

# WORKING REGIONALLY *for* PEACE, SECURITY, *and* JUSTICE



## ABOUT THE WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

Founded in 2011, the core purpose of WRN is to amplify the voices of unheard, marginalized women, and with them address the interlinked issues of peace, militarization, forced displacements, (in)security, justice and governance in South Asia. To this end, WRN connects women peace advocates, committed to working collectively within and across national borders and cultures in traditionally conflicted countries. WRN's pursuit is reflected in its history where its unique Community Conversations have been used to deliver specific advocacy campaigns to ensure grassroots women's concerns and their voices shape political discourse, policy development and program implementation which affect them.

Through a combination of comparative analysis, advocacy and capacity building, WRN seeks to promote a unique and valuable regional dialogue by documenting the experiences of women in zones of conflict across South Asia. For this purpose, WRN will continue to work in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India - countries consistently featured among the worst to live in as a woman in terms of inclusion (economic, socio-political), justice (formal laws, informal discrimination) and security (at family, community and society levels).

Emphasizing human security and a people-centric, gender-lens approach, WRN recognizes non-traditional crises and threats also qualify as "conflict" for women, where women's lives, security and peace are jeopardized, all the more so for those who are displaced, caught in armed-conflict, or face the brunt of exclusionary, divisive and aggressive politics.

The WRN model and approach aims to tap into and coordinate local and regional expertise on key topics related to women's human rights, peace and security across multiple and diverse movements and networks.

## WRN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

- WRN is first and foremost a network of solidarity, speaking for and supporting women's human rights defenders across South Asia and beyond.
- Choosing to work with women's peace organizations and networks, we have contributed to strengthening the impact and influence of transnational activism around gender inclusive peacebuilding.
- Listening closely to what women living in the shadow of conflict and insecurity tell us, we amplify their voices and concerns in order to raise public awareness and positively influence government policies and actions.
- WRN has steadily expanded its capacity-building platform through discussion, training and outreach on issues relating to women, peace and regional security.



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# 1

## ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN, INDIA, AND PAKISTAN

The year 2020 has been a challenging period globally. Millions of lives are lost due to the pervasive COVID-19 pandemic, as well as gross social, economic, emotional deprivation and suffering. Like with other businesses and social work, WRN's brand activities were equally and foreseeably disrupted. Some of the planned activities had to be disbanded, while others were either delayed or altered. Not only were the activities affected but some of our staff also struggled with the virus itself. To say the least, the usual routines were interrupted, field operations were delayed, participation at events were influenced, inter alia. Despite the calamitous situation, the following activities were undertaken.

### ONGOING REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

#### Monthly Regional Webinars

Given the disruption created by the pandemic, WRN reinvented itself to keep pace with changing times. Through its monthly webinar series, WRN has been able to create yet another regional platform, which brings together regional convergences and specific contextual differences on varied gender-justice and

peace concerns in the region. Over the past 6 months, the webinars brought to the fore relevant discussions on topics, both topical and the unrelenting, to capture the situations confronted regionally, and specifically its impact on marginalized women. Since June 2020, topics of relevance that were teased out comprised: *The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees and IDPs in South Asia; Role of Women in the Afghan Peace*

*Process; Interlinkages Between SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); Religious Morality vs Constitutional Morality: Impact on Women's Democratic Politics in South Asia; Local Women's Voices for Peace and Security in South Asia.* The latest in the series focused on *Human Rights and Justice in the Region*, on December 10th (Human Rights Day) in partnership with Cordaid. Speakers from within the Network and eminent social justice activists from South Asia participated in the webinars. The webinars were also instrumental in expanding WRN's outreach through interaction with speakers invited from Sri Lanka, in addition to its existing countries of operation. WRN webinars have attracted a large group of interested audiences over the past few months ranging from students, social activists, academics, to even government officials. WRN members also took part in webinars arranged by other organizations and networks to promote WRN's agenda for peace in the region.

### THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

During this challenging year, WRN limited its outreach to donors. We are extremely grateful to the amazing women and charitable foundations listed below, though unsolicited, continue to support our efforts to seek peace with justice and security for women in South Asia. We could not have done the work in this report without them. Thank you!

#### \$50,000 to \$100,000

Channel Foundation

NoVo Foundation

#### \$5,000 to \$20,000

CarEth Foundation

Lynda Goldstein  
Foundation

Yuan Family  
Foundation

Mary Zinn

#### Up to \$1,000

Josie Hadden

Molly Ross

Alessandra Mayer



## REGIONAL WEBINARS

**JOIN US TO DISCUSS**

### THE INTER-LINKAGES BETWEEN SDG5 & SDG16

**31 AUGUST 2020**

02:00 PM GMT  
06:30 PM AFGHANISTAN  
07:00 PM PAKISTAN  
07:30 PM INDIA




SABA GUL KHATTAK  
FEMINIST RESEARCHER,  
PAKISTAN



FEROZAN RASOOLI  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EQUALITY  
FOR PEACE & DEMOCRACY (EPD)  
AFGHANISTAN



PRIYANKA MATHUR  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, JAIN  
UNIVERSITY, ANGALORE &  
ASSOCIATE MEMBER, WRN INDIA

REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE  
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/32IX5XD](https://bit.ly/32IX5XD)

WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN - INDIA

WOMENSREGIONALNETWORK.ORG

**JOIN THE WEBINAR REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE**

**IMPACT OF COVID19 ON Refugees & IDPs in South Asia**

**SATURDAY JUNE 20**

3:30 PM Afghanistan  
4:00 PM Pakistan  
4:30 PM India

[www.womensregionalnetwork.org](https://www.womensregionalnetwork.org)

Photo: Omar Muftic, Bangladesh

**JOIN OUR WEBINAR**

### Role of Women in the Afghan Peace Process

**THURSDAY JULY 23**

02:00 PM GMT  
06:30 PM Afghanistan  
07:00 PM Pakistan  
07:30 PM India



Dr. HABIBA Sarabi  
Member, Afghanistan Peace Negotiations Team



Judge NAJLA Ayoubi  
Director of Global Programs  
Every Woman Treaty  
Founding & Executive Board Member, WRN



Dr. RITA Manchanda  
Research Director  
SAFRI, WRN  
Board Member, India

REGISTER FOR ZOOM PARTICIPATION  
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/2WOMT15](https://bit.ly/2WOMT15)

WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN - INDIA

**SPEAKERS**

**JOIN OUR REGIONAL WEBINAR PANELISTS**

### CONSTITUTIONAL VS RELIGIOUS MORALITY

**IMPACT ON WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA**

**30 SEPTEMBER 2020**

02:00 PM GMT  
06:30 PM Afghanistan  
07:00 PM Pakistan  
07:30 PM India



DR. SRIDEHA NAIR  
FORMER MEMBER OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
INDIA



BENAZIR JATOI  
BARRISTER, WOMEN & MINORITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST  
PAKISTAN



JAMILA AFGHANI  
DIRECTOR, MEDICA  
AFGHANISTAN



FARHAT ASIF  
AUTHOR, MINORITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST  
INDIA

