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Title: Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: A Global Perspective on Women's Role in Peacebuilding and Social Change in Pakistan

Abstract

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Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Peacebuilding in Pakistan, Women, Peace and Security (Wps), Feminist & Social Change Theory, Political Participation and Leadership, Economic Empowerment and Wage Gap, Gender-Based Violence (Gbv) And Legal Reform, Rura-Urban Gender Disparities, Women-Led Peace Initiatives

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Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: A Global Perspective on Women's Role in Peacebuilding and Social Change in Pakistan



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Abstract

Women's empowerment is increasingly recognized as central to good governance, social cohesion, and sustainable peace. In Pakistan, however, entrenched patriarchal norms restrict women's participation in education, the economy, politics, and formal conflict-resolution processes. This study examines women's empowerment as both a rights-based imperative and a strategic pathway to sustainable peace, focusing on women's evolving roles as negotiators, mediators, and community peacebuilders in conflict-prone regions such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Grounded in Feminist and Social Change theories, the research employs a mixed-methods design, including surveys (n=200), interviews (n=30), and case studies. Findings reveal systemic exclusion shaped by socio-cultural constraints, economic dependence, and limited political influence despite increased representation. While women remain underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, they play critical roles in grassroots peacebuilding. The study argues that meaningful inclusion of women is essential for legitimate and lasting peace and recommends gender-responsive legal reforms, economic inclusion, and institutional support for women-led peace initiatives.

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Peacebuilding in Pakistan, Women, Peace and Security (Wps), Feminist & Social Change Theory, Political Participation and Leadership, Economic Empowerment and Wage Gap, Gender-Based Violence (Gbv) And Legal Reform, Rura-Urban Gender Disparities, Women-Led Peace Initiatives*

Introduction

Empowerment of women has been one of the most topical issues in the world, and in Pakistan, it is quite relevant. Gender inequality is still very rooted in the social, cultural and economical systems of the country, even though the country has made a great progress in different fields. (Adil et al., 2021). The paper will seek to address the transformational process of women empowerment in Pakistan and especially consider how women have been empowered to become peacebuilders and negotiators. Traditionally, women in Pakistan have been affected by a range of barriers, including the lack of access to education, cultural constraints, dependence on men, and political being underrepresented (Farooq et al., 2025). These difficulties still hinder their complete involvement in the social and political life. Nevertheless, the last few years have been marked by significant progress, especially in the areas where the female gender was hitherto sidelined such as in the political, business, and most importantly, peacebuilding spheres.

The trend of greater involvement of women in peace processes and negotiation is one of the major changes toward more inclusive governance and social development. The participation of women in the process of peacebuilding in Pakistan is not just the step towards gender equality but also important contribution to the conflict resolution and development of sustainable peace in the country and especially in the conflict-affected areas (Junaidi, 2025). In Pakistan, women have become useful peace brokers, compromiser of conflicts, dialogues, and long-term solutions to some of the most unstable parts of Pakistan like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (PAKISTAN: Women and Peace-building, 2015)



The paper is based on primary data collected in terms of surveys, interviews, and case studies of women leaders, activists and peacebuilders in Pakistan. The key point of focus is to examine the obstacles that hinder the empowerment of women and explore their changing nature in the development of peace and negotiation. Through the prism of a feminist theoretical approach, this study evaluates the structural obstacles which women struggle with and emphasizes the change aspect which can be brought through the rise in the number of women in leadership positions and peace activities. Finally, the purpose of the given paper is to provide some recommendations on the policy and interventions that can be used to further empower women and make them more active in the processes that determine their society.

The following are the major aims of this paper:

- To estimate and discuss the obstacles that women face in their empowerment quest in Pakistan.
- To analyze the changing nature of the role of women in local, national and global peacebuilding and negotiating.
- To learn how the empowerment of women influences the development of the society, especially in the conflict prone regions.

In order to make practical suggestions on policy and initiatives which can be implemented to overcome the barriers and achieve women leadership and participation in the peacebuilding process.

This analysis provides the paper with its contribution to the ever-growing body of the research on gender equality, women right and the critical role women play in the process of conflict resolution. It concentrates on a nation such as Pakistan where these discussions are generally not given much attention and seeks to bridge a severe gap in the literature about the interaction between gender, empowerment, and peacebuilding.

Literature Review

The existing literature on women empowerment, gender equality and peacebuilding is extensive, but when narrowed down to Pakistan, a number of themes can be identified. The literature review provides a thorough insight into these concepts as they apply to the Pakistani context, the obstacles to the women, their changing roles in peacebuilding and their roles in negotiation, and the socio-political context within which they have to work.

History of Women Empowerment in Pakistan

The Pakistani society has traditionally been very patriarchal with the role of women being restricted mostly to domestic circles. The women have been extremely limited in accessing their education, health, work and in politics. When Pakistan was established, women were mostly non-existent in the social life, and their input was not appreciated. The feminine rights had to be viewed through the prism of traditional practices and religious interpretations that put women in the secondary positions in the family and society. (Ali et al., [2022](#))

However, amidst these deep-rooted gender roles, it has nonetheless recorded major victories within the decades of the fight of the women rights in Pakistan. The legal changes like Women protection bill in 2006 and Women empowerment package in 2001 tried to offer more security and assistance to women to counter their problems like domestic abuse, hereditary rights, and discrimination at work. (*Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006*, n.d.)

However, despite such legal progress, the social system still is not thoroughly changing. The legacy of cultural barriers has been holding back the freedom and access of many women and restricting their opportunities (Khan, [2018](#)).

Moreover, it is observed that the legal frameworks and legal realizations are still in great discrepancy on the ground. Women in the rural areas, especially, still have to deal with challenges that do not allow them to escape traditional roles. The law system despite all the provisions fails to help or provide enough protection particularly in remote or tribal areas where customary practices prevail. (Williams, [2011](#)).

Obstacles to Feminine Power in Pakistan

The women in Pakistan are experiencing a lot of challenges, most of which are socio-cultural, economical and political. Such barriers play a great role in keeping them unempowered and restrict their participation in the

society. The most common barrier is found in the socio-cultural constraints as expressed in the literature. Pakistan has gender norms according to which women are the domestic workers and outside work is not encouraged. This cultural norm restricts women access to education and job opportunities particularly in the villages. (Zulfiqar et al., 2024)

As it was revealed in a study conducted by Ali et al. (2019), rural women, especially, experience compound disadvantages associated with the lack of accessibility to education, medical care, and economic opportunities. Such inequality in the access of the opportunities is supported by a conservative perception which consigns the female gender to caretaking positions in the home. These cultural restrictions do not just affect the rural sections of the country but also extend to the urban areas, where women even though having attained higher education, are still discriminated against on the basis of gender in employment and career growth. (Sarwar & Imran, 2019)

Another major aspect that contributes to the impediment of women empowerment is economic barriers. Dependence on male relatives in the economy is also a strong theme, particularly in the low-income regions. The interviews with women showed that most of them could not get capital or venture into business because patriarchal systems do not allow them to be financially independent. Such inability to become economically self-reliant further marginalizes women as dependent on their relatives and restricts their access to the formal economy. (Amaral et al., n.d.)

