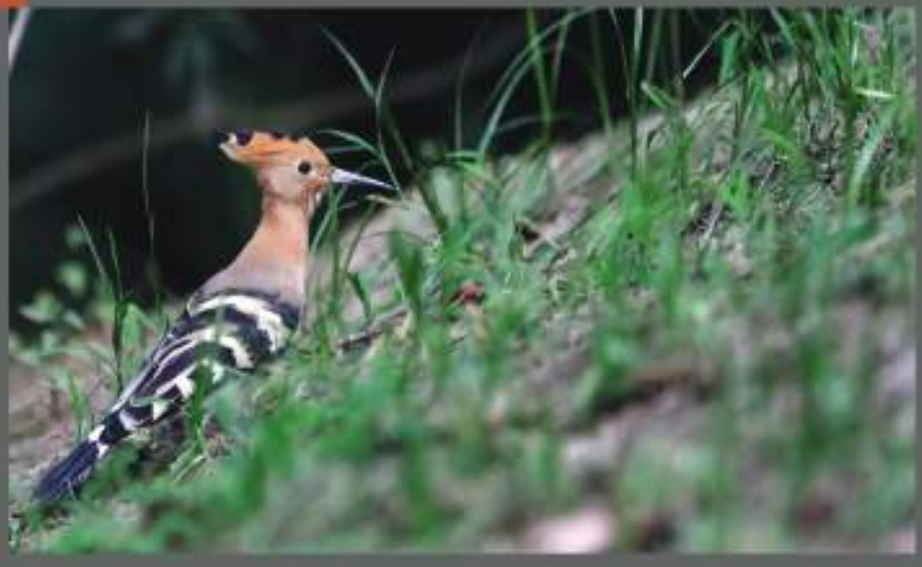
BAYĀN

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK

VOLUME VII DECEMBER 2021
BI-ANNUAL SOCIO-LEGAL JOURNAL



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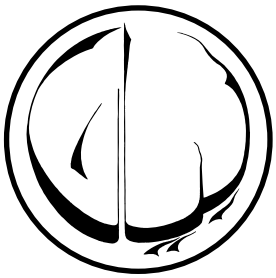

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Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre is a non-government, not for profit feminist activist organisation. Simorgh's main focus is research and dissemination of information that will enable women and men to challenge the dominance of ideas that support social and economic divisions on the basis of gender, class, caste, religion, race and nationality.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those held by Simorgh.

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Actor, singer, teacher, dancer, maker of impromptu nonsense verse, friend, writer – in which of these roles shall we remember Rubina Saigol? How do we count the ways she will be missed? For her warmth of heart and the generosity with which she gave of her time to friends and young aspiring academics? For her laughter – her penchant for irreverent political verse, when – in the manner of the traditional 'Fool' – the bhand or mirasi, she deflated the pretensions of self-seeking importance? For her sense of the absurd that lightened the dark moments of an illness that stole two years of her life? For her zest for life and love of dancing, with which she livened our gatherings? Or for her understanding of the dynamics of patriarchal power arrangements – for her ability to recognise the linkages and connections between the systematically organised patterns of collective living and minutiae of daily life and the broads strokes of history – between the grand narratives of law, religion, morality and the temporal circumlocutions of real politic that link the personal to the political in countless ways?

Rubina's was a dissenting voice that rejected unthinking obeisance to received truths and established icons. This is borne out by her work on the construction of Muslim womanhood and masculinity in the works of Syed Ahmad Khan, Dipty Nazeer Ahmad, Akbar Allahbadi and Iqbal; on education and the construction of nationalist ideology; on women's education in religious seminaries and resurgent patriarchy; on the gendering of school texts and the Single National Curriculum. Sharpened by insights provided by the debates particularly among black and South Asian feminists and her living connection with the women's movement, her work, which was meticulously researched, was marked by her ability to express the most complex ideas in simple, unpretentious language without simplifying the meaning of what she was saying.

A born and bred Lahori, Rubina Saigol went to school at the Convent of Jesus and Mary, took her BA from Kinnaird College for Women and read for her Masters in Psychology at the Punjab University. Except for the time she spent in the USA for a Masters in Development Psychology from Columbia University and a PhD in Education from the University of Rochester, Rubina – or Ruby as she was popularly known, lived and worked in the city where she was born among her family members, friends and colleagues – many of whom she had known from childhood and others whose lives she became a part as a student, colleague and fellow traveller in the larger, cross regional collective of the women's movement in the different cities of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and beyond.

