

FROM CONFLICT TO SECURITY:

*A Regional Overview of Community Conversations with
Women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India*



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA



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THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Afghanistan, Pakistan and India together make up one of the crossroads of Asia. Long before this region became synonymous with protracted conflict and bitter inter-state 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 metamorphosed, their internal alliances shifted and the agenda of their external supporters changed, but one thing remained constant—the fabric of daily life was rent, apparently beyond repair. Death and bereavement, injury and disability, displacement, poverty and erosion of liberties marked most of the decades since 1979. The ouster of the Taliban in 2001 held out the promise of peace and democracy but that stands largely compromised now.

Pakistani society reflects the consequences of many wars being waged at the same time. Unresolved issues with India are only a point of departure. Over the last couple of decades, the country has also become an operational base for militant groups that are engaged in violent activities. This has made ordinary Pakistanis collateral damage for attacks that are supposed to be targeting terrorist groups. The role of the Pakistani state in these hostilities is politically contentious. In addition to this, sectarian and sub-regional conflicts also fracture the polity, so that whether or not in the line of actual fire, conflict circumstances prevail.

Escalating defence expenditures, declining social funding and predatory development models that exploit national resources and marginalize and displace communities have deepened structural inequalities.

The Indian experience challenges traditional understandings of “conflict.” Traditional inter-state conflicts arguably affect fewer people than the plethora of conflict situations arising from insurgencies and counter-insurgency operations, autonomy or separatist campaigns, inter-communal violence, political rivalries, 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, 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, the security agenda of states has undermined the rule of law and accountability. Escalating defence expenditures, declining social funding and predatory development models that exploit national resources and marginalize 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, and people, especially women, 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; brutalization, including rising family violence; impoverishment with no credit, no capital and no title to any; and displacement that ruptures social support networks. Conversely, conflict also disrupts the patriarchal order by creating opportunities for women’s agency—whether by joining fighting forces, as peace activists, as heads of households and economic actors, and in their efforts to engage with the system to make it work for them. The promise of peace appears to contain the promise that this agency will not be reversed; the reality is some backsliding usually occurs.

Conflict in the region exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, particularly gender inequalities. It magnifies socio-cultural difference, uneven development, disparities in access to welfare services and gender lines. Women’s experiences, their fears, their courage, their priorities and solutions were the focus of the Community Conversations documented in this WRN project.

The Community Conversations process unfolded at a critical moment. International society is creating norms around the inclusion of women, ending impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, and taking into account women’s experiences and needs in conflict, post-conflict and peace-building phases. From the recognition of rape as an act of torture by the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia to the “Women, Peace and Security” resolutions adapted by the U.N. Security Council, starting with 1325 in 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), this is a moment in which the decades-long effort of the women’s movements around the world are coming to fruition. The WRN contributes to this process of change through the stories and perspectives brought to light by the Community Conversations, and by strengthening the efforts of regional women to secure their inclusion at the peace table and every other decision-making sphere.

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 (modelled 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.

ABOUT US, 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. WRN is animated by a vision of women working collaboratively within and across borders, to listen to and learn from each other to construct a common agenda to ensure women's rights, equitable and sustainable 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, militarisation and extremism, and corruption—as a priority for all three countries.

These are WRN's core values:

- 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, ongoing and in-depth communication.
- Identify and resist militarisation of civilian authority/institutions and development aid.
- Strive for excellence while being creative, bold and courageous.

WRN networks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are autonomous but work in close coordination with each other. Network members in each country have invited others to join and established working relationships with women's rights organizations in their countries.

THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

How do you take discussions about security, conflict, militarisation and governance outside elite security policy circles? How do you bring more women's voices into this discussion? How do we integrate their experiences and concerns into the security

discourse? Brainstorming around these questions generated the idea of Community Conversations.

The "Community Conversations" process initiated in 2011 was one of the first activities undertaken by the Women's Regional Network. It evolved organically in each of the three WRN countries, adapting to different ground realities. The resulting documents reflect this diversity clearly—the methods are different, the questions are different, the perspectives vary.

At the core, however, a few things remained the same in every country. We sought out women who live and work in remote and insecure areas to understand their experiences, fears and insecurities. Our objective was to document the impact of militarisation, extremisms and corruption on their ability to access rights and justice. The CCs emphasize women as survivors and make visible their agency in everyday life and in resistance movements. The Conversations acknowledge women's contribution to the post-conflict processes of justice, peace and social reintegration.

This process has generated rich and detailed accounts from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan of the gendered social impact of politicised violence, militarisation and corruption in conflict-affected areas. It anchors WRN's work firmly in the real world of women's experiences. While the findings of each Community Conversation process remain context-specific, by identifying the common threads and themes, WRN will create cross-border strategies and seek common solutions.

A REGIONAL OVERVIEW: DIVERGENCES AND INTERSECTIONS

Across the region, the security agenda of states has undermined the rule of law and accountability. Escalating defence expenditures, declining social funding and predatory development models that exploit national resources and marginalize 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, and people, especially women, pay the price.

DIVERGENCES

At first glance, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan present very different conflict contexts.

The primary context of conflict in Afghanistan is a consequence of the internal and external factors—from the 1979 Soviet occupation to the decade-long resistance to the Taliban years to the post-2001—in which interplay several other countries have played a role. In an insecure environment, women's rights have been a

casualty. To speak of conflict is to refer both to this globalised context, as well as the local rivalries between armed groups and to be in the cross-fire between local militias and international forces.

In Pakistan, the primary context of conflict arguably is nation-building. Disputes within the state about terms of inclusion or about the nature and the values of the polity have created pockets of conflict. These play out, along with other debates and differences, alongside the fall-out of international interventions in the region (mainly in Afghanistan). Thus, through the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan was the staging ground for the Afghan resistance groups and the most important host to Afghan refugees. Kashmir remains another reference point for Pakistan's internal struggles.

In most of continent-sized India, conflicts are almost entirely internal. Social structures and diversity form the fuel for most conflicts, with the design and implementation of new development projects becoming contentious for their resource use and acquisition strategies. Inequality is a core issue in most conflicts in India. For those along India's long borders, transnational disputes, the politics of kin-states, porous borders and the movement of people, arms and money are important factors. The role of the state varies across the country—and in most places associated with protracted conflict, it is ambivalent, creating conditions that promote exploitation as much as associating with those whose actions have a detrimental impact on people's lives.

When we descend further into the step-well of the Country Reports, the specific locations where Community Conversations were held display even greater diversity.