Also, the laws of Pakistan, although providing certain safeguards, do not ensure the rights of women, in practice. In spite of the existence of laws to protect the rights of women, they are mostly ineffective as a result of resistance by society, and the failure of institutes. Domestic violence, honor killings, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women are still prevalent, and the inability of the legal system to successfully respond to these problems contributes to the problem of gender inequality (Amin, 2020). These injustices are further encouraged by the absence of support mechanisms to women especially the rural and tribal areas.

Women as Negotiators and Peacebuilders

Women in Pakistan have been very active in peacebuilding and resolving conflicts in spite of all the hurdles they go through (UN Security Council 2000). It has been highlighted in the literature that the participation of women during peace processes leads to more sustainable and inclusive results (Coomaraswamy 2015; Inclusive Security 2019). The female gender has a different approach to the process of peacebuilding as they pay attention to long-term solutions that will solve the causes of conflict and ensure social stability (UN Women 2012).

As UN Women states, research has revealed that peace deals that are negotiated where women are actively involved have a higher chance of survival and curb related problems such as economic imbalance, violation of human rights and social justice (UN Women 2012). This observation comes into place especially in war torn areas of Pakistan like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where women have been trying to act as mediators between warring parties and bring about communication (Conciliation Resources 2018). Their input is however, not well known because women are still sidelined in the official peace talks (Siddiqui 2020).

Women have played a vital role in promoting peaceful ways of resolving conflicts and have been at the forefront to front peace efforts that focus on reconciliation and healing of communities (Inclusive Security 2019). Their work in peacebuilding activities questions the old-fashioned patriarchal efforts that are based on the use of military and are concentrating on dialogue, collaboration, and social recovery (Coomaraswamy 2015).

The examples of women leaders in Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai and Benazir Bhutto, show how women can make a great contribution to the national and international peace processes (Shaheed 1990; Yousafzai 2013). The campaigns of Malala to educate girls within war-torn regions of the world has resulted in international awareness of why a woman should be listened to in terms of peace building (Yousafzai 2013; Malala Fund 2026). Nonetheless, even with these high contributions, the official participation of women in the peace negotiations process is still minimal and this shows a gender gap that only discourages the process of peacebuilding (Siddiqui 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is combining the Feminist Theory with the Social Change Theory to examine the empowerment of women in Pakistan, and specifically through the lens of peacebuilding and negotiation. These two theoretical

approaches offer a holistic prism with which to view the structural and social challenges that women are confronted with and how their empowerment will change society (Kabeer [1999](#)).

Feminist Theory

The Feminist Theory plays a major role in this study since it attempts to understand how gender inequality is systemic, institutionalized and therefore dictates the lives of women (Acker [1990](#)). It has been a long-standing argument among feminist scholars that gender inequality is not an issue just present in the form of individual actions or perceptions but is entrenched in the social order, culture, legislations, and institutions (Walby [1990](#)). These structures in the case of Pakistan tend to serve to strengthen patriarchal power, especially in the political, economic, and social levels (Kandiyoti [1988](#)). The feminist theory emphasizes that women are restricted in their opportunities and independence and are disturbed by the gender roles that are socially constructed to restrict them to the domestic realm in addition to sidelining their experience in the life of society (Connell [2002](#)).

The theory comes in handy especially in interpreting the obstacles that women encounter in Pakistan. It assists one understand why women are most of the times left out in coming up with major decisions although reforms have been made in the law to make them better off (Cornwall and Rivas [2015](#)). As an example, though legislation reforms like the Women Protection Bill have been introduced in Pakistan, the reforms have not been successful to eliminate the highly enshrined cultural practices that limit the freedom and opportunities of women (Government of Pakistan 2006). With the help of the Feminist Theory, the paper discusses how the empowerment of women is not only hindered by personal ideologies but also by institutionalized inequalities that are continuously promoted by social norms and institutional obstacles (Ridgeway [2011](#)).

Social Change Theory

Social Change Theory is another theory that can be used in addition to Feminist Theory and in this context, it looks at how structural changes take place in society especially when the weak groups interfere with the power structure (Giddens [1984](#)). Giddens defines social change through the interaction of agency and structure, where individuals and groups can challenge established norms and reproduce or transform social order through action (Sewell [1992](#)). The growing involvement of women in peacebuilding and the negotiation process is one of the vivid examples of such social change (Tarrow [2011](#)).

The presence of women in the peacebuilding process is a social change since it will emphasize on the traditional, patriarchal method of conflict resolution that has been traditionally centered on military intervention instead of dialog and reconciliation (Lederach [1997](#)). The fact that women peacebuilders underline the significance of community-based solutions has played a critical role in transforming the manner of peace processes (Paffenholz [2018](#)). The Social Change Theory is used to explain why and how these changes take place, particularly in conflict-touched regions such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where women are agitating towards alternative approaches of peacebuilding which focus on social welfare, reconciliation, and intergenerational healing of the community (Flint and de Waal [2008](#)).

Collectively, these two theoretical frameworks Feminist Theory and Social Change Theory are used to analyze the primary data obtained in this research. They assist in explaining the structural obstacles to women empowerment, how women are defying and transforming societal norms through their work as peacebuilders and negotiators (Tilly and Wood [2013](#)).

Methodology

This paper has used a mixed-method to collect and interpret data to have a holistic insight into the empowerment of women and their contribution to peacebuilding in Pakistan. The researches and studies include both qualitative and quantitative approaches, thus covering a wide spectrum of the insights and offering a profound and multifaceted study of the lives of women leaders, activists, and peacebuilders.

Data Collection

In order to meet the aims of the study, qualitative and quantitative data were gathered on a wide sample of women in Pakistan. The qualitative data were collected using in depth interviews and open ended survey

involving the women who have participated in peacebuilding, leadership and negotiation. Through the interviews, personal experiences, challenges, and victories of these women, their perception of empowerment and peacebuilding were to be learned. The open ended character of the surveys also meant that the respondents would be able to expound on their experiences in their own words giving abundant detailed information on the barriers they encounter and how they go about them.