## STUDENTS PANEL ON REGIONAL PEACE

**28 SEPTEMBER 2020**

01:30 PM GMT  
06:00 PM Afghanistan  
06:30 PM Pakistan  
07:00 PM India/Sri Lanka

**PANEL**

DAMINI KAIN - INDIA  
FARIHA ESSAR - AFGHANISTAN  
KAINAT SABIR - PAKISTAN  
MOMINA SAJID - PAKISTAN  
MUDA TARIQ - INDIA  
ZAHRA - AFGHANISTAN



**MODERATOR**  
FARHAT ASIF  
BOARD MEMBER  
WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE  
[WOMENSREGIONALNETWORK.ORG](https://www.womensregionalnetwork.org)

WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN - INDIA

**JOIN OUR REGIONAL WEBINAR**

### LOCAL WOMEN VOICES FOR PEACE & SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA

**31 OCTOBER 2020**

02:00 PM GMT  
06:30 PM Afghanistan  
07:00 PM Pakistan  
07:30 PM India/Sri Lanka



Nimalka Fernando  
WRN Board Member  
Sri Lanka



Rita Manchanda  
WRN Board Member  
India



Mariam Azeem  
Director, Movement Support & Learning, Rhize  
Pakistan



Lima Anwar,  
Core Member, WRN  
Afghanistan



Rukhsanda Naz  
President WRN  
MODERATOR

**JOIN OUR REGIONAL WEBINAR**

### HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE IN THE REGION

**HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 10 DECEMBER 2020**

00:00 AM DENVER  
00:00 AM WASHINGTON DC  
01:00 PM GAT  
02:00 PM KABIL  
00:00 PM ISLAMABAD  
00:30 PM NEW DELHI/COLMBO

WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN - INDIA





### WRN Regional Online Students Meet

Commemorating the occasion of the International Day of Peace (September 21), WRN organized an online regional meet for students. Understanding that peace is not the mere absence of violence and war, but as something that contributes to a sense of security for all members living in a society, WRN initiated a dialogue among university students in the region through a two-stage process. The first was a call for essay submissions, followed by a panel comprising of two students from

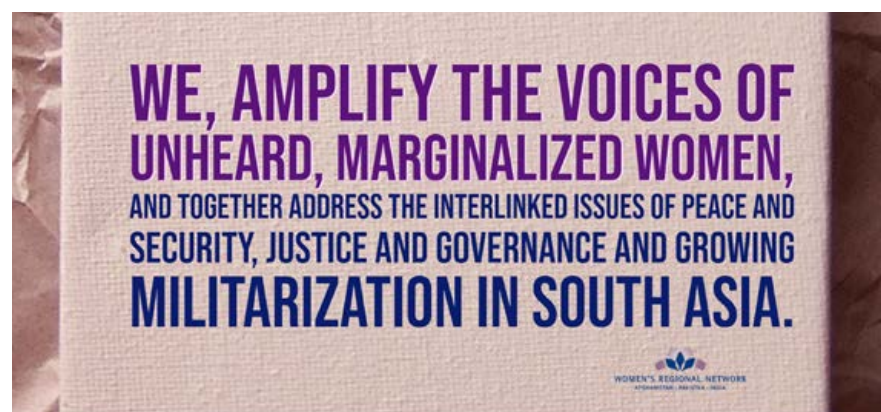
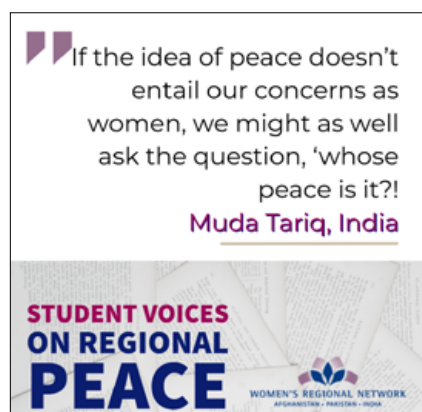
each country based on the best entries. The discussion brought forth the concerns raised by the youth on the importance of engaging women and youth in peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes.

### WRN's Third online WPS course

The third WRN on-line course was postponed in order to up-date and incorporate the latest social, economic and political developments as they impact the women, peace and security agenda in South Asia. An Advisory Committee is now



finalizing the syllabus and revamping the structure for early 2021 delivery of this course to hundreds of students instead of our average of 40 students.

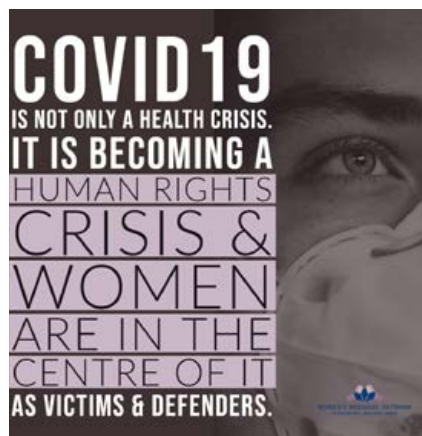


## REGIONAL UPDATES

### Launch of WRN research report on Women and Election Challenges in Afghanistan

**Challenges to Women (Candidates & Voters) in 2018 Elections** research report in Dari was launched by WRN on August 25<sup>th</sup> 2020. The launch was widely attended by government officials, civil society organizations, donor representatives, youth groups, WRN's members and academia. Ms. Zarqa Yaftali, WRN's board member, set the tone of the launch, followed by an introduction by Fatema Kohistani, WRN-Afghanistan Country Coordinator. Zarqha Yaftali reviewed WRN's significant contributions to promote peace in Afghanistan and across the region and WRN's efforts to advance the WPS Agenda since 2011. The report findings were shared by the lead researcher and author of the report, Ms. Humaira Saqib, WRN Afghanistan core member, along with a panel discussion, facilitated by WRN's core members.

The panel consisted of Ms. Hasina Safi, candidate for Ministry of Afghanistan Women Affairs; Dr. Sima Samar, Minister of Afghanistan Human Rights and International



Relation; Ms. Shinkai Karokhil, Member of Afghanistan Parliament; and Mr. Yousuf Rasheed, Executive Director at FEFA. The panelists discussed the challenges faced by women in Parliamentary and Presidential elections and proposed specific recommendations to tackle these challenges.

The participants appreciated the WRN efforts to reach out to the female voters and candidates, to document their concerns and problems in conflict-affected areas for policy input and actions. The same report has been published in English along with a policy brief (see Appendix, page 18) to ensure the recommendations are widely disseminated for policy input.

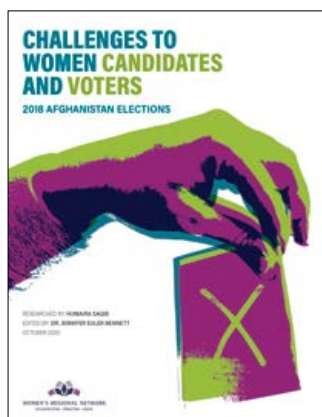


### WRN Film screening program

WRN in Afghanistan conducted a film screening program at Rana University, to convey the message of unity and stimulate youth to think about how they can bring about positive changes in their own lives, family and the society. The documentary movie 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell' narrates the stories of women peacebuilders in Liberia. It depicts the significance of how a group of committed women, their unity and sustained struggle made it possible to defeat warlords and pave the way for building peace in the country.