Rubina was a warm-hearted and generous friend. The house that she shared with Farzana Shamim, the friend who stood by her as perhaps only a friend can, in her painful battle with cancer and then with the Coronavirus that took her life, was a place for friends to gather to pass an evening, eat a meal, share a joke, discuss a film, talk politics. Ruby left us on the 21st of August, 2021. Her passing has left a void.

editorial

This issue of Bayan examines the social, economic and psychological impact of the Covid Pandemic on women, children and marginalised communities. While acknowledging Covid-19's cross class fallout, our focus is on the working poor, who constitute majority populations in the global South and specifically in Pakistan. The immediate context of this volume is provided by the "swift and massive shock" of the pandemic and the collapse of global and local economies. By the heightened super power antagonisms and the displacement of the human rights and democracy discourse by virulent nationalisms. By the panic generated by an unknown and unpredictable virus, and the social and economic impact of lockdowns, social distancing and livelihood loss and widening fault lines of race, religion, class, caste, gender and geographical location. However, the writers in this volume do not perceive the post-pandemic 'new normal' as a reminder of a lost golden age. They use it instead to problematise the pre-pandemic socio-systemic inequalities, inequities and the ruthlessness of the power struggles that shaped the 'old normal', and paved the way for the 'new normal'.

Before speaking about the content of this volume, it is necessary to say something about the conditions in which it was produced. Not only did the virus disrupt work schedules; responding to the distress caused by lockdowns and job loss, and its impact especially on women and children, most of our writers took time off for Covid relief work. Instead of chasing elusive writers and shifting timelines, the decision was taken to simultaneously start work on the forthcoming volumes on a first compiled, first published basis. This will explain the time lag between some of the essays as some were written during the first wave of the pandemic and others in the second wave.

Read separately, these essays are a valuable source of information. Taken together, they lay bare the bones of a highly gendered and exploitative system. At the same time, they shed light on the multiple hierarchies of power and control, expressed globally through an extractive and potentially violent neoliberal order, and locally through the social and economic arrangements of a patriarchal society as manifested in the family, community, workplace and the state.

Framed by the larger context of regional aid dependency politics and Cold War antagonisms followed by the extractive demands of a ruthless neoliberal order, the first two essays by Kaiser Bengali and Azra Talat Sayeed look at Pakistan's precarious economy, food security issues and the enrichment of the privileged national and international elite at the expense of an already under privileged and neglected majority. Critiquing Pakistan's financial dependency from a historical perspective Kaiser Bengali gives an overview of the country's political-alliances-for-aid approach, and the long term impact of its disastrous involvement in the USA's proxy war in Afghanistan and problematic relationship with the IMF and other international finance institutions. Analysing the political economy of hunger, Azra Talat Sayeed traces the global failure to ensure sustainable access of all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food, to the historical shift, first from the traditional to the capitalist mode of agriculture and reliance on Green Revolution technologies, and subsequently from the Keynesian bent to the imperialist set of neoliberal policies, which she holds accountable for the massive pauperisation of Third World rural and urban populations.

Rubina Saigol and Nida Usman Chaudhry examine the cross-cutting terrains of the democratic endeavour and human rights discourse and patriarchal social arrangements from the larger perspective of the neoliberal order, and the 'private as political' of the domestic sphere in the

Pakistan context. They claim that the post-Covid 'new normal' is not a departure from the pre-pandemic 'old normal' but a disruptive moment that reformulated and reinforced the inequities and inequalities of pre-pandemic times. The writers argue that the economic panic of Covid-19 led to an upsurge of xenophobic nationalisms, altered the patterns of collective living with the long term potential of widening existing divides, globally between rich and poor countries and locally between the moneyed elite and the underprivileged majority, between civil and military populations, including on the basis of class, caste, religious and ethnic differences.

Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz, Ume Laila Azhar and Ayesha Khan, focus on the social relations of patriarchy as they play out globally and locally in the economic arrangements of the workplace and in the power dynamics of the private domestic sphere. In this regard, the fact that the 'shadow pandemic' of violence against women in its multiple forms falls darkly across almost all the papers is not without significance.

Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz speak about the 'shadow pandemic' of domestic violence. They identify family and spousal abuse and sexual violence against women and children as integral to patriarchal power relations and see its rise as the inevitable corollary of lockdowns, livelihood loss and financial insecurity. Seeing it as part of the dynamics of the forced proximity of women, children and men in small homes in congested, low income urban communities, they link the lack of helplines and related public sector services to women's low visibility on the policymaking radar. Ume Laila Azhar speaks about the feminisation of poverty and assesses the impact of Covid-19 on women in the informal economy. Speaking about the informal sector's very significant contribution to the global economy, she analyses the reasons for the government's neglect and failure of its relief efforts as well as the perpetuation of poverty and violence against women as the combined effects of patriarchal practices, bureaucratic apathy and exploitative market arrangements. Analysing the pandemic with reference to women's sexual and reproductive health and their invisibility in government policies, Ayesha Khan analyses the decline in reproductive health services due to the diversion of federal and provincial resources towards the pandemic, and women's increased vulnerability to domestic violence as an outcome of lockdowns and financial precarity, and stresses the importance of a "strong architecture of international treaty obligations and domestic laws and policies" for improving Pakistan's gender outcomes, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

This volume culminates with two visual narratives by Rahat Dar: "The besieged city" shows deserted streets, housebound women and children and jobless daily wagers, and "Women in the informal economy" provides a glimpse of women's unacknowledged, underpaid and largely unsafe work that sustains their families and the nation's economy.

