

# The Role Of Women In Peace Building Process In The Erstwhile FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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## Abstract

The basic aim of the study is to uncover the role of women in peace building process in conflict ridden society of FATA, KP Pakistan. For accomplishing this task, qualitative methodology with primary and secondary sources as an instrument of collecting data has been employed. Key informant interviews were conducted in the IDPs camp in Jalozai Nowshera with women belonging to different parts of FATA. Women inclusion in the peace building process in the world in general and FATA in particular is essential for sustainable peace and development. The study emphasizes on the consultation of women in conflict affected areas like FATA to include them in peace process on local level to end hostilities and violence and promote dialogue culture on regional level for sustainable peace. The study argued that how women are the one who are flagging warnings before conflict building and in the prevention of violence in FATA. The different sign that women have indicated before the conflict in FATA has been analyzed in the study and discussed the dynamics that has prevented tribal women from participating in the peace process. The paper concludes that the marginalization of the women living on the borderland can end if included in both formal and informal structures of peace buildings.

**Key words:** peace process, women participation, flagging warnings, violence prevention.

## Introduction

Peace building is a broad, complex and long-term process. It boosts the people for dialogue, strengthen relationship and reform institution. The process requires the deconstruction of the structures of violence and the construction of the structures of peace. It not only prevents violence but advances the economic and political rights of the people. The basic purpose of this study is to understand that absence of violence is not the sole criteria of peace as the concept is difficult to define. The study aims to understand that peace-building is the achievement of protecting the people from injustice and discrimination and the work for socio-political empowerment. The study is an effort to understand that sustainable peace

could be attained by granting the economic and political rights irrespective of racial, religious, color and gender discrimination.

In all societies where war lasted for decades, no doubt those men and women both suffer but it is undeniable fact that women affect more. Their loved ones (father, husband, son, brother) are killed or caught in complex conflicts. Usually, women are confined to household activities and their participation in the public domain is very rare that is why during and post conflict situation, they are the victims of violence, exploitation and abused more than men specifically sexual violence and abuse. It is very important that women condition and role should be identified in the war and conflicts and peace building

processes. Women's roles, resources, priorities, needs and requirements are usually different from men in times of conflicts and war yet being representing half of the world population they must be the part of the decision-making process (Lund & Mitchell, 2017)

For the first time in international community United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" that formally recognized either the impact of conflict on women or the need to engage them as dynamic negotiators in peace building process. After the resolution the importance of women equal participation and involvement in the attempts to maintain peace and security and the need of their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention were stressed on various international forums (Faraz, 2017).

As for as the participation of women in decision making and peace building practices are concerned in reality, the situation is not very encouraging in many countries specifically in peripheral areas. In society such as Pakistan where patriarchal norms and structural inequalities have prohibited the women from participating in the efforts and restricted them to household activities only, they are not in a position to play meaningful role in this regard.

Ordinarily in the debate about the conflict ridden Pakhtun borderland of Pakistan the Former Federal Administered Tribal Area (FATA) now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the condition is very worst. FATA attached to Afghanistan is suffering from insurgency since last four decades after USSR intervention in 1979 and then US war on terror in 2001. Since then the Pakistan military has launched so many operations to combat terrorist who have hidden shelters there. Drone attacks and the insurgency have badly affected the socio-economic structure of this area. Besides this the social, political and cultural narratives, perceptions and practices that are prevailed there have silenced tribal women in the rehabilitation process (Naseer, 2018).

The piece of study has discussed the causes and reasons behind the absence of tribal women participation in peace building efforts in conflict ridden region and highlighted that how women were the one flagging warnings during conflict building. The paper has thrown light on the positive role that women could play in the peace practices and in the prevention of violence and conflicts through 'Early warnings and Early response' and has emphasized that we need to understand the subtle warning/signs of conflict building from local perspective.

**Figure 1.1: Methodological model of the study**



### **Role of women in peace processes**

After the UN resolution 1325 in 2000 on peace and women, there has been some achievement in women peace participation process on international front but still much to be done. Unfortunately, females which are half of the world population are continuously absent from peace agreements in past and an emerging process. A 2012 UN study report of 31 peace processes occurred between 1992-2011 shows that how women had been marginalized from such important peace agreement despite their tremendous role that they have play in promoting peace, peaceful dialogues and ending hostilities in many conflict regions of the world. The report exemplifies that only 4% of signatories, 2.4 % of chief mediators, 3.7% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators were women. ( Bigio & Vogelstein, 2016)