In Afghanistan, researchers took care to reach beyond the capital to locations “across the spectrum,” that is, less-affected and greatly-affected by the internationalized conflict-like post-conflict situation in the country. They spoke to students, teachers, health-care workers, civil society activists, government workers and housewives, and included literate and illiterate, urban and rural, women.

In India, the WRN team identified four sites where women live with different kinds of conflicts. In Rajouri and Poonch, in Jammu and Kashmir state, just outside the Kashmir valley, the conflict and military presence played out in different ways. In Tripura state, inter-tribal violence and armed group rivalries within the framework of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, have created a society where cycles of violence and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence persist. The people of Jagatsinghpur, Odisha, have been fighting back predatory development projects that involve acquisition of land they have traditionally farmed, and their protests have provoked violent responses. Sexual violence was part of the communal violence in Kandhamal, Odisha, which although episodic and different from the other militarised

situations studies, calls for the same justice and reconciliation processes.

The two research sites in Pakistan again are different from each other, and from all the other sites covered in the Community Conversations projects. In both Balochistan and in the Swat region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the problems of nation-building are compounded by the “War on Terror” and complicated by the resultant international and regional engagement. Further, governance crises have led to the emergence of non-state actors challenging the state in both places. But Swat is a district and conflict is localized and confined to two players, the army and the Taliban. Multiple conflicts wage within Balochistan, from ethnic conflict, resource use battles, political rivalries and state repression.

The fourteen locations across Afghanistan, India and Pakistan where Community Conversations were held thus represent the gamut of conflict and militarised settings, with no two of them being identical.

The third divergence is between Jagatsinghpur and all the other sites. Whereas women show agency and resilience across the region, it is only in Jagatsinghpur, Odisha that residents have mobilized as systematically and carried out such a sustained and focused protest, and most important, this is a protest in which women have participated from the beginning and in full measure. Although the researchers who visited the site point out that protest strategies that have involved women embed patriarchal values of shame and honour and also depend on the patriarchal division of labour (mothers protest so daughters take over the household), and suggest that male decision-makers prepare these strategies, the reality is that women show enormous commitment and courage in executing them. They show this courage in other parts of their life; it must be noted that the women of Jagatsinghpur were also the least concerned about personal safety and the only ones who defined security in terms other than freedom from harm.

A final difference that is significant for WRN's work on women's rights in the region is how much each of various actors matter in each context. As a corollary, the most effective entry-point for advocacy and engagement varies in each country.

In Afghanistan, as in many other recent “post-conflict” contexts, the role of UN agencies and international society in creating pressure for women's rights has resulted in historic levels of inclusivity. By contrast, the Afghan government appears is unable to either summon up the political will to promote or resist pressures to undermine these reforms. Between international and Afghan forces, the security situation has not improved. Civil society's resistance through the Taliban years and its activism in the last twelve years may both be imperilled in the months to come.

In India, always resistant to any outside intervention, civil society actors with a long history of engaging government and media make the most difference. The widespread activism on gender-based violence in the last year has opened many additional fronts. Where the Indian government is resentful of international pressure on matters it labels ‘sensitive,’ it can be reached through the initiatives of civil society and media. Individual politicians and policy-makers are increasingly accessible to the social sector.

In Pakistan, too, scope for international pressure on matters considered social and cultural is limited. Furthermore, it is not clear how far the writ of the government runs in these matters, at a time when it is embattled on many fronts. Civil society, always an outspoken force in Pakistan, then bears the primary responsibility for promoting change—even at considerable personal risk to its activists.

These divergences are insignificant compared to the universality of the stories that are uncovered by the Community Conversations. We explore these intersections next.

INTERSECTIONS

For women, no matter where they are or what rationale fuels the conflict or militarisation in that area, there are similarities in the way that their everyday lives are affected.

Women show agency, creativity and enterprise.

On the positive side, all the field reports found countless examples of women’s enterprise and creative agency in the most challenging of situations.

In Afghanistan where post-2004 laws have tried to restore rights to women and insecurity erodes that achievement, the Focused Group Discussions in eight provinces still managed to locate and reach out to participants who were students, teachers, health care workers, civil society activists, government workers and housewives. Women who worked outside the home did so at risk to themselves and their families. Considered most at risk by the participants, we learn that women still work as women’s rights activists, lawyers, educators, health care workers, security sector workers, activists and politicians. University students, including girls, created an online campaign in support of the Afghan National Security Forces and many women and girls contributed financially to it.

Caught between the security forces and armed groups, Pakistani women’s access to justice has been greatly curtailed. This has not however stopped them from approaching human rights organizations. Women’s rights NGOs and community-based organizations play an important part in smaller towns, giving women a voice and a way to reach state institutions.

Researchers in India met a village panch called Reshma in Poonch,

who won the election in a constituency reserved for women, who learned to protect herself and her family using a gun while her husband worked elsewhere. The reports brought in the stories from Tripura and Kandhamal of activists and others training themselves, even studying law, in order to help their communities and those in distress. In Jagatsinghpur, women’s naked bodies were the instrument of protest, intended to shame the police.

In the last instance, women’s agency is a little specious because the strategy was created by men in the protest movement, trying to protect themselves from arrest and it played into using women’s bodies and invoking patriarchal ideas about shame and honour. What is important though is that without the women’s commitment and courage it would not have worked.

It is important to take cognizance of such agency because, as the authors of the Pakistan study put it, “... focusing on women’s vulnerabilities often entrenches stereotypes about their needing protection, and compromises initiatives that could focus on their agency.” Painting a picture that dwells on women’s vulnerability could preclude their inclusion in reconstruction, development and governance as capable actors and productive beneficiaries.

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Physical (in) security comes first

The meaning of “security” has animated a great deal of scholarship in the last two decades. What emerges clearly from all the field reports is that for most participants in the research, the most fundamental understanding of security related to physical security. While more men were likely to be killed or injured, increased levels of violence were universal, within and outside the homes, framing and circumscribing women’s lives and life-chances. Increased levels of violence include increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence within the home, in the context of identity politics and also in the public sphere. Domestic violence, targeting of women from ethnic minorities, sexual exploitation as a form of corruption, sexual violence in the wake of violence and moral policing are some common experiences across sites. Women face violence at the hands of family members, security forces and armed groups, and a culture of impunity prevails.

In Afghanistan, how safe women felt depended on where they live, and in general, women in cities felt safer. Conservative beliefs and practices about gender roles were reinforced by conflict conditions to reinforce women’s physical insecurity. Women risk being attacked when they break these traditional norms by going out to work. Stalking and acid attacks are new forms of violence

they encounter. Perpetrators are rarely arrested while it is possible for victims to be ostracized or jailed for adultery.