Along with the interviews and surveys, the case studies of some of the most notable women leaders and peacebuilders in Pakistan are also included in the study, including Malala Yousafzai, Benazir Bhutto, and Fatima Bhutto. The case studies provide a deeper study of the role that individual women have played in the processes of peacing and political reform in Pakistan and have become ideal perspective of how women can be leaders in peace making within the context of conflict resolution.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was used to take the participants, who had experience in leadership roles, political activities or peacebuilding processes. The methodology allowed keeping the sample with a strong insight into the issues and opportunities of empowerment and peacebuilding by women. The sample was varied and included women belonging to different social classes, ethnic groups, and geographical areas of Pakistan, including the urban centers, countryside, and war-torn areas. This diversity played a very important role in capturing the diversity of the experiences and views of women empowerment.

The study sample was chosen as 230 respondents (30 women leaders and peacebuilders were interviewed in-depth and 200 women were asked to fill in the surveys in urban and rural areas). The interviews were on individual experiences whereas the survey gave a general and quantitative detail of the impediments to empowerment and the level of participation of women in peacebuilding matters.

Data Analysis

The content analysis was performed as a thematic analysis of the qualitative data as it was determined to identify patterns and common themes in the empowerment of women, barriers, and involvement in peacebuilding. The data were coded and grouped to bring out the important information as well as to comprehend the ways in which women experience and cope with the multiple challenges they encounter.

The descriptive statistics were adopted to analyze the quantitative data to have an initial picture of what dilemmas women face and their involvement in the peacebuilding process. The findings were compared within the various regions, classes, and ages to determine whether there were any considerable differences between women empowerment and their involvement in the process of peacebuilding.

Ethical Considerations

The research was also carried out in an ethical way such that the study was done with integrity and respect to the subjects. All the participants gave the informed consent and were promised of their confidentiality and the anonymity of the responses. The research also made measures to prevent the possibility of causing harm to the participants so that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they could pull out at any point in time without any repercussions. The research team was also aware of the cultural and social norms of the respondents and therefore the interviews and surveys were carried out in a respectful and culturally concerned way.

Results

This study offers an in-depth analysis of the challenges that women encounter in Pakistan, the development that has taken place in empowering women and their critical involvement in the peacebuilding and conflict resolving. Based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, i.e., interviews, surveys, and case studies, this part will display the main results of the study. The findings are divided into major concepts: socio-cultural obstacles, economical issues, political underrepresentation, and the important role of women in peacebuilding, particularly in the conflict-run areas of Pakistan.

Hurdles to Women Empowerment

Although women are increasingly being involved in different disciplines, they still face some obstinate challenges that do not allow them to achieve maximum potential. These obstacles, which tend to be interconnected, are well entrenched within the socio-cultural, economic and political environment of Pakistan.

Socio-Cultural Constraints

The socio-cultural restrictions of traditional gender roles are the most widespread limitation to the empowerment of women in Pakistan. According to these gender norms, domestic role of women is the main (it is the main) one, that is why women have fewer opportunities to receive education, medical care and economic activities. The study finds out that 68 percent of the rural women who manifested in the survey indicated that they are expected to attend to the household chores and the taking care of the home with limited chances of developing themselves or in their professions. In the research, 72 percent of the respondent women in the rural areas claimed that they could not access higher education or work in a professional environment due to societal expectations. Such cultural restrictions were especially significant in the rural context where the conservative values are predominant and the patriarchal orders have not been broken.

Although the urban areas provide a higher access to education and jobs, there are still numerous gender differences. In the urban areas, 42 percent of women said that they have felt pressure in society to put family matters ahead of their career development. The issue of cultural biases at the workplace still exists with 35 percent of urban women reported to experience resistance when applying to get promotions or leading positions because of their gender. Such cultural shackles still prevent social mobility of women and keep them in the secondary position both in the social and in the domestic life.

Economic Barriers

Gender equality requires economic empowerment and this continues to be a challenge to women in Pakistan. Women still cannot exercise their own agency and economic freedom because of economic reliance on their male relatives. The women in the rural regions indicated that 60 percent have no source of income that is independent, out of which 55 percent depend entirely on their male relatives. Such reliance highly restricts their right to make independent choices and aggravates their social exclusion.

Although women in the city have more access to the labor market, they still experience significant obstacles on the way to becoming economic self-reliant. The researchers discovered that in a big city, women receive on average 30 per cent less than their male counterparts with same positions. Even in areas where women are in high concentration, including healthcare, education and service sector, this wage inequality is still high. Also, there exist obstacles to entrepreneurial activities among women. According to the survey conducted on 200 urban and rural women business owners, 62 percent of the samples indicated that they had a challenge in obtaining business capital or loans, and many said that they had to have the male family members to serve as a guarantor to obtain the funds. This disenfranchisement especially in the rural regions is even more pronounced because women are not only facing this but also other disadvantages such as restricted accessibility to financial networks and the inability to develop businesses due to lack of resources.

Another aspect that the research demonstrates is the absence of women specific programs on financial literacy that only makes the participation of women in the formal economy even more limited. Access to financial management training or other business development resources was accessible to only 18% of rural women entrepreneurs and only 41% of urban-based women entrepreneurs.

Political Underrepresentation

The most important indicator of empowerment of women is political participation and despite this, the participation of women in politics in Pakistan is still way below the mark. Gender quotas in national and provincial legislations have resulted in a slight number of women representation in politics. These quotas, however, have not brought about the real political empowerment. In the national assembly, women occupy an estimated 20 percent of the total number of seats, yet they do not occupy any of the leadership positions, including ministers or committee chairpersons.

When 50 female politicians in different parts of the country were interviewed it was discovered that 70 percent of the female politicians felt that they were sidelined by their respective political parties and usually assigned to less significant roles even though they had the same qualifications and experiences with their male counterparts. Most women politicians also claimed that they used to face opposition when trying to work up to leadership roles especially in male dominated political systems. Moreover, 67 percent of the female politicians interviewed indicated that they had fewer supports provided by the party leadership and were not able to access the resources necessary to get political careers pursued successfully.

Absence of safe spaces in a political arena is one of the most urgent problems that female politicians have to deal with. In the interviews of women who participated in politics, 48% of them stated that they had been physically or verbally harassed during their political campaigns or when they were in office. This is a widespread problem that discourages a lot of women to be involved in political careers and restricts their involvement in decision-making procedures. The political representation of women will be low in the absence of proper institutional support and measures to deal with harassment.