### Women Coalition for Peace

WRN in Afghanistan is a member of Women's Coalition for Peace. This coalition is led by the Afghan Women's Network, which comprises more than 200 members. During the reporting period, WRN had a prominent role in developing press releases, position papers, and participated in several advocacy meetings led by the coalition.



<The launch of Women's Challenges in the Afghan National Election. From left to right: Forozan Rasooli, member of WRN; Mr. Yousuf Rasheed, Executive Director of FEFA; Dr. Sima Samar, Minister of Afghanistan Human Rights and International Relation; Hasina Safi, Acting Minister of Women's Affairs; Zarqha Yaftali, Board Member of WRN.

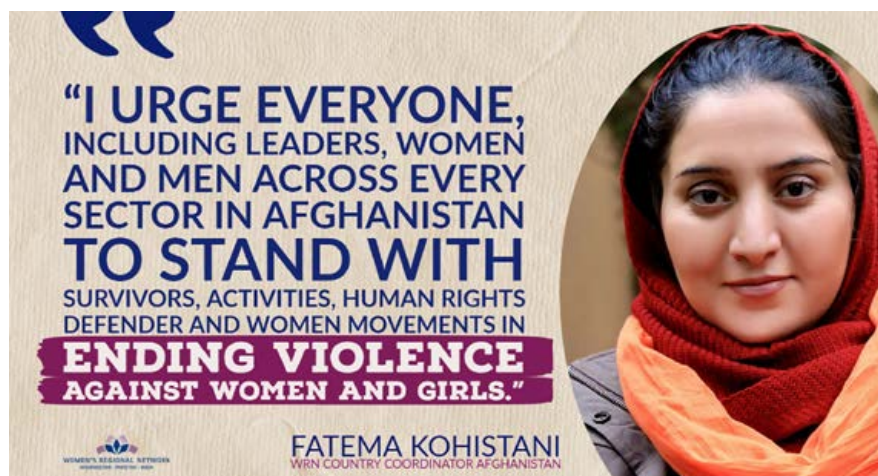


## Women's Peace and Security Working Group (WPS-WG) committee in Afghanistan

WRN Afghanistan nominated Ms. Zarqa Yaftli and lobbied for her candidature as a co-chair of the WPS-WG Committee. The committee is energized with more than 55 members from donor agencies, government organizations and CSOs that work on Women Peace and Security and UNSCR 1325 agenda. The UN Women Afghanistan leads the secretariat of the committee.

## Training on women's rights: The Islamic perspective

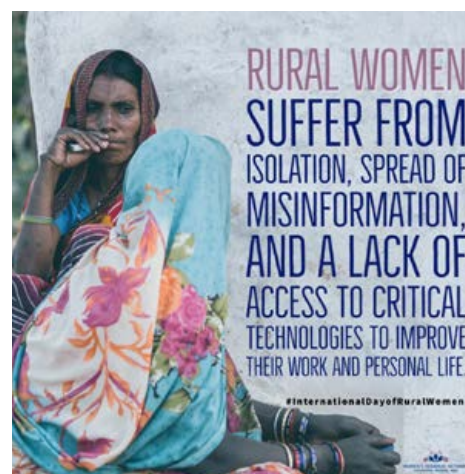
WRN Afghanistan Country Coordinator participated in the "Rights of Women in the light of Islam" training, organized by the Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD) organization. The training was specifically organized for the senior delegates of the peace talks, Afghan peace activists, senior government officials, civil society representatives, victims of war, media representatives and youth groups. To date 11 rounds have been completed successfully; with each round spread over a day per week.



## WRN Contribution to the Press Conference on Provincial Women Voices

WRN in Afghanistan played a significant role in EPD's sharing of *Perspectives and Recommendations of the Provincial Women's Networks (PWNs) on the Intra-Afghan Dialogues and Negotiations*. These perspectives were drawn from 15 provinces of Afghanistan (Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Faryab, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Laghman, Daykundi, Bamyán, Paktia, Helmand, Urzgan, Kandahar, Parwan, Badakhshan). The panelists included Ms. Zarqa Yaftli, WRN board member; Dr. Sima Samar, Human

Rights and International Relation Minister; Ms. Nargis Nehan, former Minister of Mines and Petroleum; and Ms. Frozan Rasooli, WRN Core Member, who discussed the prospects for women and tabled a set of recommendations during the question-and-answer session. A written statement was drafted and handed over to the Peace Negotiation team. The delegates have committed to reflect on the prospects and recommendations shared by this group at the peace negotiation table.





### **WRN Afghanistan as a member of Family Law Review Committee**

At the latest advocacy meeting on Family Law, the Second Vice President had asked women networks to develop an amendment plan to those articles which were rejected by the Afghanistan parliament. The Family Law has since been reviewed and worked on by a committee of legal experts in regular meetings lasting 10 days. After having accomplished the work of making the necessary amendments, the same has been officially drafted and sent to the Second Vice President office for approval.

### **WRN Afghanistan and 16 Days of Activism**

On the occasion of 16 Days of Activism, WRN Afghanistan conducted activities at the provincial level to enhance the effectiveness of subnational structures for countering violence against women. In doing so, the intent was to support the government to be more accountable in terms of improving its mechanism for effective use of their resources and creation of job opportunities.

WRN Afghanistan, in collaboration with Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF), held a national conference in which representatives of provincial elimination of violence against women committees, media, civil society delegations, government authorities at the policy and decision making levels participated. The conference ended with a panel discussion in which the government authorities and ERAW representatives addressed the queries and questions of media and other participants.



From left to right: Sharifa Zurmati and Habiba Sarabi, Members of National Peace Negotiation Team; Ms. Nargis Nehan, Former Minister of Mines and Petroleum; and Forozan Rasooli, Deputy Director of EPD.

As an effective outreach strategy, WRN designed and published brochures in which articles of the law for protection of women and legality of women rights were published and disseminated among targeted groups, including students and public from different walks of life. Alongside, billboards and banners were printed and installed in key areas around the city to ensure wide-spread and effective dissemination of messages on ERAW. Furthermore, social media messages were designed for social media of our networks and WRN's own webpages.

### **Advocacy meetings in Afghanistan**

As a member of the Advocacy Committee in Afghanistan, WRN in Afghanistan participated in several significant advocacy processes. As part of this process, a meeting was held with the Second Vice President, to ratify the suggested amendments to the family law. Another meeting was held with the First Lady, advocating for women's meaningful participation in the ongoing peace process. The committee also met the Head of High Council for National Reconciliation for enhancing women's role in the peace process, which

led to the inclusion of eight women in the leadership committee of High Council for National Reconciliation—including WRN Board member, Zarqha Yaftali.

### **WRN Community Conversation research work in India**

After a long pause in WRN India's work on its proposed Community Conversations, WRN's India Country Coordinator, guided by WRN Board Member Abha Bhैया, resumed work on the research and held conversations with the community, with the support of an intern.