In Pakistan, the narratives from both Balochistan and Swat are littered with instances of sexual and gender-based violence. Women spoke in great detail about their experiences of sexual violence, about their fears and about their coping mechanisms. For instance, one woman said she slept with a sharp knife under her pillow. People take advantage of women in distress; this is true of the landlord who exploits women who seek shelter on his property or the father-in-law and brothers-in-law who exploit the wife of a man gone to work abroad or to fight elsewhere. In a fraught situation, the line between private and public perpetrators of violence blurs when members of a family or community share information that leads to kidnapping or harassment of one of their own. Trust breaks down within the group. The women discussed cases of moral policing and intimidation by the Taliban and others.

Violence is not introduced by conflict into the household and public spaces; this is illustrated by these words from an Indian participant: “If our husband beat us sometimes, it is not violence. But if the husband is displaced and gets compensation or a job and starts to drink and then beat us, that is an act of violence. Even if we are beaten up by our husbands, it is okay, as long as we are together in this struggle.” Sexual violence was a key instrument in the Kandhamal riots of 2008; social workers and activists were singled out for punishment. In Tripura too, rape and abduction by state forces make a common story; so much so, the threshold of tolerance for domestic violence and violence in public spaces has dropped dramatically. In the border districts of Jammu and Kashmir, while sexual violence has been a dominant theme in discussions of human rights in this area, there was hardly any official documentation of case studies.

Fear and the feeling of insecurity limit life-chances

The reality of rising levels of violence against women formed one part of the story in all the countries. The other was the fear of violence, fear for themselves and fear for their family members. Insecurity was also seen to be a state of mind. Women feared for the safety of their families (including the men) every time they stepped out of their homes. The feeling that it was unsafe for women to go out also limited their life-chances—their prospects of going to college or getting a job or even seeking out medical attention were defined by the risks they anticipated along the way.

In Afghanistan, a housewife asked, “How can one feel secure when every day we hear from the news that someone has been kidnapped or killed? Whenever a family member leaves the house we are worried for their security and whether they will return or not. How can a person feel secure and live normally in a situation like

this?” Fear of violence has meant that women have lost economic opportunities, access to health and education and mobility, as a result of which they are poorer.

A Hazara respondent told researchers in Pakistan, “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.” Fearing attacks and reprisals, doctors avoid polio duty (resulting in children not getting their shots on time) and choose not to report violence and torture cases. Rumours about “forced disappearances” contributed to this climate of anxiety. The Pakistan study sought to

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understand how women coped and what is heartening is that fear has not diminished their will to get an education or have a career; they find inventive ways even at great personal inconvenience to achieve their goals. The Pashtun girl who cloaks herself completely in order to go to college and the Hazara woman who does the same to go to work, offer role models to people in more comfortable settings.

There is a telling story from Poonch, India about a young woman participant in the army-run exchange programme, who nevertheless panicked and jumped off a ledge when she saw an army vehicle. Caught between state forces and armed groups, people alleviate their vulnerability by trying to balance the demands of both sides—“army ‘source’ by day and a militant accomplice by night.” Writing about Rajouri and Poonch, the researchers use the words ‘weariness,’ ‘wariness,’ ‘sadness’ and ‘bitterness.’ In Tripura, the presence of army camps is a source of tension and trauma for villagers. Women displaced after the Kandhamal violence face a range of bleak alternatives that underscore their insecurity and vulnerability. In Jagatsinghpur alone, researchers reported that women seemed to have lost any fear of physical violence. Here alone, security is defined in terms of land and livelihood security.

The presence of security forces is a mixed experience

Women were divided on the question of whether the presence of security forces enhanced or endangered their security, and largely their response depended on their social and geographical locations.

In Afghanistan, three kinds of armed forces are active—the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), international troops

and illegal armed groups. Researchers found the ANSF enjoyed the most support; if they could be strengthened, the illegal armed groups and Taliban would not be a problem. They associated the ill-effects of militarisation with illegal armed groups and not with forces that were bound by and followed the law. Participants in the research also clearly associated such militarisation with a decline in women's security. There was greater ambivalence about foreign troops, whose efficiency was recognized but whose presence and work created other vulnerabilities.

In Balochistan, stories about “forced disappearances” by the Frontier Constabulary (FC) fueled existing insecurity. These disappearances happened in daylight in crowded places, it was believed, because the FC enjoyed impunity, and it was believed that they numbered in the thousands. The fate of Khuzdar is illustrative; from a thriving cultural centre, it is now a town whose people live in terror of disappearances, proxy death squads and in isolation and poverty. In Swat, women's feelings about the army have changed. The army was welcomed for its relief work and for its ability to counter the Taliban, but while feelings about the Taliban have remained unchanged, the army is now seen as creating inconvenience and insecurity without delivering a full defeat of the Taliban.

The culture of impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in patriarchal societies is reinforced by the long-term presence of armed forces—state or private—and by militarisation.

The culture of impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in patriarchal societies is reinforced by the long-term presence of armed forces—state or private—and by militarisation. In Kandhamal, India, during and after the riots, the police are accused of just standing by without helping. Survivors of sexual assault found it hard to file complaints and patronage networks were pressed into action, intimidating survivors so they retracted their complaints. The Tripura report lists a series of reported sexual and other attacks and most of the alleged perpetrators are from the security forces.

The experience of militarisation is all-pervasive

While women were unfamiliar with the idea of “militarisation” in theoretical terms they identified and articulated clearly the impact it had on their lives. Militarisation followed from the presence of any armed forces or armed groups, or the enforcement of emergency laws, but in some situations, there was a sense that some forces were better—or at least, somewhat more accountable—than others.

The entry of security forces into a situation initially improved the security situation, this sooner or later yielded to a deterioration as local residents were caught in the crossfire between the forces and armed groups. Moreover, as the civilian administration loses control over the security apparatus, impunity deepens insecurity. The Pakistan report offers the clearest illustration of this. In Balochistan, different ethnic groups had different experiences and views regarding the Frontier Constabulary. They were seen by some Hazaras as having saved lives, but for the most part, while the specific experience differed, they were not seen as contributing to a sense of security. In Swat, as we saw above, residents welcomed the security forces. One respondent said that the armed forces were irrelevant to women's insecurity, which began at conception. Others said they feared both the army and the Taliban.

In Kandhamal, women had specific complaints against the police and the Central Reserve Police Force. The police had failed to protect them during the riots and been complicit with the perpetrators. They were callous and insensitive and would not register complaints; moreover, they failed to arrest perpetrators, after carrying out half-hearted investigations. In Jammu and Kashmir, women reported sexual harassment by soldiers when they walked to school or work, and spoke about how they planned everything to avoid going out alone in the dark.