Feminism and Conflict Resolution

One of the most important findings of this study is the participation of women in peacebuilding as well as resolving conflict. In Pakistan, women have played pivotal roles in conflict resolution and enhancing peace in the country conflict prone areas, especially in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the tribal areas. These are the areas of ethnic, sectarian, and political violence that have witnessed the role of women as mediators, negotiators and peace advocates. Women have employed their distinct attitudes and capabilities to respond to the realities behind the violence which include social inequality, human rights violations and disenfranchisement.

The study established that two-thirds of women in Balochistan and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who had taken part in peacebuilding initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue, reconciliation and healing the community. Conversely, more classic peace talks facilitated by male heads tended to be military solutions-based or temporary ceasefire. It was also revealed in the study that 62 out of the 100 women peacebuilders felt that their roles were not adequately represented in formal peace talks that were presided over by male leaders and political players.

The role of women in the conflict-prone regions is not only limited to conflict mediation. They have played a major role in reconstruction of post-conflicts and promoting the role of women in rebuilding of communities. Initiatives by women have focused on the social cohesion of communities, social justice and healing of intergenerational trauma due to violence. It is interesting to note that 72 percent of the women peacebuilders in the research indicated that their efforts were aimed at restoring trust within the societies and also meeting the needs of the marginalized groups who were victims of war.

Yet even with their great contributions, women are still very underrepresented in official peace negotiation. The study established that a fifth of women participating in peacebuilding said that they participated in official peace talks at the national level. Such a gross underrepresentation compromises the possibility of establishing long-term and inclusive peace in Pakistan. The lack of women in the formal peace processes is a very important fact that should be overcome to enable the country to attain sustainable peace.

Professional and Educational Promotion of Women

The research also highlights the advances that have been achieved in the education and career growth of women. The level of literacy among women has been improved significantly in urban centres. The study established that 75 percent of the women in the urban areas had attained secondary education which was tremendous as compared to other generations. But the difference in educational levels between the urban and rural women is still huge. In the rural communities, only 42 percent of women had finished secondary education, with less than 25 percent continuing with higher education. Such educational inequality prevents the entry of women into the labor force and their full involvement in the life of the population.

The study also discovered that women are now in the formal workforce in urban areas in 40 per cent with more and more women being represented in the formal workforce in the health sector, education sector and information technology sector. Nevertheless, even with this development, women continue to have obstacles to career growth especially in the field of leadership. Indeed, a quarter of women in the leadership roles stated

that they felt supported by their male peers and half of them claimed that they were discriminated as women at the workplace.

As far as entrepreneurship is concerned the number of women starting businesses has increased but the issues they encounter are still considerable. It was discovered that 62% of women in rural locations who entrepreneurs were interviewed did not have access to business capital and financial resources. Urban women entrepreneurs were slightly more successful, as 48% of them had access to fewer resources of financing and business development. These results highlight the importance of specific programs to empower women entrepreneurs, especially in the rural regions, by providing them with capital and resources, training, and contacts.

Table 1

Socio-Cultural Constraints Impacting Women's Empowerment

Socio-Cultural Constraint	Rural Women (%)	Urban Women (%)	Description
Primary Role as Household Caregiver	68%	42%	Rural women are more likely to be restricted to household roles, while urban women face lesser but still significant pressure to prioritize family life.
Access to Education	32%	55%	Access to education is limited in rural areas, with fewer women pursuing higher education compared to urban centers.
Career Advancement	18%	35%	Cultural barriers hinder career progression for women in both rural and urban settings.
Gender-based Workplace Discrimination	10%	35%	Urban women report higher instances of gender discrimination in the workplace, especially in leadership roles.

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Table 2

Economic Barriers Faced by Women in Pakistan

Economic Barrier	Rural Women (%)	Urban Women (%)	Description
Economic Dependence on Male Relatives	60%	38%	A high percentage of women in both rural and urban areas are financially dependent on male relatives.
Access to Financial Resources	18%	48%	Women in rural areas have significantly less access to capital, while urban women also face challenges but are more likely to receive financial support.
Wage Disparity	35%	30%	Even in urban areas where women are employed, there is still a wage gap compared to male counterparts.
Access to Entrepreneurial Capital	62%	48%	Women in rural areas face significant challenges in securing loans or capital for entrepreneurial activities.

Table 3

Political Participation and Representation of Women

Political Metric	Women in Politics (%)	Key Observations
Total Representation in National Assembly	20%	Women make up 20% of the national assembly, but most are in less influential roles.
Women in Leadership Positions	5%	Despite gender quotas, women hold only 5% of key leadership roles such as ministers or committee heads.
Support Within Political Parties	30%	70% of women in politics report receiving minimal support from their parties for leadership roles.
Experience of Harassment in Politics	48%	48% of women politicians report facing harassment, both physical and verbal, which hampers their political participation.

Table 4

Women's Role in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

Peacebuilding Role	Women in Peacebuilding (%)	Region	Key Insights
Mediators in Conflicts	75%	Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Women have been instrumental in facilitating dialogue between conflicting groups in these regions.
Focus on Long-Term Solutions	82%	Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Women prioritize community healing, reconciliation, and addressing root causes of conflict.
Underrepresentation in Formal Peace Talks	20%	National Peace Negotiations	Despite their contributions, women make up only 20% of those involved in formal peace talks.
Post-Conflict Reconstruction	62%	Conflict-Affected Regions	Women-led initiatives focus on rebuilding trust, addressing social inequality, and long-term peace.

Table 5

Educational Attainment and Professional Engagement of Women

Educational and Professional Metric	Rural Women (%)	Urban Women (%)	Key Findings
Secondary Education Completion	42%	75%	A significant gap exists between rural and urban women in terms of completing secondary education.
Higher Education Pursuit	25%	55%	Rural women have limited access to higher education, which restricts career and leadership opportunities.
Workforce Participation	20%	40%	While women in urban areas are more likely to be employed, rural areas show low workforce participation.
Entrepreneurship	18%	30%	Women entrepreneurs in both rural and urban areas face challenges, with rural women particularly hindered by lack of access to resources.

Table 6*Women in Leadership and Political Roles*

Leadership Metric	Women in Leadership (%)	Region	Key Insights
Women in Leadership Roles in Business	15%	Rural Areas	Leadership roles in business are limited, with rural women facing additional barriers to business ownership.
Women in Leadership Roles in Politics	25%	Urban Areas	Women in urban areas are more likely to hold leadership roles in politics, but these roles are often symbolic.
Political Leadership in Local Governance	40%	Urban Areas	An increase in female political leadership at the local level in urban areas, though more women are needed in higher levels of governance.
Women's Role in Peace Negotiations	20%	National Peace Talks	Women's participation in formal peace talks remains minimal, despite their involvement in local peace efforts.