Frequently in conflicts and crises all the stakeholders whether local, national or even international's main concern is to stop or reduced violence, to arrange negotiation for formal peace talks, temporary ceasefire and in case of success a roadmap to be formed for formal talks and settlement. Unfortunately, women are often absent in such processes and as a result their needs and concerns in these pre-negotiations, and formal agendas are unable to be introduced. That is why despite ending violence, peace building process fail to acknowledge the different forms of violence that women are experiencing before, during and after the conflict. Despite setting the formal structure for peace the agreements challenge women vulnerabilities. Women could play a critical role in the processes, as they could sit at the formal negotiating table, could also work as part of technical committee or in submission, in the mobilization of the masses, in the articulation of their demands and concerns and could be utilized as mediators or facilitators. Women could build a foundation and catalyze the

peace process by building ties among opposing factions and groups as it has been observed that even in the most traditional societies women's role as communicators and facilitators has produced tremendous results (Lund & Mitchell, 2017).

US institute of peace launched a project in Columbia in 2015 to back the network of women peace builders and women led organizations devoted to non-violence and mediation. This network completed the formal peace process by negotiating with different arms groups for local ceasefire and became successful in the release of hostages. They put pressure on the insurgents to lift barricades and recognized human rights violation. Some of the member of this network was the part of negotiating table for peace talk of Columbia in Havana. In 2017, Congress passed Peace and security Act 2017 to strengthen women participation in all aspects of peace negotiation and conflict prevention. But still a long way has to go to recognize that the security of women is linked to the security of nations and security is linked to women ability for peace in her leading role on the negotiating table. (Lindborg, 2017)

### **Dynamics that prevent women from participating in the peace process in FATA**

In the conduction of interviews with tribal women living in the camp of Internally Dispersed people (IDPs) in Jalozi Nowshera Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the ongoing military operation in FATA, the scholar received various complaints from them. These women belonged to various parts of FATA. They informed the scholar that different dynamics has prevented tribal women from participating in various political and peace building activities in FATA. The author has recorded the following reasons

from different women in the ethnographic interviews.

1. Zarmeena Bibi of South Waziristan told the scholar that the patriarchal Pakhtun society culture creates numerous hurdles in the way of women to actively participate in any social, economic or political/public processes. She says that their role in the tribal societies is neither recognized nor appreciated by anyone in the tribal society. The role of Pashtun women is mostly limited to the private sphere of family and indoor activities. According to a Pashtu proverb “khaza ya da kor da ya da gor da” meaning that a “women’s place is either at home or in a grave (KII, tribal women, 01). This designates strong stripe between public and private spheres for a women and advocate that a woman has nothing to do with the outside world beyond the four walls of the house (KII, tribal women, 01).
2. Akbaro Bibi of Orakzai agency says that unfortunately tribal culture perceives war and peace making as men’s domain. She further says that the internal conflict, war and peace building are associated with men in these tribal areas. She says that it is ironic that in the internal conflicts and feuds, women are always used as tool of peace making amongst the warring tribes and suffers the most in these conflicts. She says that after the conflicts when peace building are required women are sacrificed through the custom of Swara (giving of woman to the aggrieved party for the wrong doings of her family men) and that women sacrificed her whole life for peace (KII, tribal women, 02).
3. Tajol Bano was of the opinion that the institution Jirga that is consisted only of men played key role in making and breaking of peace. She accused that the

tribal norms has systematically excluded and marginalized the weaker groups of women and children to play any constructive role in making important decision that affect their lives. She further says that similarly, people from lower socio-cultural background are not welcomed to be part of Jirga. As a result, women are denied from any formal platform from where they can play a part in peace building activities. It is considered against the basic principles of tribal system Pakhtunwali to allow women to play a leading role in the peace building. In the absence of women, it is no wonder that most of the peace deal failed not only in FATA but in the whole world (KII, tribal women 03).

4. Another tribal woman Bachana Bibi disappointedly states that the state of Pakistan is also completely silent over the exclusion of women in the peace processes of FATA. She further criticized the central and provincial governments that their policies have further strengthened the male-dominated structure. As the government has excluded women from local and national committees dealing with peace building in FATA. She says that for negotiating peace with terrorists, the government of Pakistan has set up “peace and negotiated committees” (Masalehti Jirga/Amn committees), however it is very disappointing that none of this apparatus had a woman as its member. She further told that in Swat situated in the same province women Jirga was formed to counter the marginalization of women in the region (KII, tribal women 04).
5. Tajol Bano told that in FATA despite of illiterate ratio in women they are flagging warnings as they were aware and were warning their men in the houses before

the conflict that “it was coming but no one has listened them, and now everyone has seen all those miseries that we are facing now. She says that our warnings were not dealt quickly and efficiently by any men in our village Alizai, now everything is out of control” (KII, tribal women 03). After the query of the author from one of the displaced tribal women on the borderland replied that they knew that small scuffles, skirmishes developing into outbreaks of violence were becoming ever-more likely, yet they did not have the power or forum to address the escalation. This is the challenge that is faced by the communities all over the world. Women neglected in post-conflict reconstruction and peace building programs are also the first that detect early warnings of the conflict. Women knowing these signs can be effective both in conflict prevention as well as in peace making too(KII, tribal women 04)