There was disagreement about the effectiveness of the military doing civilian work. While some felt that the military-run development projects were more efficiently executed, they were also seen to increase the vulnerability of an area. There was broad agreement that the military should not do development work. In Afghanistan, much development aid has been channelled through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) or the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Although efficient, participants pointed out that aid administered by armed men (from any force) contributed to the deterioration of the security situation and also the spread of corruption. In spite of the promise of protection held out by armed soldiers, accepting such aid placed recipients at risk of violence and intimidation by others. Their solution was to de-militarise aid, to make its administration more efficient and to engage more Afghans in the process. Moreover, the effectiveness of hearts-and-minds projects was limited by the disconnect between project design and ground realities. This, they felt, could be remedied by giving Afghans ownership over project design.

Militancy and counter-insurgency operations result also in easy access to arms; landmines are an ever-present threat. At more than one site, “forced disappearances” or rumours about them were powerful sources of disaffection towards the state. The Pakistan Report states that all the Baloch participants knew at least one person who “had been disappeared.” This reality looms large as if it were ‘thousands and thousands,’ and while the actual

numbers vary, they matter less than the impact of the disappearances on the Baloch people. Outrage over disappearances has displaced, at least in the minds of participants in the Community Conversations, the original causes—relative deprivation and exploitation—as the main grievance against the state. Abductions and “forced disappearances” by both state and non-state actors, as well as other forms of intimidation were common in Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura and in the Afghanistan sites as well. As the researchers write in the Jammu and Kashmir field report, “The LOC holds many stories of such brutally broken, expendable lives and the impunity with which the security forces and the government walk away.”

Another form of bullying and intimidation that is reported in places with a long-term army presence has physical, psychological and economic consequences. There is a story in the Jammu and Kashmir field report about an elderly man on a bus that was stopped by the army, who was asked to carry luggage and ammunition cases. He offered to hire someone else to do it, and was beaten for it. He has received no compensation. Where commercial areas are the targets for attacks and counter-attacks, families lose their only source of livelihood, in addition to losing earning members to injury or death. This is reported by participants from both Balochistan and Swat. Taliban representatives and supporters were told not to pay full rent to their landlords and to pay part of their earnings to the Taliban, participants from Swat said. Militarisation has thus brought poverty and loss of livelihoods in its wake.

Militias use military means to create insecurity in order to increase their leverage with the government. Women cynically speculated about collusion between security forces and the very armed groups they were supposed to be fighting being a reason for the impunity both enjoyed. In Tripura, demographic change that placed local tribal communities at a disadvantage in comparison to Bengali settlers was the main grievance. Over time, it is not the settlers that are the targets of insurgent groups, but other tribal groups (than their own). The field report from Tripura catalogues as a series of incidents and cases, the fate of women caught in the crossfire between armed groups and security forces in a situation which is in constant flux.

Militarisation affected people’s access to news and information about local circumstances. Cable operators were forbidden from offering news channels, for instance. People from Hub in Balochistan telephoned friends in Karachi to find out what was going on in their town.

Militarisation breaks trust within the community, and alienates people from the state. When conflict wages over a long period, people end up taking sides, and sometimes playing both sides. People who know you well turn informants, sharing what they

know about your beliefs and activities and making you vulnerable, participants in Pakistan said. When alliances re-group over a period of time, so do people in the community re-align. With the loss of trust, the social fabric—and the safety net it provides—disintegrate. The breakdown of the community increases the vulnerability of women.

Corruption is so endemic as to be normal.

WRN identified corruption as a key issue for our work. Across the three countries, women found corruption unremarkable because it was so pervasive that they did not think it could change. So much so, that Indian participants spoke about “efficient corruption,” where you pay a bribe and your work is done, and “inefficient corruption,” where you pay a bribe but it does not get done. By this yardstick, armed forces personnel are generally considered less corrupt and more efficient than politicians and private contractors.

The Pakistan report offers a taxonomy. Corruption was seen to take many forms—a violation of rights; not doing one’s job properly, lack of accountability; and sexual harassment. Sexual favours are one variety of bribe demanded in fragile, militarised situations. Lack of accountability facilitates many kinds of gender-based violence—acid attacks, trafficking, sexual violence within the household and sexual exploitation of those in need.

Militancy and militarisation have created new opportunities for corruption. When the military enters the civilian sphere, the opportunity and habits of corruption enter the military and the civilian sphere is securitised.

Across the three countries, women found corruption unremarkable because it was so pervasive that they did not think it could change.

Participants in Jammu and Kashmir spoke about “army dukan-daari,” or the army’s growing interest in local business. The army’s non-military expenditures spawn a parallel economy. The Jammu and Kashmir field report talks about the “wild money” injected into the local economy by small, unaccounted payments made to informers, for instance, that goes out into a patronage network. In Kandhamal, women said that in order to get a job card, they had to pay in advance a bribe which was a large percentage of what they would earn. Government schemes designed to help them, could only be accessed through the payment of bribes.

Militarisation advances at the cost of civilian authority. As the military takes on more civilian functions—like development and

infrastructure; as it appropriates land and property for its use, and as more governance matters are taken over in the name of security, civilian administration is sidelined. Accountability declines. Areas in India (Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura in this project) where the Armed Forces Special Powers Act is applied experience this, and this is one of the main grounds for the campaign against this law. However, even without a specific law, military encroachment on civilian authority results in a shrinking of civil rights, accountability and transparency.

When corruption intersects with militarisation, insecurity and patriarchy, for women the two most deadly consequences are the culture of impunity for violence they experience and poor access to justice. Women are disenchanted with state institutions which they find distant and indifferent.

UNDERSTANDING SECURITY, MILITARISATION AND CORRUPTION

When we embarked on the Community Conversations process, we did not walk in with canonical or standardized definitions of the three main ideas we wanted to explore. We wanted to let women share with us and shape the ideas about security, militarisation and corruption which would inform our work.

Security

Based on the Community Conversations across all the sites, the first sense in which women understand security is as freedom from personal and physical harm. That physical harm might arise due to a bomb blast, the proliferation of small arms and landmines, sexual harassment and violence or increased levels of gender-based violence.

Women also imagined security as a life without fear—for themselves and for others around them. Having to worry about others and their safety, every single day, was a source of insecurity for them.

It was only in Jagatsinghpur that women identified security with their land and livelihood. They seem to have overcome physical fear and anxiety in their commitment to their campaign.

Militarisation

As the Pakistan study points out, participants in the Community Conversations did not necessarily have a theoretical understanding of militarisation. They spoke of it in terms of how the prolonged presence of the military and non-state armed groups and/or protracted conflict affected their lives and their security.