**About the Research:** Contemporary India in the recent past witnessed an interesting moment in women's movement and their participation in public life. Re-energizing India's democracy with new enthusiasm and iterating their conviction in the constitution of the country, women challenged arbitrary and patriarchal practices, while creating a space for themselves in the public realm. This movement, witnessed and showcased how women — young and old — stood up collectively to demonstrate their conviction for supporting and upholding the values of democracy and coexistence.

“*Re-energizing India's democracy with new enthusiasm and iterating their conviction in the constitution of the country, women challenged arbitrary and patriarchal practices, while creating a space for themselves in the public realm.*”

This movement, led by women and youth, was not only non-violent, inclusive and innovative, but also informative and educational in nature. The coming together of women and youth demonstrated the values of collective and collaborative leadership, while the women and youth of India led the way for drafting new understandings of peace and justice from a South Asian perspective.

Through the Community Conversations (CC's) (titled ***Re-energizing India's Democracy: Women's Participation, Voices and Solidarity in the Field***), WRN spoke to a number of women and the youth who participated in different ways to encapsulate a South Asian understanding of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The research report has been reviewed by the WRN India core group and will be published in early 2021. A policy brief will also be released on this research at the same time.

### Community Conversations by WRN Pakistan

Pakistan's Community Conversations on the Rohingya community, titled ***Rohingyas Citizenship Rights in Pakistan*** with a specific focus on the challenges of the Rohingya

women, in the province of Sindh, was a daunting journey. For the Community Conversations, WRN worked in 3 Union Councils (UC) in Karachi, the provincial capital of the Sindh province. These UCs also host the Rohingya refugees. Some of the challenges confronting the researchers included: gaining access to the community, political pressures, ongoing floods in the cosmopolitan city of Karachi, approaching the resource persons and the lockdown due to COVID. All these in turn greatly affected the timely delivery of the report. However, it has been completed and will be published in early 2021. The Policy Brief emanating from this research can be found in the Appendix on page 21. The full report will be launched in early 2021

in either Karachi or the capital city of Islamabad, to showcase the plight of the community regarding their controversial citizenship rights, and capture the attention of the policy makers for further action.

Pakistan Country Coordinator, Shad Begum, and the members of the core group requested Board Member Ms. Farhat Asif, to actively engage in conceptualizing a community conversation that is proposed to be conducted in Azad Jammu and Kashmir on the Pakistan side. The concept has been developed into a proposal for funding consideration. Since WRN India has in the past conducted two Community Conversations on the Indian side of the border in Kashmir, this research project is envisaged to bring forth an understanding of shared perspectives and contextual differences on both sides of the border. Obtaining information from both sides of Jammu and Kashmir will provide a panoramic regional overview and the voices of the Kashmiri women regarding their peace and security issues and concerns, and the status of human rights as a collective.



# 2

## CHALLENGES

WRN activities, in all the WRN regional countries, have been affected by security risks, COVID-19 disruptions, a growing climate of self-censorship, and poor internet bandwidth for online interviews.

In Afghanistan, the Presidential election results and power-sharing agreement between the President and the Head of High Council for Peace Reconciliation led to certain political controversies which also affected WRN's work to continue with its focus on gender justice and peace. In addition to this, WRN members and staff are carrying on their work in an environment which is replete with life threatening incidents. These incidents, in particular, are targeted at women and human rights activists and spokespersons, disrupting the process and leading to large-scale insecurities and fear among the general public. The other challenges included the disruptions caused due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a surge in the rate of

criminal threats and activities such as robbery, abductions and extortions in the larger cities like Kabul, Balkh, and Herat, which severely affect the safety of movement in the country. This is compounded by the increase in insecurities and attacks on the outskirts of Kabul in areas like Shakar Dara, Qarabagh, Paghman, Surobi.

While the pandemic played its role in halting the research processes in all the three countries, a larger challenge facing WRN India is the current climate of threat to dissent and freedom of expression. The shrinking democratic spaces not only makes it difficult for WRN to strive against all odds to continue to speak up for human rights, peace and justice, but puts the members and staff under

great security threats. A climate of self-censorship is growing as we witness several rights and justice activists being incarcerated on a daily basis. This has slowed the Community Conversation research and interviews, since the major problem is approaching respondents who are willing to talk and participate in the research. A lot of time is being invested in exploring connections which are trustworthy, and an entire exercise of trust-building itself is carried out with those whom the researchers manage to connect to before they agree to be a respondent. There is also a certain threat to personal and political security that the researchers are navigating while conducting this research.

The other challenges come in terms of the logistics to be able to conduct the interviews, as many people from the community do not have access to technologies like zoom. Even while holding conversations on zoom, one needs to be constantly mindful of internet bandwidth issues compounded with privacy concerns.

*“The shrinking democratic spaces not only makes it difficult for WRN to strive against all odds to continue to speak up for human rights, peace and justice, but puts the members and staff under great security threats.”*



# 3

## COLLABORATION AS GUEST LECTURERS

### Collaboration with Fatima Jinnah Women University

WRN Pakistan Country Coordinator, Shad Begum, is keen to build collaborations with like-minded alliances, academia, and women groups which have a similar mandate. In continuation of this commitment, WRN Pakistan initiated a conversation about the possible collaboration with a renowned women university called Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU). After a few consultation meetings, WRN and FJWU in October 2020 signed a Letter of Intent (LOI). The two entities have committed to provide education on Women, Peace and Security to students, especially those belonging to marginalized communities. Both institutions seek to create a

partnership to enrich the educational experiences for the students at FJWU, the scholarship of their faculty, and an enhanced understanding of the issues around War, Women, Peace and Security. In order to foster a more vibrant academic experience for students, faculty and staff, FJWU and WRN encourages mutual engagement at institutional levels.

### WRN partnerships in Afghanistan

WRN has been working closely with different networks and organizations in specific country locations to build strong networks and associations. In Afghanistan, WRN has formally joined the Family Law Review Committee, is a member of Afghan Women Coalition for Peace led by AWN and is now an official member of Women Human Rights Defenders Committee. WRN has developed a good working relationship with the Provincial Women Network, led by Equality for Peace and Democracy in Afghanistan. The two worked together to hold a press conference on the current Peace process which culminated in a statement asking the international community and NATO to support women's meaningful

participation in the Afghanistan Peace Process. WRN in Afghanistan has partnered with Cordaid for two events on Human Rights Day in December. Both management teams are now exploring further possibilities for joint regional activities.

### Collaboration as Guest Lecturers

On September 23rd, WRN Pakistan Core Group Member Shad Begum moderated an online regional session on *Local Women Voices for Peace and Security in South Asia*, where women from Asian countries discussed the challenges and opportunities for the local women in strengthening the WPS agenda and their contribution towards UN1325. The panelists from 8 different countries shared experiences to find convergence and divergence in amplifying women's voices for peace and security in the region. This session was organized by WRN Board Member Farhat Asif in association with Coady Institute, St Francis Xavier University (Canada). WRN Board Member Rita Manchanda from India, and WRN Afghanistan Core Member Ms. Fariha Easar, were also among the panelists.