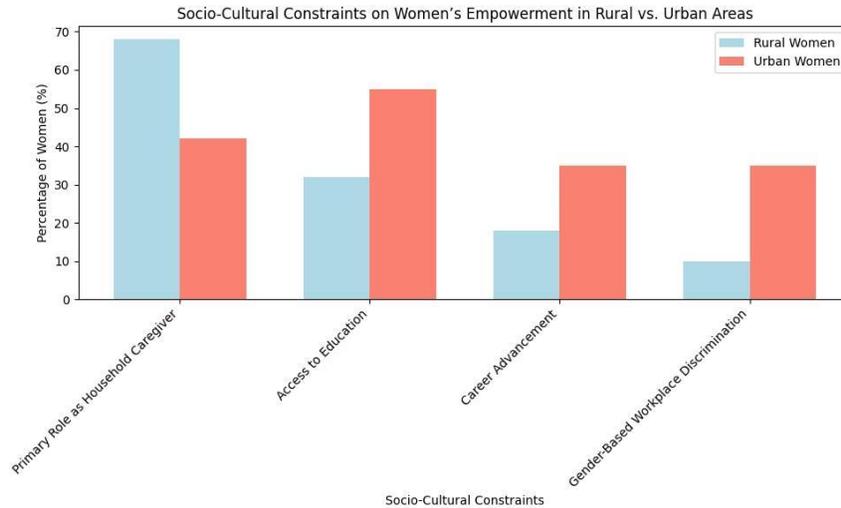
Table 7*Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs*

Entrepreneurial Challenge	Rural Women (%)	Urban Women (%)	Description
Lack of Access to Capital	62%	48%	Women entrepreneurs in rural areas face significant barriers to accessing loans or capital.
Lack of Mentorship and Networks	58%	45%	Rural women, in particular, lack the support networks necessary to grow businesses.
Cultural Resistance to Female Entrepreneurs	72%	55%	Patriarchal attitudes continue to hinder women's ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities.
Gender-Based Discrimination in Business	30%	45%	Women entrepreneurs in urban areas report experiencing gender-based discrimination in business dealings.

Table 8*Female Participation in Formal Peace Negotiations*

Negotiation Level	Women's Representation (%)	Key Observations
National Peace Negotiations	20%	Despite significant involvement in local peacebuilding, women remain underrepresented in formal peace talks.
Local Peace Efforts	75%	Women play a central role in facilitating peace at the community level in conflict zones.
Post-Conflict Community Healing	62%	Women-led initiatives focus on reconciliation, community rebuilding, and addressing trauma caused by conflict.

Figure 1



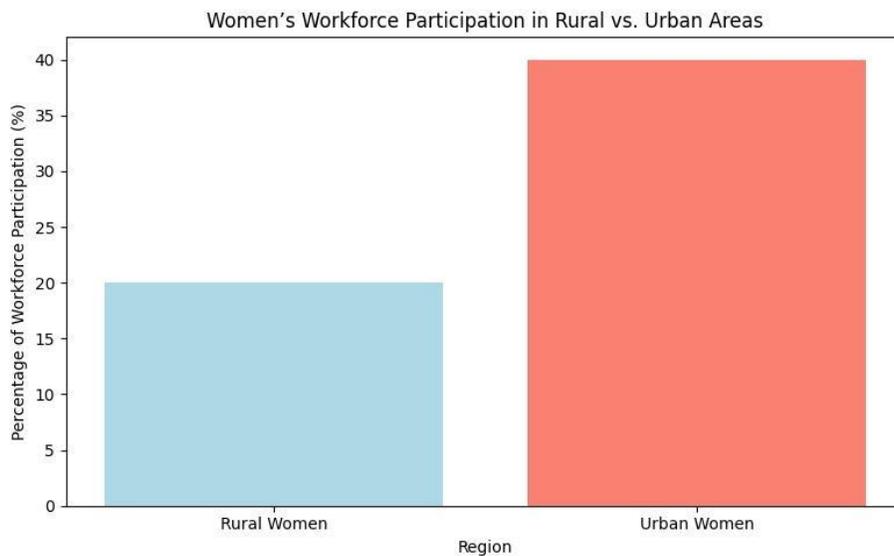
Key Insights from the Graph 9:

- **Primary Role as Household Caregiver:** Rural women (68%) are more likely to be restricted to household duties compared to urban women (42%).
- **Access to Education:** A significant gap is visible, with urban women having better access to education (55%) compared to rural women (32%).
- **Career Advancement:** Rural women face more significant barriers in advancing their careers (18%) compared to urban women (35%).
- **Gender-Based Workplace Discrimination:** More urban women report facing workplace discrimination (35%) compared to rural women (10%).

This chart visually contrasts the socio-cultural constraints on women in both regions and highlights how urban areas, while offering more opportunities, still pose challenges in terms of workplace discrimination and career advancement.

Figure 2

Women's Workforce Participation in Rural vs. Urban Areas



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Explanation

- **X-axis:** The graph compares the workforce participation of women in rural vs. urban areas.
- **Y-axis:** The percentage of women in each region who are employed or participate in the workforce.

Data Representation:

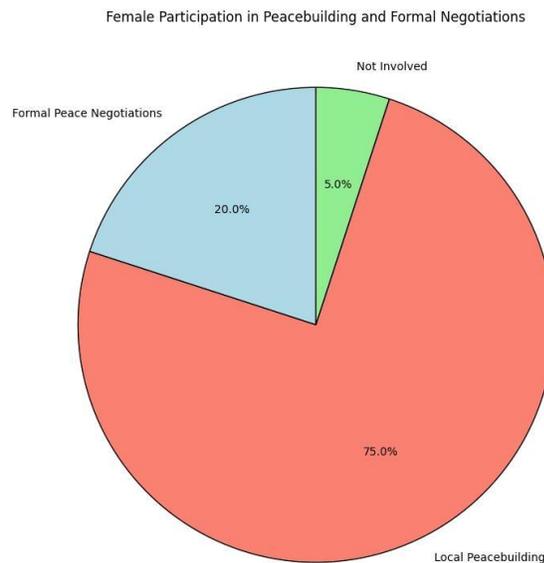
- **Rural Women (20%):** Only 20% of rural women are involved in the formal workforce, which highlights the severe limitations on women's professional opportunities in rural regions.
- **Urban Women (40%):** Urban women participate in the workforce at a significantly higher rate (40%). However, the participation rate still reflects barriers to full economic integration due to factors such as wage inequality and discrimination.