Militarisation is marked by the entry of the military into the civilian sphere. In Afghanistan, the discussion centred around the involvement of various armed forces (Afghan and international) and illegal armed groups in development activities. In Pakistan, it was about the creeping military presence in civilian institutions and development activities. Accounts from the four Indian

sites illustrate the infringement of civil rights and basic freedoms, the loss of accountability, the creation of a parallel economy and patronage networks and increasing levels of violence.

Militarisation transforms the military into something like a civilian enterprise, as “hearts and minds” projects take on infrastructure management, development and even everyday administration. It also transforms the community into a garrison, in terms of the military presence and its appropriation of facilities for its use; in terms of the ability to enter and exit the community, and in terms of the degree of regulation. Militarisation sidelines the civilian authority.

Participants in the Community Conversations also made it clear that militarisation was not just about the impact of state forces, but also paramilitaries, foreign forces and illegal armed groups (or militant groups). Any group that carries arms and uses violence to enforce its will contributes to militarisation.

Corruption

Women who participated in the Community Conversations experienced corruption as a part of everyday life. They understood “corruption” to include several kinds of behaviour, from bribes to a failure to do one’s job to lack of accountability to sexual harassment to violation of rights. Like the idea of integrity, perhaps, the idea of corruption represents to the participants a way of being in the world and interacting with others.

In Pakistan, they speculated about the factors that fuel corruption—poverty at one end and lack of accountability on the other. Women felt corruption trickled down from the top echelons of government. In Afghanistan, women clearly saw insecurity and corruption as linked. Corruption is a cause and consequence of weak governance and in turn, alienates people from the state. This was underscored by Indian descriptions of the impact of corruption on society, affecting land rights, education, access to jobs, development schemes, compensation payments and food distribution.

Across the three countries, women who participated in the Community Conversations clearly saw poverty, conflict, militarisation, insecurity and corruption as interlinked and mutually reinforced.

MOVING FORWARD

Holding peace to be more than the absence of violence, and believing that security lies in freedom from fear and freedom from want, and that justice is inalienable from peace and security,

Members of the Women’s Regional Network affirm that:

- Women’s rights are a non-negotiable part of the peace agenda in any and every context;

- The full and meaningful participation of women in peace processes and dialogues at any level is a prerequisite for a just and sustainable peace;
- A peace that does not address the culture of impunity for sexual and gender-based violence and lay the foundation for accountability is a flawed peace.

And drawing on the findings of the Community Conversations and the recommendations developed by our country teams for the international community, their national government and civil society, recommend:

To the international community that it should:

- Ensure that women are present and have a voice in defining priorities for peace and transition processes overseen by international agencies;
- Make support—diplomatic, financial and technical—contingent upon the inclusion, representation and full and meaningful participation of women in peace and transition processes;
- Promote women’s rights based on existing conventions and resolutions, such as the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Security Council Women, Peace and Security Resolutions, namely, UNSCR 1325 and the supporting resolutions;
- Build capacity and offer assistance to national governments to comply with international norms and conventions relating to accountability, access to justice, human rights and gender equality.

To national governments that they should:

- Guarantee the full and meaningful participation of women in decision-making, especially in peace and transition processes, and the inclusion of their voices and concerns in the determination of national priorities;
- Comply fully in letter and spirit with international conventions and resolutions relating to women’s rights and gender justice;
- Repeal national and local laws and regulations and emergency ordinances that have the effect of restricting human rights, especially women’s rights, and security;
- Create, implement and monitor mechanisms to ensure accountability and access to justice;
- End impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in all situations, especially in conflict and militarised zones;
- Demilitarise civilian zones and administration; de-weaponise society; and de-politicise the security sector.

To civil society organizations that they should:

- Affirm women as important stakeholders in peace, whose participation is critical to the success of peace and conflict resolution processes at every level and to the long-term sustainability of that peace;
- Intensify advocacy for the full and meaningful inclusion and participation of women in decision-making processes, especially those relating to peace and transition;
- Recognize and articulate the root causes and evolution of conflicts from women’s perspectives and amplify their voices in the conflict and peace process;
- Build the professional capacity and confidence of women, beyond gender sensitization, and especially in the security sector, mediation, conflict resolution and conflict transformation;
- Project women leaders as role models for both women’s rights and professional life;
- Facilitate the coordination of women’s rights work and the protection of women working in the public sphere.

And informed by these recommendations, which also reflect WRN core values, *members of the WRN* have defined their priorities for action across the region, which are without prejudice to and do not rule out other national and local priorities and actions:

- Women’s participation in peace and security work will be a priority area for advocacy work in 2014-2016.
- Creating mechanisms for the protection of Women Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, in recognition of the considerable risk faced by women who work in the spheres of public policy and social change in political environments inimical to participation.

Without women, peace is a chimera. “With women” means listening to women talk about their experiences and needs, making and acting on a commitment to gender justice and facilitating and securing active and meaningful participation of women in peace, political and transitional processes. A peace built by everyone in a society, is a peace that truly belongs to everyone.

AFGHANISTAN

Surviving War And Transition: Perspectives From Afghan Women

Afghan women are extremely concerned about their status and safety in this period of transition. They acknowledge that some progress has been made since 2001, especially since the 2004 constitution and the 2009 law on violence against women, but for the road ahead, they emphasized the importance of education and awareness-building; the transformative role of civil society and religious leaders, and the need for women's active engagement in the public sphere. There was unanimity in the view that Afghans should drive reconstruction and development if Afghanistan was to secure a sustainable future.

PROCESS OF DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

In Afghanistan, WRN members visualized a dialogue-based research process. They partnered with EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD). A total of 40 Focus Group Discussions were organized, each featuring between four and six participants, five each in each of eight (out of the 34) Afghanistan provinces—Kabul, Balkh, Bamiyan, Faryab, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Kunduz. In other words, the Afghanistan Community Conversations engaged around 160 women, including high school and university students, teachers, health care workers, civil society activists, government workers and home-makers. The findings from the Focus Group Discussions were supplemented by key informant interviews at both national and provincial levels.

KEY FINDINGS

The gap between the reality of women's lives and government commitments can be attributed to insecurity, corruption and the use of international aid as an instrument of foreign policy—all of which are consequences of conflict.

On security

- Far from women's rights making progress, insecurity was a likely cause of their decline. How safe women felt depended on where they were; women in Kandahar felt least safe and women in Bamiyan felt safest. Generally, urban life was seen as safer.
- While home might be an Afghan woman's last refuge, women also spoke about violence within the home, forced marriage, honour killings, dispute settlement through exchange of girls and forced confinement to the home. Patriarchy and tradition are responsible for discrimination and security, as much as the conflict conditions that prevails.
- In the public sphere, "Afghan Local Police" and other armed groups empowered by the government as well as non-state

militias are the most common perpetrators of violence against women. Women were divided on whether local or foreign forces inspired more confidence.