On September 24<sup>th</sup> WRN President and Board Member Rukhshanda Naz participated in an online regional session organized by WRN Board Member Farhat Asif in collaboration with Coady Institute, St Francis Xavier University (Canada). This session brought together women of different generations, to examine the key focus areas for women's community peace and security work over the next two decades, especially in terms of localizing the UNSCR 1325 agenda.

### WRN's Partnerships with Women Undivided

*Undivided: Women War & The Battle for Peace* is a multimedia storytelling platform to create community and empower women in war and conflict zones. It believes that by recognizing women's roles in conflict, it can elevate their voices in creating peace. In partnership and in collaboration with WRN, Women Undivided will highlight experiences and stories of women of conflict shared by WRN in their areas of work through interviews, written narration, photos, documentary, audio, etc. A list of women leaders and activists has

been prepared and shared with Women Undivided for further action.

WRN also continues working with its trusted partners in the region who support us as fiscal agents like Prakriti in India, Equality for Peace and Democracy in Afghanistan, and Association for Behavior and Knowledge Transformation (ABKT) in Pakistan.

WRN's potential for future partnership and collaboration increases through the staff and members' participation in various regional

activities. While the members as prominent human rights and peace activists are invited to speak on different platforms, the staff also takes part in different national and regional activities which not only enhances their skills but also takes WRN's work and mandates to a wide range of people. Recently, WRN Afghanistan Coordinator has been a part of a training program by Equality for Peace and Democracy in Afghanistan alongside senior delegates of the peace talks, Afghan peace activists, government officials, civil society representatives, media representatives and youth groups on a regular basis. WRN India Country Coordinator has recently concluded her training as a part of the Swedish Institute Gender Leader Lab 2020 — a cohort of 50 gender justice activists from South Asia and MENA region, where she has had the opportunity to not only introduce WRN's work to a wider range of audience, but also explore potential future partnerships.



# 4

## COMMUNICATIONS

Women's Regional Network (WRN) primarily uses newsletters, website, social media platforms, WhatsApp, direct mailing, and virtual events to communicate its messages.

The social media platforms of Women's Regional Network have been influential in the organization's advocacy-related work and promotion of the organization's work, principles and networking. WRN is active in three leading social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Additionally, WRN organizes webinars and online courses on Zoom.

### SOCIAL MEDIA OBJECTIVES

Social media of WRN is maintained on a day to day basis with two main objectives:

#### 1. Promote WRN Work and Vision:

To achieve this, we share information on WRN's current work and engagements, as well as the work, is done in the past.

#### 2. Engage with the current

##### audience and attract a new

**audience:** Engagement with the current audience requires us to exchange and promote each other's work and, at the same time, keep updated on what is happening in the broader platforms as well as locally.

### SUMMARY OF SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYTICS

(January to December 2020)

#### Facebook

Number of Followers:  
**8,597**

The audience reached:  
**1,034,550**

Impressions:  
**2,041,939**

#### Twitter

Number of Followers:  
**774**

Impressions:  
**239,937**

#### Instagram

Number of Followers:  
**132**

Impressions:  
**9,017**



“

*WRN promotes recent research findings, statements, urgent appeals and events of our partners. Social media engagements facilitate a sense of solidarity which helps WRN to widen the network as well as to reach WRN messages to a broader audience.*

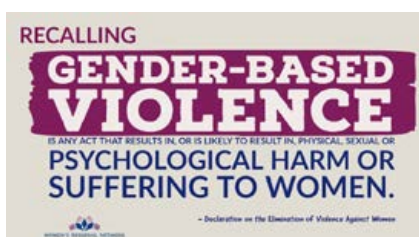
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## Regional Webinars

# 7

- **June 20:** Impact of COVID19 on Refugees & IDPs in South Asia
- **July 23:** Role of Women in the Afghan Peace Process
- **August 21:** Inter-linkages between Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 5 and SDG 16
- **September 28:** Online Regional Students Meet — The importance of Regional Peace to impact and sustain peace within our countries
- **September 30:** Religious Morality vs Constitutional Morality — Impact on Women's Democratic Politics in South Asia
- **October 31:** Local Women's Voices for Peace and Security in South Asia
- **December 10:** Human Rights and Justice in the Region