### **Warnings/signs of conflict building raised by tribal women**

The elusive warnings/signs of conflict building that need to be understand from local perspective is very significant. During the conversation with these IDPs tribal women the author has received various subtle/ indicators that are both qualitative and quantitative: the pointed certain warnings are:

1. Zarmeena Bibi was of the opinion that most of the women felt the anger amongst the men and boys especially an over-reaction. She says that usually anger is a response for a first time upset so must be building by something or someone. Mostly the men started taking their fear or frustration on the women at home (KII, tribal women 01).
2. Akbaro says that unemployment transformed into a cultural threat amongst the young men. She says that unfortunately talking about the unemployed youngsters men at home/hujra/mosques was ridiculed. Such responses are a menace for conflict building (KII, tribal women 02).
3. Another threat that Zarmeena Bibi pointed out was the involvement of tribal men in the groups of militants, insurgents, lashkars, and committees. She says that after their involvement, they seems to be anxious or an edge most of the time, avoiding normal social interactions and are always recluse (KII, tribal women 02).
4. Bachana Bibi says that the those men who were getting involved both in offence and defense usually started using inappropriate language and picking up fights with people around them in a village or even within the family (KII, tribal women 03).
5. During conversation another women says that when they start seeing strangers people in the village they complaint about it to their people that these people has nothing to do with their communities(KII, tribal women 02).
6. Women shared their miseries that how the crime rate increased and was not addressed by the local security apparatus. They were the victims as most of the crimes were related to their livestock (in border areas, the livestock is a wealth of women (KII, tribal women 03).
7. Change in the local congregation and council of elder’s structures, the local men involved in the communities are somehow replaced by the Shuras overnight.
8. The women noticed that behavior of men towards women mobility in the village

changed too, they were stopped from their routine activities such as fields, kitchen, gardens, river side in some places from the markets.

9. Women experienced that violence against children increased in different forms that resulted in high school dropout too. Mothers were confused, scared and reluctant to send them to schools. Also, we all later on found that how borders areas children were used in the war too (KII, tribal women 01& 03).
10. Women observed that in the communities, hate speeches and propaganda was carried out specifically in the context of sectarian conflicts. Banned outfits were advertised and held congregations.
11. The most important indicator that all women observed were that there was no action taken against the local crime, nobody stopped the congregation of banned outfits, women were stopped from their daily routine and no hue and cry was raised, strangers were all over but nobody questioned them or stopped them from carrying arms (KII, tribal women 01& 03).

### Recommendation

If sustainable peace is required, it is essential that female participation in the process should be observed seriously specifically at local level. If the stakeholders of Pakistan want to bring prosperity and peace to this strategically important borderland of Pakistan, the following recommendation regarding women at local level could bring significant difference.

1. Women's political participation must be ensured in FATA at local, provincial and national level.

2. Support and security should be provided to women local network like Aman o Nisa and TQK and PAIMAN etc. in FATA who are struggling against extremism in Pakistan.
3. The role of media needs to be connected to portray women as positive negotiator instead of stereotype mostly in domestic family scenario. Adequate opportunities should be provided them in media to discuss issues related to peace.
4. Youth should be involved in addressing the core narratives around gender roles and eliminating the traditional stereotype role of women.
5. Consultation with women and women organizations in crises and conflicts should be employed.
6. Special status should be given to women in informal militias(lashkars) "Aman Committees", in the "Jirga System" in dialogue and truce(tigah) from where women has been excluded.
7. Women role in peace building should be part of the National action Plan.
8. Access to education and employment opportunities for women must be provided in the first priority lists in FATA developmental projects.

### Conclusion

Pak-afghan border defined by diverse geographical realities has been subject to varied invasions, complex contestations and intense power plays by the regional and international stakeholders. The physical interference of both local and major powers in the geographical landscape of the region has made conflict a permanent feature of the region. In case of Pakistan borders areas, such intervention provided 'new forms' of political spatiality to the region by creating un-defined boundaries and in the process opening it to the concept of 'modern statehood' based on territoriality, sovereignty and

population, however isolating the tribal population specifically women from such state system. The marginalization of the women living on the borderland can end if included in both formal and informal structure of the peace.

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