- Deteriorating security has long-term consequences for the life-chances of Afghan girls and women, decreasing mobility, access to health and education while increasing the range and extremity of the violence they experience. Moreover, it strengthens the arguments of conservatives who would limit women's freedom. Absence of the rule of law and endemic corruption reinforce a culture of impunity.
- Participants saw the potential of religious leaders to be agents of change, given their influence over every aspect of life.

On corruption

- Corruption is seen as all-pervasive, and women make a clear link between insecurity and corruption. Further, corruption both arises from and reinforces weak governance. People lose faith in government and lose hope of change.
- Anecdote after anecdote reinforced the idea that corruption was unavoidable and that in addition to monetary bribes, women were often forced into sexual favours as bribes.
- All conflict parties use corruption to increase their advantages in a given position. Poverty and conflict make this possible.
- A substantial part of international aid has flown back out of Afghanistan through imports, contractors and consultancies. Aid delivered by foreign military forces is involving the military in humanitarian and development activities with detrimental consequences.
- "Lead from the front" echoed through the discussions; the fight against corruption depends on the removal of corrupt and tainted leaders.

On militarisation and effectiveness of aid

- Most participants felt strongly that for development initiatives to be successful and sustainable, they need to be driven by Afghans themselves. However, irrespective of who runs projects, stringent accountability mechanisms need to be embedded in their design.
- Participants were most concerned about militarisation through illegal militias. Insurgent groups use military means to create insecurity which then gives them leverage with government.
- Many thought the military delivered aid more quickly and efficiently. However, some strong reservations were also expressed. First, such aid rendered beneficiaries more vulnerable, as militias target such installations and their end-users. Second, those contracted by the military to do the work pocket the money to the detriment of the project.

- The effectiveness of aid as a military ‘hearts and minds’ project appears to be inconsistent. The real aim is then to leverage goodwill towards support for military purposes.
- Aid disbursed by the military was also regarded as not reflecting ground realities and not sustained.
- What would make such aid effective was Afghan civilian ownership, through involvement in conception, planning and execution.

Women in Afghanistan are living with extremely high levels of violence in both private and public spheres and with acute gender inequality, but insecurity, corruption and militarisation seem to preclude any change in this situation. There is cynicism about the prospects of peace. Nevertheless, they believe in the importance of asserting and expanding their agency—as an active part of civil society and also, by expanding women’s participation in the peace process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the international community

- Commit to and advocate women’s rights as a non-negotiable part of any international dialogues on peace;
- Continue to assist the government of Afghanistan in implementing its commitments to gender equality policies and laws, and in particular, the organs of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Bill (EVAW);
- Continue to provide capacity building and technical assistance and to hold accountable the justice and security sectors, for the protection and prevention of violence and abuse of women and girls;
- Ensure Afghan women are driving the agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment, taking the lead role in defining their legal, policy and social concerns and priorities, during the transition process and beyond.

To the Afghan government

- Ensure women’s rights are a non-negotiable part of the peace process and agenda.
- Commit to women’s meaningful and full participation at the negotiation table and in decision-making with regard to the peace, reintegration and reconciliation processes at every administrative level and in line with Constitutional guarantees;
- Refrain from supporting proposed laws and policies detrimental to women’s rights; these violate the Afghanistan Constitution and their international obligations and commitments with regard to women’s rights.

To civil society organisations

- Facilitate and promote coordination and cooperation on women’s rights work among individuals and organizations across locations and backgrounds.
- Project women leaders as role models for both women’s rights and professional life.
- Build the professional capacity and confidence of women to work beyond gender sensitization, in male-dominated sectors like the economy, security and judiciary.

PAKISTAN

Exploring Women’s Voices: Women in Conflict Zones: The Pakistan Study

Women experience conflict and militarised situations differently. Physical safety is uppermost in their mind, and this also means safety from sexual and gender-based violence, including violence in the home. However, assuming vulnerability to be their foremost experience might preclude giving them a chance to be agents of change. Protracted conflict lowers trust in state institutions and isolates women in their communities, and so does the combined impact of patriarchies at home and outside. Corruption is regarded as so pervasive as to be unremarkable. What concerned women more was access to justice; there were many barriers to this, some of which were mitigated by the work of local human rights organizations. Change is successfully strategized through dialogue that engages government, the security sector and civil society, takes on board women’s views and giving equal importance to national and human security.

PROCESS OF DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

WRN Pakistan chose to focus on Swat and Balochistan because conflict is ongoing in both locations, allowing a rare contemporaneous glimpse of the impact of conflict on women’s lives. Dr. Saba Gul Khattak and Dr. Nazish Brohi undertook the project on WRN’s behalf. Conflicts in both sites have historic underpinnings and both have been affected by the “War on Terror.” In Swat, the conflict is relatively contained both in terms of its location as well as the number of conflict parties (Tehrik-e-Taliban and the army). In Balochistan, multiple conflicts play out simultaneously—ethnic, sectarian, resource battles, for starters, and the role of the army is less well defined. The researchers used qualitative interviews with women and focus group discussions to gather data. In Balochistan, the group discussions engaged 22 professional women across ethnicities but based in Quetta; 20 young women between 18 and 30 years, from urban and semi-urban working class backgrounds, coming from five towns; 18 ethnically Baloch peasant women from three troubled areas; and conflict-displaced Baloch women. In-depth interviews were done with ten of these

women. In Swat, ten detailed interviews and one focus group discussion with 18 participants of diverse backgrounds were undertaken.

KEY FINDINGS

On security

Participants in the Pakistan Community Conversations process defined security primarily in terms of physical safety. Sexual and gender-based violence was integral to their definition of physical insecurity. Anxiety about safety and the consequences of insecurity were a corollary. Apart from the oppression of protection and control, rumours about rape and sexual violence as well as moral policing contributed to the insecurity climate in women's lives. Men are more vulnerable than women in conflict, while women are vulnerable to gender-specific threats. Assuming women are the most vulnerable might foreclose opportunities for women.

Balochistan: While participants said they had last felt safe as children, they agreed that children today grow up amid too much violence for that to be the case. Men's lives were at greater risk in conflict than women's. Working in the development or human rights sector was risky compared to a government job. For Hazara women, ethnicity rather than gender put them at risk. Women were punished at home for facing harassment outside. As acquaintances turn informers, trust broke down within the community. While security impaired women and girls' access to education and work, their creativity and determined resistance found solutions through efficient mobile use, traveling in groups, conservative dressing and pooling resources.

