁴⁵

One organization—PAIMAN Alumni Trust—initiated a deradicalization and rehabilitation program in Swat under the leadership of Executive Director Mossarat Qadeem, who is also the national coordinator of Amn-o-Nisa. Using dialogue and peaceful Quranic teachings, Ms. Qadeem works with the mothers of extremists to convince their sons to give up militancy and become peaceful members of society. The program also provides ex-Taliban fighters psychosocial counseling and skills-based training to link them with livelihoods and help them to lead meaningful, productive lives. As of this year, 79 boys had successfully been rehabilitated, some of whom went on to earn master's degrees, contest local elections, or become entrepreneurs.⁴⁶

Given their roles in families and civil society, women are keenly aware of their communities' needs and are well placed to help them physically, socially, and emotionally recover from violence. Their knowledge and insight about realities on the ground can shed light on affected groups' priorities and the resources required for reconstruction, which is needed to enhance the success of crisis responses.⁴⁷ As evidenced by the aforementioned examples, Pakistani women are taking incredible—even life-threatening—measures to reconstruct destroyed homes and schools, assist traumatized survivors, deradicalize and rehabilitate youth, and rebuild lives shattered by extremist violence.



Mossarat Qadeem, founder and executive director of PAIMAN Alumni Trust, facilitates a skills-building session with a deradicalized youth. (Photo courtesy of PAIMAN Alumni Trust, 2011.)

Recommendations

National and international policymakers have not sufficiently acknowledged Pakistani women as peacebuilders or incorporated their voices into reconstruction and rehabilitation policies and processes. To truly address the needs of disaster-affected communities, provide assistance to survivors of extremist violence and displacement, and curb radicalization in Pakistan, it is imperative to support and enhance women's recovery efforts. Equally important, policymakers must include women when designing and implementing response, reconstruction, and rehabilitation initiatives to make them more effective and sustainable. This will ultimately help policymakers address the root sources and drivers of extremism and empower communities to effectively respond to and recover from extremist violence.

To better address the needs of communities affected by violent extremism, and to increase women's inclusion in Pakistan's post-crisis response, reconstruction, and rehabilitation mechanisms, the Pakistani government, in collaboration with women in civil society and international actors, should:⁴⁹

1. Work with women's groups, local community leaders, and relevant national and provincial authorities to develop gender-sensitive, indigenous early warning and response systems to prevent, and immediately react to, incidents of extremist violence and terrorism. Such systems should identify, nominate, and train male and female first responders to appropriately address the specific needs of women and girls.
2. Ensure that hospitals and emergency clinics hire and train female doctors/medical assistants to treat women and girl survivors of extremist violence and terrorism.
3. Develop training materials for law enforcement officials that highlight the impact of extremist violence on women and girls, and train officials in how to engage with them following these

"If the goal is to improve health, nutrition or education, reduce fertility or child mortality, stem the spread of HIV, build robust and self-sustaining community organizations, encourage grassroots democracy, and ultimately, temper extremism, successful efforts must target women."

—Isobel Coleman, Senior Fellow and Director of the Women and Foreign Policy Program, Council on Foreign Relations⁴⁸

incidents. Trainings should include at least 25 percent women trainers and participants.

4. Involve women in designing and managing IDP camps so that women's and girls' specific needs are taken into account, including their requirements for access to adequate food, shelter, hygienic facilities, healthcare services, security, and psychosocial counseling.
5. Include women in the design and implementation of assistance, food, and compensation programs. Consult with women heads of households to ensure that assistance policies and programs address their needs and that they are adequately compensated.
6. Ensure the accessibility and availability of women crisis centers in conflict-affected areas to provide trauma care, psychosocial support, and skills-training for rehabilitation.
7. Fund and support programs that rehabilitate and build the livelihood skills of women survivors of extremist violence, especially women heads of household. Skills building should not only focus on traditional means of livelihood for women, such as embroidery, sewing, and clothes making, but also on other income-generating activities, such as training and support for livestock rearing, agricultural farming, and business ownership. Rehabilitation-focused initiatives should provide:

- a. Access to justice and legal counseling;
 - b. Access to trauma care and psychosocial counseling;
 - c. Opportunities for economic empowerment;
 - d. Access to microcredit loans; and
 - e. Support for families, including childcare, education, and healthcare.
8. Following needs assessments conducted by local actors, (re)construct new schools in conflict-affected areas, especially those for girls. Provide enhanced training for female teachers with incentives to work in post-conflict areas.
 9. Fund and support women's peacebuilding and deradicalization initiatives, including collective advocacy, community outreach, and capacity-building projects—particularly ones that promote tolerance, pluralism, interfaith harmony, and civic engagement.

To enhance Pakistan's crisis-response and recovery policies and processes, the Pakistani government, in collaboration with women in civil society and international actors, should:⁵⁰

1. Map, collect, and consolidate data on victims of extremist violence and terrorism, especially women, youth, and other vulnerable groups.
2. Develop a comprehensive policy and legislative framework to acknowledge victims of extremist violence and terrorism and award compensation to the civilian victims. Ensure women, and particularly women heads of households, are taken into account and awarded appropriate compensation.
3. Conduct a coordinated assessment of the capacity of Pakistani law enforcement agencies to deal with extremist violence and ensure capacity-building and training of law enforcement officers to deal with women survivors as well as women perpetrators during these incidents.
4. Conduct a needs assessment specifically for women police stations and women law enforcers to provide them with the tools, equipment, and resources needed to efficiently perform their duties.
5. Appoint and support a gender adviser in the Federal/National/Provincial Disaster Management Authorities to integrate needs and concerns of women in all phases and levels of reconstruction and rehabilitation.
6. Develop for the National Crisis Management Cell and the Federal/National/Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (where applicable), through an inclusive and consultative process, a strong mechanism for monitoring and evaluating reconstruction and rehabilitation activities for women and youth affected by extremist violence and terrorism.
7. Develop a National Policy for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, along with a national strategy, led by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, in coordination with the provincial governments and women's organizations. Ensure the specific needs of women and youth affectees of extremist violence and terrorism are properly addressed and incorporated.
8. Develop partnerships between women's groups and military and civilian authorities to conduct an independent evaluation of ongoing government deradicalization programs, such as at the Sabaoon and Raastoon centers. With appropriate modifications, replicate and advance similar programs led by women's and youth groups.

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49 These recommendations are based on ones originally crafted by Amn-o-Nisa for Pakistani and US policy-makers in September 2011 and April 2012, respectively. For more information, please visit http://www.hunt-alternatives.org/pages/8871_pakistan.cfm and <http://blog.inclusivesecurity.org/recommendations-for-the-us-government-from-pakistani-women-leaders/>.

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