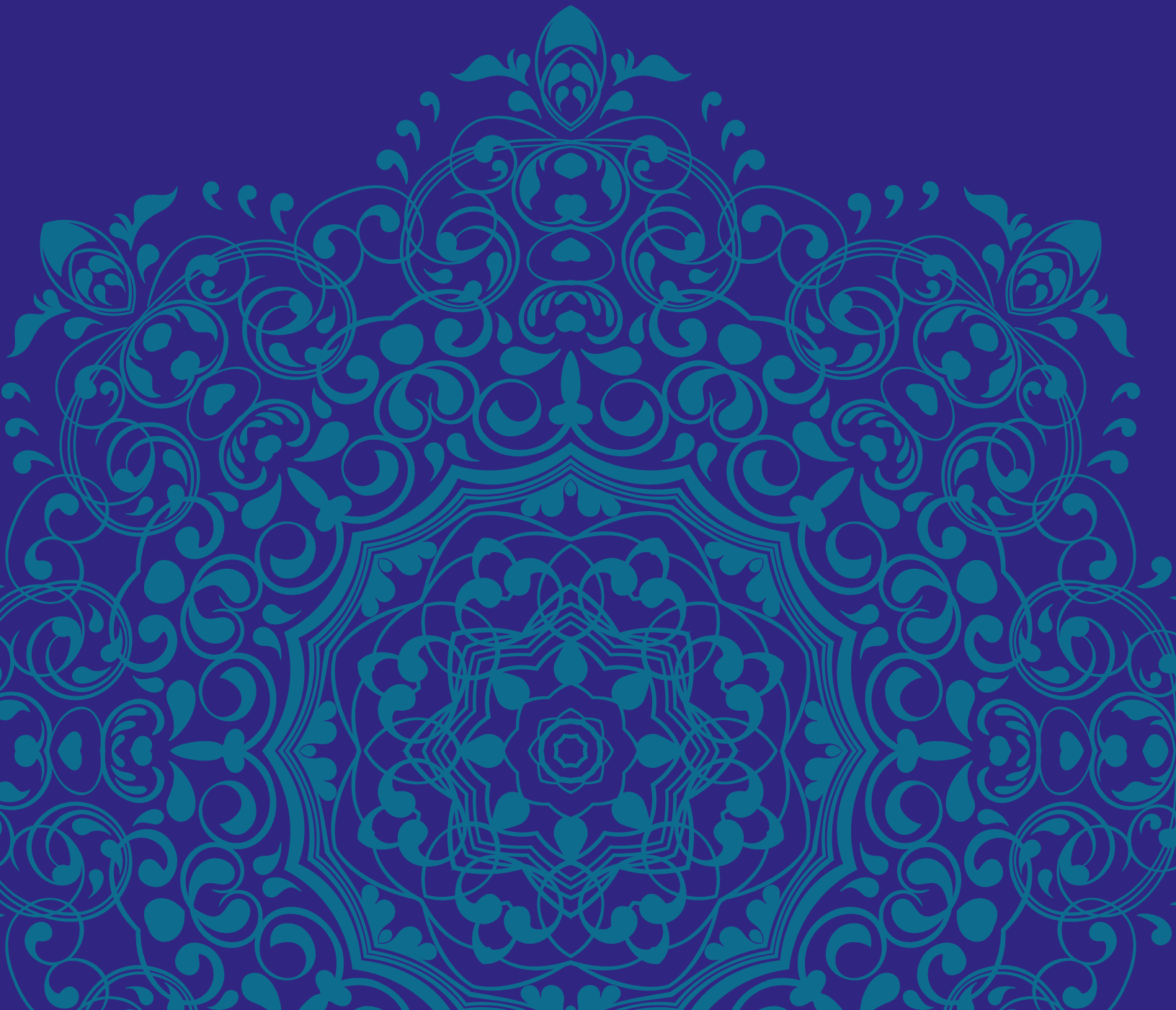


## SOCIAL MEDIA FOCUS IN GENERAL

- Afghan Peace Process
- Women in Peace Processes
- Women Peace Security Agenda
- Violence Against Women
- Women in Politics
- Peace Negotiations in South Asia
- Appeals: Women in Peace processes | Release of Women Activists
- Press Releases and Statements of Women Networks
- International Human Rights Day | Peace Day | Non-Violence | Violence Against Women
- Refugees | Internally Displaced People
- Democracy and Women
- UNSCR 1325
- Support Girl Child Campaign
- COVID Impact of Women in South Asia
- WRN Research | Community Conversations | Principles and Statements
- WRN Country Activities: Afghanistan | India | Pakistan | Sri Lanka

# 5

## FINANCIALS



# MANAGEMENT REPORT

## Women's Regional Network

### For the period ended December 31, 2020

#### Profit and Loss

January - December 2020

	Total
<b>INCOME</b>	
400 Contributions	19,500.00
500 Grants	170,000.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>189,500.00</b>
<b>GROSS PROFIT</b>	<b>189,500.00</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
750 Outside Services	
Communications	8,610.00
Finance	5,200.00
Local Region Coordinators	39,955.00
Other Professional	26,537.50
<b>Total 750 Outside Services</b>	<b>80,302.50</b>
800 Program and General	
Conference-Other	499.00
Dues & subscriptions	427.86
Office and General	4,779.62
<b>Total 800 Program and General</b>	<b>5,706.48</b>
830 Travel and Meetings	
Air-Hotel	5,874.74
Auto-Parking-Taxi	434.17
Meals & Entertainment	418.00
<b>Total 830 Travel and Meetings</b>	<b>6,726.91</b>
850 Advertising & Marketing	407.36
860 Other Business Expenses	
Bank Charges & Fees	832.27
Taxes & Licenses	20.00
<b>Total 860 Other Business Expenses</b>	<b>852.27</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>93,995.52</b>
<b>NET OPERATING INCOME</b>	<b>95,504.48</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>\$95,504.48</b>

Continued >



## Balance Sheet Summary

As of December 31, 2020

	Total
<b>ASSETS</b>	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	220,266.84
Other Current Assets	20,648.00
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>240,914.84</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$240,914.84</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	4,540.79
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>4,540.79</b>
Long-Term Liabilities	40,800.00
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>45,340.79</b>
Equity	195,574.05
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$240,914.84</b>

# 6

## APPENDICES



## POLICY BRIEF

# CHALLENGES TO WOMEN CANDIDATES AND VOTERS

### 2018 AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS

This policy paper is based on Women's Regional Network's (WRN) research study, entitled *Challenges to Women Candidates and Voters in the 2018 Elections*, conducted in 2018 by **Humira Saqib** and edited by **Dr. Jennifer Euler Bennett**. The Full Report is available at [www.womensregionalnetwork.org/](http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/)

#### Introduction

In the past 20 years, sustained efforts have taken place to steer Afghanistan towards a democratized state system. Realization of a democratic system, created by people's votes, became possible after the fall of the Taliban regime, the Bonn conference and holding of the Loya Jirga to reach a consensus on the new Afghan Constitution. Women's participation in the political engagements also improved markedly since the fall of the Taliban.

To date, three rounds of each presidential, provincial council's and parliamentary elections have taken place. These elections have been fraught with several structural and institutional difficulties and are considered the most controversial elections in Afghanistan. This policy paper dwells on understanding and

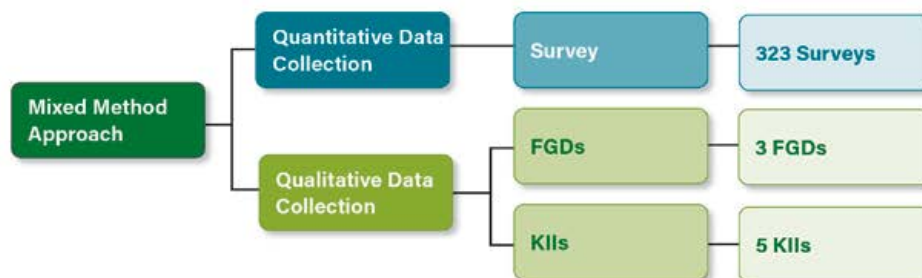
exploring the various challenges and issues confronted by women voters belonging to marginalized populations and of different ethnic groups, along with women candidates during the 2018 parliamentary elections.

#### Findings

The research findings bring to the fore the gendered aspects of the 2018 elections. It highlights several ensuing factors that point to women's unequal and discriminatory social, economic and political standings. Several challenges culminating in women's insecurities were the hallmark of the research, discouraging mass female participation in the elections and consequently, negatively impacting the end results. The research results show

#### Methodology

Through WRN'S signature Community Conversations study design, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth interviews (IDI) in the three Provinces of Logar, Parwan and Kabul.







Understanding the vulnerabilities and the challenges women face can be an opportunity to meaningfully modify the electoral system in Afghanistan.

that: lack of transparency in the electoral process; fraud; coercion and redirecting women's votes, by force in some parts of the country, as well as lack of awareness of how to participate in elections (registration, biometrics, voting, inter alia.), lack of women's independence for voting and freedom to openly campaign, were some of the major hurdles and challenges experienced by women voters and candidates.

The research avidly underlines the pervasive sexual harassment and abuse of women during the 2018 elections. This was reinforced by a new challenge associated with an inappropriate use of social media, portraying women politicians as immoral. As informed, fake accounts were made, in the name of women, which led to dissemination of false information and perceptions, to defame female candidates. This was one of the driving factors that discouraged women from contesting the elections, as well as voting for women candidates. The findings also show that women candidates' lack of financial resources was grossly exploited and was another factor exposing them to sexual advances and favors by the local peers and electoral stakeholders.