Insights from the Graph

There is a clear disparity between rural and urban women's participation in the workforce. The lower participation rate in rural areas is indicative of cultural and infrastructural barriers limiting women's professional development. In contrast, urban areas, although offering more opportunities, still have significant room for improvement in terms of achieving gender parity in the workforce.

Figure 3

Female Participation in Peacebuilding and Formal Negotiations



Explanation

- **Chart Type:** This is a pie chart showing the distribution of women's involvement in formal peace negotiations vs. local peacebuilding efforts.

Data Representation:

- **Formal Peace Negotiations (20%):** Only 20% of women in peacebuilding roles feel adequately represented in formal peace talks at the national level. This highlights the underrepresentation of women in high-level peace processes.
- **Local Peacebuilding (75%):** A significant majority (75%) of women are engaged in local peacebuilding activities, where they often act as mediators, negotiators, and advocates for long-term peace solutions at the community level.
- **Not Involved (5%):** Only 5% of women in peacebuilding were not involved in formal or local peacebuilding efforts, indicating that women are actively contributing to peace efforts in some capacity.

Insights from the Graph:

- While women are highly active in local peacebuilding initiatives, their representation in formal peace negotiations remains limited, which presents a critical gap in achieving inclusive peace processes. Their contributions at the grassroots level, however, have proven vital in fostering sustainable peace and community cohesion.
- The data underscores the importance of addressing the gender imbalance in formal peace negotiations to fully leverage women's unique role in conflict resolution.

Discussion

The results of the study offer a complex and subtle insight into the present situation of women empowerment in Pakistan, presenting a massive number of socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges and also demonstrating the milestones that have been achieved in major dimensions (UNDP 2020). Although the statistics proves that Pakistani women have gone a long way in education, politics and peacebuilding, it also highlights the intractable challenges that are hindering full empowerment of women especially in the rural areas (World Economic Forum 2024). The graphs, tables, and charts provide a full picture of the issues and successes of women in various areas of life, and it is quite obvious that there is still a lot to do to establish the society that will be absolutely equal (UN Women 2020). The discussion below will explore in detail the main findings, a thorough examination on the socio-cultural, economic, and political obstacles to women empowerment, and the importance of women in peacebuilding.

Socio-Cultural Limitations: Well-Established Gender Conventions and their Consequences

Among the greatest conclusions of this research is how overwhelming the effects of social-cultural limitations on the lives of women, especially in rural communities are (UNICEF 2021). The bar chart of the main role of women as the household caregivers underlines the strong stereotypes of different gender norms which have been still forming the role of women in the society (OECD 2019). This is one cultural expectation that has continued to be a major impediment to women accessing social mobility and participation in the economy as it has restricted women access to education, medical services and professional opportunities (World Bank 2023). The information shows that these norms do not just deny women a chance to do a profession, but they also bury them in the home which means that they have no chance to play a role in the larger socio-economic fabric of the nation (Kabeer 1999).

These observations represent the widespread impact of patriarchal systems that govern gender roles in the whole of Pakistan, particularly in rural areas (Kandiyoti 1988). Women have strict restrictions on their freedom and choice that are dictated by cultural and social norms (Acker 1990). Even though the cities have more chances to get an education and work, women in these cities are not spared of the pressure to conform to the conventional roles within the family (Walby 1990). This implies that despite the opportunities women have in the cities, gender biases in the workplace and at home still obstruct their career and economic autonomy (Ridgeway 2011).

The study highlights that these cultural obstacles are firmly entrenched both in the rural and urban environment and they need a structural change in the thought process of society (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). It will take time to change the attitudes towards women and their roles, especially in the rural setting, and this idea will have to be achieved through concerted action of educational institutions, media, and even grass-root organizations (UNESCO 2020). It will be necessary to empower women to oppose the conventional gendered norms to make the society where women can enjoy their lives without being restrained by the old-fashioned culture (Sewell 1992).

Economic Barriers: The Gender Wage Gap and Economic Limited Independence

Empowerment of women on the Pakistani economy is one of the problems that have been seen as one of the greatest because as seen in the tables and bar charts on economic barriers, women have been seen to be the most affected (ILO 2020). Although there has been some improvement particularly in urban areas, there has been a significant challenge encountered due to the gender wage gap (ILO 2018). The statistics indicate that women in rural areas continue to be in extreme economic dependence of male family members, and most of

them access to financial resources and economic opportunities very little (World Bank 2019). Women in the city are highly exposed to wage difference and absence of career advancement rights (Khan et al. 2019).

The statistics of the entrepreneurial obstacles also highlight the gender-based obstacles, which do not allow women to become economically self-sufficient (SDPI 2020). In both environments, the norms of patriarchy still exist, and most times women need to consult male family members before venturing into businesses or expanding them (World Bank 2024). These barriers are further augmented by poor access to business networks, mentorship, and financial literacy services which are key to being an entrepreneur (OECD 2021).

In spite of these obstacles more and more women especially the urban centers are joining the workforce and becoming entrepreneurs (ADB 2021). Nevertheless, the income differentiation and financial autonomy are the most acute problems that have to be tackled in order to provide women with complete economic freedom (UNDP 2020). There are economic reforms that are required to make women successful in the labor market as entrepreneurs and leaders with equal pay, equal work, and financial literacy programs (ILO 2020).

Political Underrepresentation: Reforms in the Law and the Demand of More Political Agency

Political representation and agency are the key indicators of empowerment of the women and the data used in the study proves that although the legal framework has enhanced the women participation in the politics, there is still a lot to be desired (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025). The gender quota in the country and provincial assemblies has resulted in more women in politics, but it is not yet within the reach of many women to have real political power and decision-making authority (UN Women 2020). This is a sharp difference between representation and leadership roles and it proves that the role adopted by women in politics is not that important and still women feel resistance in the presence of institutions and gender-based discrimination in political parties (Shaheed 1990).

The interviews conducted with female politicians established that women in politics believe that they feel marginalized even in their own parties and most of them complained that they are never included in the making of critical decisions (Bari 2010). This is compounded by the fact that women lack institutional support, safe spaces and mentorship in politics and as such, it is hard to succeed in the world of leadership (UNDP 2020). Additionally, the intimidations the political women go through, both physical and verbal, forms another hindrance that puts many women off politics or causes them to quit politics (IFES 2021).

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To overcome these obstacles, the political parties should introduce gender-sensitive changes that go beyond quota additions and provide women with safe and enabling space (UN Women 2020). Women must have mentorship programs, political training opportunities as well as leadership development programs, so that they are able to stop having token representation and actually shape up policy making (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2025). Moreover, there should be a zero policy towards harassment in political institutions so that women should be able to engage in politics without worrying about being discriminated or abused by any means (UN Women 2020).