Swat: Women are both physically and psychologically vulnerable, the latter in the sense of worrying about the safety of their family members outside the home. The army presence was seen as a necessary protection, but paradoxically, increasing insecurity. Caught in the crossfire between the Taliban and the army, women faced intimidation (especially by acquaintances turned conflict partisans), moral policing and gender-based violence and anxiety pervaded every aspect of life. The deteriorating situation also traumatized children and the elderly. The presence and influence of the Taliban made rural areas less secure for women, but trade and livelihoods were affected everywhere by their arbitrary appropriation of property.

On militarisation

Some aspects of the army presence were seen as problematic, but women did not see militarisation as a system in itself. The more protracted a conflict, the lower the trust in the state, requiring longer-term interventions. Militarisation limits the flow of news and information, especially about political and geopolitical issues, however, women did hear about killings and disappearances.

Balochistan: The army's entry into a fragile situation hastens its deterioration, and the civilian administration's lack of control over the security apparatus made them both complicit in sustaining the climate of insecurity. Together, they have made a strong case for Baloch nationalism. Baloch women experienced intimidation and moral policing by security forces. Rural, non-literate women said poverty leads to conflict; urban, educated women said conflict leads to poverty. Forced disappearances, and related rumours, have become more important to participants than the central issue of relative deprivation and neglect. Both the security forces and the Taliban function with impunity, which is reinforced by the unwillingness and inability of the local authorities to enforce the law. People cope by relocating, by telephoning relatives outside to hear news updates and by marrying daughters earlier.

Swat: Women have gone from seeing the military as a saviour to believing that real peace will only follow its withdrawal. Here, the army has undertaken development projects and its work is considered superior. The army presents a relief to women whose rights, presence in the public sphere, mobility and access to services are opposed by the Taliban. However, human rights violations like incarceration and torture are noted. Participants sympathized with the displaced who were afraid to return, fearing what awaited them. Both sides were said to have raped women. Questions were raised about the relationship between the Taliban and the army and whether in fact, there was collusion between them on some matters.

On corruption

Corruption is so pervasive that women did not have much to say about it.

Balochistan: Participants were matter-of-fact about corruption being pervasive and everyone being complicit. While they were clear that all aid money was siphoned off, they did not know about specific cases and controversies. Inflation, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and lack of accountability were considered responsible for corruption at the local level. Further up the class ladder, people's powerlessness, the lack of accountability and the absence of deterrence mechanisms facilitated corruption. Professional women in the study thought problems originated at the federal level and trickled down. The insurgency and subsequent breakdown in law and order have caused a rise in crime.

Swat: Corruption was variously defined as: violation of rights; not doing one's job properly; lack of accountability; and sexual harassment and seen as occurring in two contexts, moral and financial. Trafficking of women into prostitution; sexual abuse of displaced women by those giving them shelter; sexual violence within the family faced during the absence of a husband who

departed in search of employment; and acid attacks—there was no accountability for violence against women. Siphoning off of funds; interference in the working of institutions; and bullying and intimidation—militancy has created opportunities for these. The army is seen as less corrupt than civilian contractors. Women are less corrupt, most respondents said, because they have less exposure to corruption in the public sphere and fewer resources for bribery. Raising children with awareness about corruption was seen as women’s main contribution to ending corruption.

On access to justice institutions

Women in Balochistan and Swat had quite contrasting perceptions of modern, state-centred justice institutions, with the former finding them alienating and the latter retaining faith in spite of the many barriers they listed. To the extent that private and public patriarchies work in synergy, they exacerbate women’s disenchantment with state institutions. Local human rights groups forging solidarity and coordinating collective action have made a difference.

Balochistan: Participants said they felt a sense of disconnect from state institutions. Only a woman who had no one else to turn to, would turn to the state, they felt. The state was not “pro-women” and its mediations regressive and alienating. Moreover, courts were seen as powerless and particularly distant from poor women’s lives. Traditional systems had the merit of not isolating women from their social networks and they did not require bribes.

Swat: Women from Swat saw modern law as holding out a fairer chance at justice even though educated, well-to-do women were not expected to go to courts and others met with harassment in their search for justice. What most women were concerned about was sexual harassment and rape within the family, especially within the marital home. Barriers to seeking justice include: ideas about shame and honour; stigma and the risk of being ‘supplied’ to influential people from shelters; discouraging police and lawyers; the tendency of men to settle disputes mutually and the lack of time, money, mobility and connections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Pakistan’s State

- **Promote** de-weaponization of society and de-politicization of the security sector.
- **Monitor** militarisation of bilateral and multilateral aid to ensure that it does not impact the democratic institutions, processes and cultures negatively.
- **Reconfigure** the national and social security paradigm from women’s perspective especially in crisis situations and include women in local, national, regional and international peace discourse.

- **Observe** activities of religious seminaries and mosques as a measure to end the propaganda of hatred.

Recommendations for civil society organisations

- **Locate, probe and understand** the evolution of conflicts from women’s perspective and amplify their voices in the conflict and peace process.
- **Affirm** women as important stakeholders in peace, whose participation is critical to the success of peace and conflict resolution processes at every level.
- **Build** women’s capacity in mediation, conflict resolution and conflict transformation.
- **Promote** disarmament, de-weaponization and de-nuclearization.

Recommendations for Regional and International Actors

- **Foster** productive relationships among women leaders in South Asia to build an enduring environment of inclusion, where women’s concerns and voices are integral to dialogues and agendas for peace and economic development, in conformity with the SAARC Social Charter.
- **Develop** Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa-specific programmes for political and economic development; protection and legal assistance for women and girls; education on reproductive health rights; and rights of the Hazara and other marginalized and threatened communities in Pakistan generally, and in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa specifically.
- **Invest** resources in peace, social cohesion, self-defence and personal security programs that reach out to educational institutions as well as the wider community.

INDIA

Unequal Citizens: Women's Narratives of Resistance, Militarisation, Corruption And Security (Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Tripura)

PROCESS OF DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

India Community Conversations (CC) brief was to focus on 'conflict affected areas'. It interpreted the notion of a conflict situation as broader than a 'militarised zone'. The result is a mix of conventional conflicts engaging with the border districts of Jammu & Kashmir and Tripura, peoples' democratic resistance movement against land acquisition and dispossession in Jagatsinghpur, and communal violence and its aftermath in Kandhamal, Odisha.