Insecurity was one of the greatest challenges in 2018 elections, due to which women's participation in polling stations, especially in rural areas, was weak, thus most of them did not cast their votes. Additionally, this paved the way for misuse of women's votes and in some areas, where men voted on behalf of women, using their voter cards. This research confirms and reiterates the findings of other reports that women are still considered to be inferior. They are deemed to lack mental and physical characteristics and the required decision-making abilities to be engaged in the political arena. To this effect, women candidates have been threatened and sometimes killed by local warlords in several provinces. The statistics reveal that the mentioned challenges to women in the remote areas in Logar and Parwan Provinces were gravely accentuated compared to Kabul.

Understanding the vulnerabilities and the challenges women face can be an opportunity to meaningfully modify the electoral system in Afghanistan. Assuming the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the government have a strong will to conduct transparent elections, there should be no doubt that this will be possible only when women attain equitable political participation.



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

### Key Issues

Key issues that emerge from this research include the following:

- **Power and gender inequalities** in social relations do not operate in a vacuum, but are structural, systemic and institutional in Afghanistan;
- **Patriarchy and bureaucracy** are mutually reinforcing systems. Men use patriarchy within the bureaucracy not only to create and sustain male privilege and power over women but also to sustain institutional hierarchy;
- **Inappropriation regarding vote-buying** by competitors in an uneven level political playing field indicates unabated institutional and structural manipulation and bad governance;
- Advantages enabled or exacerbated owing to **structural lack of resources of women candidates** — be it financial/ economic or sociocultural capital;
- **Restricted female mobility**, emanating from patriarchal conservatism and misogynist attitudes, has led to women's security issues and independence, as well as access to public spaces, leading to political disequilibrium;
- Outright **insecurity and conflict** at the national level, as well as socio-cultural constraints imposed by family and/or community members, influential locals, political power brokers and/or religious stakeholders, amongst others.
- Gains in women's substantive representation and political mainstreaming are inextricably linked and dependent on a continued **commitment of national and international stakeholders towards women's rights and gender mainstreaming**.

## Recommendations and Policy Input

1. To attain equitable political participation, a paradigmatic shift is required to focus on gender policy interventions and their impact on women's political empowerment and mainstreaming, particularly viewing participation beyond numeric concerns and individual women's agency and capacities towards structural and institutional constraints. In order to achieve this goal, **detailed understanding is required of not only the outputs of institutions but also the institutions themselves, in both their formal and informal guises.**
2. Women candidates' equal share of political influence is overshadowed by direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers. If formal equal treatment cannot be obtained, compensatory measures, such as specific security measures and distinct government and other watchdog support should be introduced as a means of reaching equality of results. In other words, **compensation for structural barriers that women meet in the electoral process should be put in place.**
3. Women candidates should form alliances with members of the provincial assemblies and women councilors in the local government, alongside the civil society organizations, rights groups and other women activist groups. **With the collective voice and agency, women candidates can garner both social and structural support.**
4. The government and the international community must defend the red lines and proactively continue to **portray positive imaging of the significance of women's rights,** especially in peace negotiations with insurgents, as argued and lobbied by women's activists and politicians.
5. Education in general, and specifically that of females, must be the hallmark for attaining democratic knowledge and rights and to **counter the nexus of illiteracy, political unawareness and the lack of citizens' capacity to adequately participate in political decision-making and decisions in governance processes.**
6. There is an urgent need to **train and induct a greater number of women in the Election Commission.** Equally, the authorities should ensure that only women polling agents should be assigned to the dedicated women polling stations.
7. **All women registered in the national database should automatically be enrolled in the voting lists so as to encourage participation of women in the electoral process;** voting centers need to be organized in a way that women can easily attend these centers; women agents should be provided transport and security.
8. Women candidates, generally speaking, run campaigns with meagre financial resource and local support. Lack of finances and independence have affected women in effectively managing election campaigns in their respective areas. It is suggested that some of the **public funding provided by international institutions for elections should be considered to assist women candidates,** through a credible institution with specific transparent mechanisms to maintain transparency.
9. To date, men are not convinced that women have equal decision-making capacities and abilities to actively enter the political arena. Especially in remote areas, women are still considered inferior who need male support and cannot act without the permission of men. Therefore, **awareness of existing laws and issues related to women's rights will be one of the essential requirements for addressing cultural challenges to women.**
10. One of the challenges of the 2018 election is related to the investigation of complaints by women candidates in the Electoral Complaints Commission. It is recommended that a qualified (supervisory) body should be set up by election observation and women's rights advocacy bodies, who should **closely monitor women's complaints in the Electoral Complaints Commission.**
11. Structural challenges and open corruption in the electoral commissions may not be resolved in the short term, but can be countered by **stringent monitoring processes, led by both national and international election observer bodies,** and should be taken up by the justice and judicial institutions.



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul



## APPENDIX B



POLICY BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2020

# Rohingya Citizenship Saga in Pakistan: Women's Human Rights at Stake

## MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy paper is based on Women's Regional Network's (WRN) research study, entitled *Rohingya Citizenship Saga in Pakistan: Women's Human Rights at Stake* conducted in 2020, by Farhat Parveen and edited by Dr. Jennifer Bennett. The Full Report is available at [www.womensregionalnetwork.org/](http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/)

### Introduction

The mass exodus and displacement of the Rohingya people is a case of gross violation of human rights and a situation of humanitarian concern. Their continued subjection to a series of extradition drives have resulted in their status as a stateless, predominantly Muslim Indo-Aryan ethnic group. This nomadic existence has fed into the process of a specific religio-ethnic Rohingya identity formation, both in their home country, Myanmar, and among the diaspora, including in Pakistan, where they have reinvented themselves in accordance with the demands of various political and cultural contexts.

Currently, over half a million Rohingya live in Karachi, the capital of the Sindh province, with no official citizenship status. No official naturalization policy was ever made to accommodate them even when the Zia regime (1978-88) brought them in large numbers to Pakistan to support the war effort in Afghanistan, nor any steps were taken in this regard by later governments. The Rohingya in Karachi received a slight glimmer of hope in 2018, when after the Prime Minister, Imran Khan (2018-todate), announced they would be given CNICs, the key citizenship document. After the announcement, there was a flurry of activity and large numbers of Bengalis and Rohingyas were issued this document. But then again, this ended up being a short-term

desultory endeavor, that resulted in uncertainty and inequalities in the Rohingya community.

While the problems faced by the Rohingya have been highlighted in general, women have remained largely absent. This policy paper, based on the WRN study, was designed to highlight women's concerns and voice to this lack of a gender sensitive analysis. As such, its purpose included identification, understanding, and deciphering the major challenges faced by Rohingya women in Pakistani society due to their insecure and uncertain citizenship status.

### Methodology

Primary data was collected using qualitative method, comprising of Community Conversations (Focus Groups Discussions -FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) to obtain information on the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the Rohingya community living in Karachi. Three large communities, namely, Orangi, Korongi and Sindh Industrial and Trading Estate-SITE (the three areas are located in the district West of Karachi), were randomly selected for this research.