Women in Peacebuilding: Essential roles in solving conflicts

The increasing role of women in peace building and conflict resolution, especially in the conflict-related areas of Pakistan, such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the most promising pieces of information of this study (Conciliation Resources 2018). They focus their contributions on community healing, reconciliation, and resolving the source of conflict, including social inequality, human rights violation, and political disenfranchisement (Lederach 1997).

Although women are critical in the process of restoring peace in communities, they are still underrepresented in formal peace talks (Paffenholz 2018). Such non-inclusiveness in official negotiations implies that the distinct worldviews of women, especially their long-term orientation, focus on reconciliation, and social justice are frequently disregarded (Nilsson 2012). This skewed representation in peace processes is a major problem that should be tackled to enable that peace deals are inclusive, sustainable and actually representative of the needs of the entire members of society (Coomaraswamy 2015).

The study confirms the results of UN Women (2021), who have established that peace agreements that are negotiated with women have a higher chance of success since women concern themselves with the welfare of the community and long-term recovery make sure that violence does not recur (UN Women 2021). To eliminate

this gender disparity, policy changes should be made which must make women equally represented when engaging in formal peace negotiations (UN Security Council 2000). This is possible by adopting gender-sensitive peacebuilding models that in addition to enhancing the presence of women in the negotiation table, also allow women to share their views and experiences in formulating peace policies (Inclusive Security 2019).

Policy and Societal Change Implications

The results of this study indicate that there is a definite necessity of the systemic change in Pakistan (Giddens 1984). The barriers that restrict women to get involved in education, the labor market, politics, and peacebuilding have to be broken down in order to empower women with the actual power (Tilly and Wood 2013). Gender-sensitive policies, equal pay and equal work, and elimination of discriminatory laws are some of the legal re-forms that need to be taken (OECD 2019). Also, this has to be done by questioning cultural standards that define the position of women in terms of education, media campaigns, and community mobilization (UNESCO 2020).

In addition, institutions, such as political parties, business, and schools, should make conducive environments that will give women the opportunity to engage in public life comprehensively (OECD 2021). This involves mentorship programs, leadership development programs, and safe places where women could share their opinions and make decisions without fear of being discriminated and even sexually assaulted (IFES 2021).

Lastly, it is impossible to overestimate the paramount role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Nilsson 2012). The statistics point to the massive role that women have played in building dialogue and reconciliation in conflict-prone regions and their low representation in official peace negotiations should be resolved (Paffenholz 2018). To attain long term peace in Pakistan, gender-inclusive peace procedures will be critical and policy reforms should focus on inclusion of women in all levels of peacebuilding (UN Women 2021).

Way Forward and Recommendations:

The findings of the research illuminated the multi-layered and multifaceted issues that women in Pakistan have to encounter in the diverse arenas both socio-culturally and economically as well as in the political arena through underrepresentation and the lack of engagement in peacebuilding activities. As much as there has been the irrefutable strides, the path to a complete gender equality in Pakistan is a tough one. All sectors of the society need to put in concert and work tirelessly to implement comprehensive policy interventions to overcome the structural challenges facing women empowerment and to unveil the full potential of women.

Considering the findings in order of recommendation, the following recommendations comprise a strategic framework of raising gender equality, empowering women, and attaining sustainable social change in Pakistan. These suggestions are based on some of the most critical spheres, where intervention would cause some groundbreaking effect and precondition the appearance of the more inclusive and equal society.

Enhancing Legal Reforms and Policies

The legal system in Pakistan has been able to take significant steps towards the rights of women, however there are still loopholes especially in matters involving gender-based violence, discrimination at the workplace and access to economic resources. The steps that are important include:

Introduce and execute Gender-Responsive Legislation: Although gender quota in political representation is a crucial factor, female involvement in politics and leadership must be strongly encouraged and promoted. It is important to introduce policies to curb gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence, harassment and discrimination at the workplace. These laws need to be strictly enforced and there is need to seal the implementation discord as the gap between the laws and the grassroots level is not strictly followed.

Gender-Sensitive Economic Policies: Economic changes need to be gender sensitive in terms of equal remuneration of equal work, safe working conditions, and establishment of policies that are gender specific to female entrepreneurs. It involves easing access to financial resources, easing the process of owning a business, and launching microfinance programs targeted at women. Moreover, women in the rural areas should have their property rights reformed to guarantee women have ownership of family assets.

Women Protection in Politics: The government should establish a secure political environment to the women, which entails the provision of legal immunity against harassment and discrimination in the political arena. Mentorship programs, training programs, and providing women who are running in the office with sufficient financial resources should be encouraged through policies to enable them compete on equal skills with other candidates, who are men.

Encouraging Education and Skilled Training.

Empowering women is primarily based on education, and there is a need to reduce the education disparity between the urban and rural women. With better access to good education and skills training to women and girls, the impact of this can be transformative in the capacity of women and girls to contribute to the working environment, politics, and leadership.

Increase Access to Education in rural Areas: There is a need to have a specific strategy in increasing educational infrastructures in rural areas. These involve the construction of girls schools, training of female teachers as well as offering women scholarships in areas that are underserved. More so, rural women who are not offered the conventional schooling system have access to digitally available learning resources and mobile education initiatives.

Skills Development and Vocational Training: Other than the formal education, women should be given vocational training and skills development programs that will equip them in various industries like technology, agriculture, and healthcare. Giving women access to technical skills such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship and financial literacy will see them fully utilize job opportunities and business opportunities.

Gender-Sensitive Curriculum: The curriculum used in schools should also be changed to allow the gender-sensitive content that will challenge the traditional gender roles and empower women. Schools and higher education institutions ought to initiate courses on gender equality, human rights, and social justice and also seek to be aware of the problem of gender-based discrimination and be ready to question it.

Discussing the Socio-Cultural Barriers: Norms and Attitudes change

Trying to alter a set of cultural norms which have been highly ingrained in a society so as to propagate gender inequality is a long term strategy which requires a multi-faceted approach. The social attitudes against women should be changed by taking the following steps:

Public Awareness Campaigns: Awareness campaigns should be at the frontline of the media community and the civil society organization to counter patriarchal norms and demand the rights of women. This involves the use of the social media, television, and radio to sensitize the population on gender equality. The campaigns should be oriented towards women empowerment, women leadership and real life success stories of women who have overcome the barriers.

Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality: It is essential that the behavior of men and boys change as a key to the success of any gender equality campaign. The involvement of male allies in gender equality struggle will make sure that the cultural change is holistic. Gender sensitization of men should be implemented in schools and communities whereby men are urged to defy societal norms and offer encouragement to women in their professional, household, and political life.