Data collection was done through a combination of methods— one-to-one interviews, home visits, focus group discussions, town hall meetings and structured seminars. Site visits were also undertaken and interviews done with affected women, civil society members and grassroots political leaders. On an average, each study drew on about 15-20 days of field research. The researchers were aware that reaching women without "going through the men" would be a challenge. The report flags the reality that research projects of this nature require sensitivity and pose risks to both researchers and their respondents, equally. Talking to women, in particular, poses an additional complexity in view of the patriarchal control within family, community and struggles.

MULTIPLE REALITIES OF WOMEN

The CCs demonstrated the gendered experience of women in conflict and its aftermath, which is rooted in the low social position of women. However, the CCs showed women to be survivors and agents in each site. On the one hand the sense of being unequal citizens ran through all the conversations, on the other hand, it showed that in the aftermath of crisis, it is women who continue to rebuild homes and lives. The CCs show that women's positions differed according to their location as members of a class, caste, ethnicity, religion or region. For women to be able to work together contributes to community co-existence, but gender solidarity cannot always be assumed as a given.

In the lives of women, violence is a continuum, widespread, all-pervasive respecting no boundaries. The continuum includes the everyday experience of violence and situations of violent conflict. While domestic violence is a reality in women's lives, faced with state and community violence women feel an internal pressure to not reveal their experience of such violence. Sexual violence is integral to conflicts, with violence against women's bodies used to humiliate, punish and destroy community "honour," and rather

than be positioned as a crime against women it continues to be framed as a question of "honour." In the particular case of the anti-POSCO struggle in Odisha, the instrumentalisation of women's bodies takes on another guise when the body itself becomes the strategy of resistance against the onslaught of the state forces (under pressure of male leadership).

The CCs revealed a noticeable gap in sustained investigation and documentation of violence against women, especially sexual violence. The social- legal construct of rape in the law and order system and the evidentiary difficulties inherent in a situation of mass politicized violence makes access to the normal structures of justice for the survivors a hugely challenging and indeed demoralising attempt.

Culture of Impunity

A climate of impunity prevails in all the sites of inquiry. Impunity is entrenched and operates in multi-faceted ways making access to justice a challenge for women and men, both in declared and undeclared 'disturbed areas'. For instance, undemocratic laws like the Armed Forces Special Power Act deny citizens fundamental freedoms and rights. The indifference and non accountability of state agencies has meant that women and men live with the knowledge that their perpetrators roam free. Conflict and militarisation destroys social cohesion, and with it, mutual trust; this reinforces the vulnerability of affected peoples especially women. What compounds the situation is the absence of accountability and justice mechanisms. Women's insecurities increase manifold owing to the proliferation of multiple armed actors state and non state.

Militarisation of Development

The intrusion of the security forces in civilian areas for 'development' activities undermines democratic civilian authority and makes peoples, especially women's access to basic needs more difficult. Moreover the army's priorities are strategic not developmental. The political economy of conflict and the militarisation of development assistance exacerbate the nexus between the military, business, bureaucracy and politicians.

Corruption

The CCs reflect a high degree of cynicism and demoralized resignation at the widespread and prevalent nature of corruption — which taints everything, hollowing out the education system, undermining land rights, access to jobs, welfare and development schemes, compensation entitlements. No sector is immune. In J&K people referred to "efficient corruption" and "inefficient corruption".

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prioritise** women's security and survival as the state is obligated under national and international legal frameworks to protect all its citizens.
- **Establish** zero-tolerance policy against sexual violence.
- **Develop** fast track mechanisms and a built in civic accountability structure to ensure justice and compensation for affected peoples.
- **Empower** women to directly address issues of security and militarisation by promoting their meaningful participation in decision making structures
- **Ensure** an end to impunity by all armed forces, state and non state, and justice for women who have survived human rights violations, ensure gender sensitive police and paramilitary training and increase women's access to legal aid.
- **Repeal** the Armed Forces Special Powers Act as it greatly impacts security and rights, particularly of women.

Resistance to Predatory Development: Jagatsinghpur, Odisha

- **Ensure** that every effort is made and possible action is taken to revoke the ownership of land pattas (entitlement documents and ownership patterns) of those families who under duress signed off their land rights for a meagre compensatory amount.
- **Take** immediate measures to resume schools, hospitals, etc. in the affected villages and all basic services are reinstated as people of the affected areas have been deprived of all these services as their fundamental right. In the name of development the area witness reinforced inequality of access and entitlement by the poor and the displaced.
- **Guarantee** the people's fundamental right to freedom of movement and abjure coercive practices such as arbitrary detention.

Aftermath of Communal Violence: Kandhamal, Odisha

- **Apply** the provisions of NREGA and other livelihood schemes of the government to women of the affected community, with no discrimination on the basis of caste, religion or gender. Act against those engaging in such discrimination or corruption; identify and allot jobs under NREGA that are better-suited to women, particularly those who are pregnant, physically ill, weak or elderly.
- **Identify** unreported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure their registration, investigation and prosecution. Take pro-active measures to prevent threat of sexual and gender-based violence to women survivors and their daughters, involved in various proceedings related to the communal violence as well as to women human rights defenders and social activists who assist them,

- **Create** accountability mechanisms for government officials who fail to discharge their duties with due diligence, including in promptly responding to and protecting women and girls, registration of their complaints related to sexual and gender-based violence and other crimes, investigation and prosecution thereof and in providing reparations in contexts of communal violence.
- **Incorporate** the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into the national policy framework of India, which addresses aspects including the rights and specific needs of women Internally Displaced Persons.

LOC: Rajouri-Poonch (Jammu & Kashmir)

- **Demilitarise** civilian zones, including schools, health centres and other public utilities.
- **Strengthen** mechanisms for maintaining the ceasefire at the Line of Control.
- **Sign and ratify** the International Landmines Convention (1996) and urgently address the issue of de-mining and the gendered implications of compensation, medical and livelihood support.

Fractured Society: Tripura

- **Promote** education, empowerment and leadership of tribal women within their communities, in political parties and within the Autonomous Tribal Council.
- **Facilitate** women's unity through inter-ethnic and inter-community roundtables with civil society (independent of government intervention) to identify common issues.
- **Ensure** that the Women's Commission adequately addresses the grievances and needs of indigenous women.
- **Ensure** that government schemes meant for indigenous women reach their intended beneficiaries.



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, India and Pakistan working together to strengthen women's rights to ensure peace and security in the region. WRN is animated by a vision of women working collaboratively within and across borders, to listen to and learn from each other to construct a common agenda towards equitable and sustainable development in building a just peace.

At its launch, members of the Network identified interlinked areas of concern—militarization, extremism, corruption and lack of security—as a priority for all three countries. WRN networks in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are autonomous but work in close coordination with each other. Network members in each country have invited others to join and establish working relationships with individuals and organizations working for women's rights in their respective countries.



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK
AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA

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