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### Major Findings

This research provides evidence to the multi-dimensional crises being experienced by the Rohingya community in Karachi, in Sindh province. Information obtained clearly demonstrates that the community and women specifically, have long been experiencing a range of human rights violations including social, economic, legal, as well as state-sponsored neglect and exclusion. The following are the major findings (discussed under sub-headings in the full report):



- Uncertainties of statelessness and lack of citizenship documents has led the Rohingya to live in constant fear of displacement and deportation. The majority are skeptical of declaring themselves as Rohingya, and instead identify themselves as Bengalis.
- The absence of a state policy on Rohingya citizenship not only deprives them of access to social services — education and health — but also other public services, including access to bank accounts, employment or a formal stable job, thus subjecting them to exploitation in the labor market where they can be denied a wage by an employer. In the absence of citizenship status, Rohingya are also not eligible for government employment and income subsidy programs such as Ahas Program (previously known as Benazir Income Support Program), Insaf Health Card, Kamiyab Nowjawan (a loan for youth), *inter alia*.
- If the parents do not have CNICs, children are denied admission to schools even if one parent possesses citizenship documents. For this reason alone, most parents have no other option but to send their children to religious seminaries that do not require official documents.
- In the absence of CNICs, they are not entitled to medical treatment in hospitals, even in emergency cases. As a result, most women give birth at home by untrained attendants. Many small children, including those with fractured limbs, end up being treated by unqualified health-care personnel.
- In most cases, acquisition of a CNIC often takes an illegal and an expensive route. Nadra authorities are reluctant to issue CNICs to Bengalis and Rohingyas, especially if they applied for it later than 18 years of age. For this reason, it is difficult for the police to check criminal activities in which they may be involved as the government simply does not have any data on them.
- Religion is a dominant force in Rohingya politics and the Jamaat-e Islami has a strong vote bank among them, especially in Korangi, where its influence extends into the social life of the people because of the number of religious seminaries in these areas. Their culture is strictly traditional and women must follow the Deobandi edicts, which discourages them to participate in public life.
- Rohingya livelihood is dependent on running small shops, working in small scale textile units in their localities, and most importantly, running roadside cane juice vendor machines. They also work as cooks in major city areas, and they get jobs without CNICs in large-scale factories. If they are required to provide the employers with their CNICs, all they need to do is get a CNIC. It does not have to be theirs — leading to corrupt and unaccountable practices. A large majority believe lack of CNICs encourages a culture of crime. With no jobs available to them, these people easily fall prey to criminal gangs.
- Despite the litany of 'the women's place is in the home,' economic pressures are driving Rohingya women to the job market. In the absence of a CNIC, many are denied a decent job or wage, job security, the ability to open a bank account in their name for the receipt of salaries, etc., exposing them to exploitation in the labor market.
- Boys have a better chance of being educated than girls, as the preference is to marry girls off as soon as they attain puberty, leading to widespread underage marriage of daughters.
- Women can only be wedded to men from their own community. Anyone attempting to marry outside the community must face the consequences.
- Most Rohingya women have never heard of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2019, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012, and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010.
- Absence of CNICs has added to and enhanced Rohingya women's social and psychological isolation.
- Women bear the disproportionate burden owing to women's sexual and reproductive health as linked to conventional social and cultural norms — emphasizing modesty and shame and the imposition of silence on critical areas of women's emotional, psychological and physical health.
- Family planning is not favored by the Rohingya. Women are supposed to bear as many children as they can, leading to large numbers of stateless and unsettled children bearing the burden of identity crises.

## Recommendations

1. **The Rohingya citizenship issue should be resolved on the SAARC platform to effectively put an end to the uncertainty and fear in which the people of this community have continued to live for more than seven decades.** The member states should ensure compliance with the SAARC Charter through active collaboration for social progress. To uplift Rohingya's status in each member status, the SAARC social agenda for the region should address Rohingya community issues under all four thematic areas,<sup>1</sup> a) Health and Population Activities; b) SAARC Social Charter; c) Children and Youth; and d) Gender Related Issues through the SAARC Development Fund.
2. **As a first step towards addressing this issue, a policy framework regarding Rohingya citizenship must be formulated by the concerned SAARC countries with the active involvement of Rohingya representatives from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, particularly women.** This will foreground and provide insights into the problems faced by the Rohingya in their different social and political contexts, with a particular emphasis on the problems faced by women regarding the multiple ways in which their unsettled citizenship status impacts on their lives as well as those of their children.
3. **Pakistan is a signatory to several international human rights treaties. The Pakistani government should examine the feasibility of issuing temporary residence to those who have lived in the country for more than four decades, till the time their status is approved for CNIC and citizenship.** Where appropriate, the government should pro-actively devise a strategy to facilitate voluntary repatriation. It should, simultaneously, in political dialogue with the cooperation of UNHCR and other international organizations, including SAARC to monitor and facilitate the repatriation of those who wish to return, alongside obtaining guarantees from the Government of Myanmar for full reintegration of all returnees and full protection of their rights.
4. **Advice should also be taken from National & Provincial Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and human rights organizations including Rohingya right-based groups.** As a result of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010, Provinces have Provincial Human Rights Institutions such as Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC). The SHRC should proactively take up the citizenship issue of Rohingyas based in Karachi & Hyderabad. SHRC has a problem-solving mechanism in which individuals and groups can raise their issues through simple applications along with relevant documents.
5. **The government of Pakistan should sign and ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness** and fulfill its obligation to prevent statelessness promoting full local reintegration within the ambit of human rights.
6. **In the absence of any legal documents, an activist approach is needed to resolve some of the basic issues faced by the Rohingya in general and Rohingya women in particular.** Urgent facilitation regarding access to government hospitals and other privately run facilities, including those run by NGOs should be provided to the marginalized Rohingya community.
7. **The majority of Rohingya are currently struggling to attain employment. Creating income-generating opportunities for the Rohingya could help give them more agency.** Because of the potential impact of workforce competition on wages and opportunities for Pakistani locals, and to avoid ill-effects and possible friction, support needs to be the same for other surrounding communities. The government, donors, NGOs and institutions such as the United Nations Aid agencies, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank should develop livelihoods programs after conducting research on specific needs/skill-based and demands.
8. **Regardless of the curriculum and language of instruction, it is important that the authorities scale-up education quickly, in consultation with Rohingya community leaders and those running informal education programs.** While their future is uncertain, education will be an asset wherever they end up. Pakistani officials, the international organizations and various NGOs, should consult the Rohingyas and local workers on key initiatives. Providing the Rohingya with education and vocational opportunities as part of this effort could help not only avert militancy and criminality but also support their reintegration in the society.
9. **The rights of the child should be especially protected, in accordance with the government's commitment to children's rights through its signing and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990.** In particular, the government should seriously look into granting nationality to all those children who were born in Pakistan.
10. **The policy of the National Data Registration Authority (NADRA) in issuing Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) needs revisiting to iron out the anomalies, irregularities and inconsistencies that exist within the system.** It should establish a formal one window mechanism to ensure consistency of issuing legal documentation across the different settling population, like Rohingya and Bengalis.

<sup>1</sup> Social Affairs ([saarc-sec.org](http://saarc-sec.org))

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## WRN CORE VALUES

- Honor 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, ongoing and in-depth communication.
- Strive for excellence, while being creative, bold and courageous.



## WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

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Women's Regional Network

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