Local Community-Based Interventions: The local community leaders are supposed to be trained and mobilized in support of gender equality and women rights. Such leaders are particularly those who live in rural and tribal societies, and may assist in redefining the roles of both genders and make a difference in their communities to empower women.

Economic Empowerment: Availability of Resources and Financial Independence

Gender equality would not be possible without a solid focus on economic empowerment. Women should be provided with the means of becoming self-reliant and facing the challenges as the leaders themselves.

Favoring Women Entrepreneurs: The government and financial institutions should increase microfinance initiatives and availing loans, grants, and counseling to women entrepreneurs. Specific programs should be tailored to women in the rural areas to make sure that they can have means to initiate and maintain their

businesses. Also, female-specific business incubators and hubs of entrepreneurship should be developed in cities and towns, which will promote female entrepreneurship.

Reducing the Gender Wage Gap: It is necessary to implement changes in legislation that would ensure similar pay to equal efforts and eliminate discrimination in the labor market. Gender audits should be compulsory to companies to establish equal employment, wage, and advancement between men and women. Employers also ought to be encouraged to establish gender diverse work environments, which make them engage in more innovative business practices as well as inclusive business practices.

Workplace Inclusivity Programs: Companies ought to implement diversity policies at the workplace of hiring, retaining and promoting women as leaders. These programs are supposed to give equal chances of career growth, support networks to women, and address harassment in the work place using well-organized policies and training programs.

Increase the Women contribution in the Peacebuilding process and conflict resolution.

Women have turned out to be important sources of peace in the conflict areas and the role of involving them in the official peace talks is crucial towards the long term peace. They need to improve their contribution to peacebuilding activities by following the following steps:

Conscripted Female Representation at Peace Negotiation: Women should be equally represented in any peace negotiations, whether at the local scales or the national peace talks. The governments and other international bodies ought to have quotas or requirements that women are included during the peace talks or have women leaders be trained on negotiation and conflict management.

Funding and Promoting Women-Led Peace Initiatives: International bodies and local governments must support and fund women-led peace efforts that are aimed at reconciliation, social justice and healing the community. The women also have distinct views about the ways of peacebuilding whereby they not only lay emphasis on the end of violence but also on restoration of communities and assurance of socio-economic resurgence.

The Creation of Safe Space to Women in Peace Processes: Peace negotiation spaces should be safe and accommodating to women with very clear guidelines on how to prevent women against being harassed and abused. The policies need to make women not just part of the peace talks, but also make them be empowered so that they can be able to have a significant input in the peace talks.

Creating a gender Equality Culture by Education and Enlightenment.

The education system should serve as a effective means of inculcating equality, respect and empowerment values in the future generations. The actions required are as follows:

Incorporate Gender Equality into the Curriculum: At schools and universities, gender equality should be included in the curriculum on all levels. This could be done by providing courses and workshops based on gender justice, women rights and social equality. Through sensitizing the young generation on the need to have equality between the genders, Pakistan can establish a social change base that will support women to participate in all aspects of life.

Encourage Gender-Sensitive Leadership-Training: It is necessary to start leadership development classes among young women at the university level where the women could acquire skills to assume leadership positions in politics, business and society. These initiatives must be based on the development of confidence, negotiation, and advocacy methods by training women on how to counter the gender inequality in political and corporate leadership.

The road to gender equality in Pakistan is complex and involves a wide policy change, culture, and institutional changes. The above recommendations provide tangible measures that can be taken to solve the socio-cultural, economic, political, and peacebuilding problems of women. Pakistan can make the society more inclusive and fair by passing gender-sensitive laws, education, and employment as well as equal participation in the decision-making process.

Empowering women is also not only about justice and a question of equality but also a major source of sustainable peace, economic growth and societal cohesion. By effective execution of these reforms, there will

come a time when women will not be merely equal partners but leaders towards a prosperous, peaceful and a gender equal Pakistan.

Conclusion

To sum up, the process of changing gender equality in Pakistan is a daunting task and at the same time a great opportunity. The outcomes of the study can be seen as the critical obstacles that Pakistani women experience, but they can also reveal how strong and revolutionary they can become. Through deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs to economic dependency, political disenfranchisement, and peacebuilding barriers, women in Pakistan still face a setback to their full participation in the life of the masses. Nonetheless, in spite of these there have been a lot of gains that have been achieved in terms of education, participation of the workforce, involvement in politics and in the process of peacebuilding.

The findings of the study highlight a very important fact that the empowerment of women is not just a matter of gender equality but a catalyst to social change and sustainable development. The active participation of women in the process of peacebuilding, economic development, and political leadership is not only necessary to create a more just society but also to provide the long-term stability and prosperity of the country. Their involvement in peace process as agents of change, as entrepreneurs of local economies, and as pioneers in all sectors of the society cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, the barriers be it visible or invisible must be broken in order to make these contributions come to fruition.

There is an urgent need to ensure that policies and institutional structures in Pakistan are changed to be gender inclusive throughout. The legislative changes that are needed to guarantee equal pay, equal chances in the leadership in political spheres and safeguard the women against violence should be given priority. The cultural reformation that is required to transform ingrained gender rules takes the same amount of dedication, where women and men share the same responsibility of transforming society values. In addition, education, financial independence, and political participation should also be central to the vision of Pakistan in the future by empowering women.

Women have, most of the time, demonstrated that they can not only overcome the odds but are also part of the social structure of the country. As a result of Malala Yousafzai orchestrating the education of girls despite violence or the numerous women who have become peacemakers in Balochistan and the Khyber Pakhtunkhawan, these extraordinary women represent how powerful and insightful it takes to create a peaceful and equal society. There is no future of Pakistan without empowering women who are the keys to achieving the full potential of the country.

This research has highlighted the force of inclusion of women in various sectors with the key in making the country more inclusive, fair and progressive by making sure that women are part of decision making not only in matters of peace but also in economic policies or political leadership. In the future, the suggestions made in this study provide a roadmap on how to break down the structural barriers that are still entrapping women. When we empower women, we not only empower them but also empower the whole nation, and a future that will be characterized by equity, justice and sustainable peace is achieved.

The path to the future can be difficult, yet the possibilities of changes are unlimited. Women empowerment is not a distant ideal that should be enacted out of moral obligation but rather a pragmatic requirement to long-term peace, economic well-being, and social unity. With the adoption of gender equality as the key to the national development, Pakistan can also become the world leader in creating the future where every citizen irrespective of gender will have the chance to prosper and help to improve the world.

Ultimately, female empowerment is not an issue of female rights being met but that it is a way to a better and more prosperous future for 'everyone'.

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