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PAKISTAN'S POLITICAL JOURNEY: FROM INDEPENDENCE TO DEPENDENCE

KAISER BENGALI

ABSTRACT

Dr. Kaiser Bengali's essay is based on the view that Pakistan's dependence on the IMF and the current economic crisis is the inevitable outcome of the ruling groups' lack of vision and policies that have systematically prioritised vested group interests over and above those of the country. Drawing attention to the cycle of dependency observable in developing post-colonial states, Bengali stresses the importance of structural reforms for the achievement of equitable growth. He examines Pakistan's political alliances in the 1950s and its foreign policy alliances from 2000 to 2021, including CPEC and its alliance with China, and tracks the country's history of deficits and IMF bailouts to show how ruling class interests and irresponsible policy management have systematically contributed to the country's economic problems.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Kaiser Bengali is an economist, researcher, and policy analyst who has served in various roles, including as former adviser to the Chief Minister of Sindh on Planning and Development, and as the former Director General of the Sindh Development Planning and Management Cell. Dr. Kaiser Bengali was the first head of the Benazir Income Support Programme, the head of the Chief Minister's Policy Reform Unit of the Government of Balochistan and the representative for Sindh in the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. Dr. Bengali has authored and edited many books, in addition to over 35 research publications in various international and national conferences and journals. He has also contributed to several national newspapers and appeared on electronic media to give his insights into economic affairs.

Dependency theories began to develop in the 1950s by several internationally acclaimed political scientists and economists that included Raul Prebisch, Paul Baran, Hans Singer, Andre Gunder Frank, and Samir Amin, among others. [1] The stimulus for these thoughts was provided by the fact that post-World War II, several countries had gained independence from the colonial yoke, but remained tied economically to the 'mother' countries. Dependency has been described as conditions imposed by the global political and economic order that cause resources to flow from the periphery of underdeveloped countries to the core of developed countries. The notion addressed, herewith, was that powerful nations imposed dependency upon weaker nations.

Pakistan gained independence in 1947 and it too faced attempts at the imposition of dependency. However, unlike many other countries whose leadership fought off the onslaught, Pakistan's leadership sought out opportunities for dependency. This is a reverse case where the weaker nation seeks dependency upon stronger nations. It seems inconceivable that there can be countries that would ask to be dominated. It can, however, be conceivable if the country's ruling cliques tend to prioritise their own interests over national interests.

Nations are taken to heights of greatness by leadership that has pride in itself and a vision for the future. These nations develop their intellectual, cultural, economic, and military prowess to shape the future of the world. Conversely, nations led by ruling cliques whose vision is limited to their narrow personal or class material gains, flounder into insignificance. They end up being dominated, subjugated and colonised. The latter kind of nations do not ask to be dominated, subjugated, or colonised; it just happens by the laws of gravity. Power is like water,[2] which flows from higher to lower elevations and occupies vacuums.

Members of the ruling cliques in the latter kind of nations hold pompous-sounding positions, engage in thunderous oratory, and preside over sabre-rattling parades. It is, however, all a charade. Dependency is ingrained in the body politic of these cliques. Their power base is fuelled from abroad, their public oratory wanes into entreaties in private for foreign economic and military assistance, as behind the din of oratory and parades they submissively append their signatures to agreements that compromise national interests.

[1] Editors Note. "Dependency Theory (1957)," Science Theory (HKT Consultant, April 24, 2020). Available at: https://sciencetheory.net/dependency-theory-1957/

[2] Editors Note. Eric Liu, "Are You More Powerful than You Think?," TED-Ed (blog), March 22, 2017. Available at: https://blog.ed.ted.com/2017/03/22/are-you-more-powerful-than-you-think/

THE ONSET OF DEPENDENCY: 1950-1999

Pakistan's story begins in the 1950s. Following the assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan was run by a coterie of retired and serving bureaucrats and military officers. The then-serving army chief was also the Minister of Defence. The decade saw Pakistan joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955.[3] Both were US-led anti-USSR military alliances that were billed as *mutual* defence treaties.[4] The *mutuality* implied Pakistan's support to the US in its warfare against the Soviet Union and US support to Pakistan in the event of a war with India. The latter, however, was a sop. During the two wars with India in 1965 and 1971, the US looked the other way. This should not have been unexpected. The very thought, while signing onto alliances, that the US would have gone to war with India on Pakistan's behalf was inane. Moreover, Pakistan had no disputes with the USSR; its interests in joining the alliances against it were mercenary: arms supplies and accompanying dollar flows.

Three decades later, in the 1980s, Pakistan – run by another military regime – again offered its services to the US in its global war against its communist rival. More dollars poured in. However, when the Soviet army departed Afghanistan, the US not only deserted Pakistan but slapped sanctions vide the Pressler Amendment.[5] It also jailed senior executives of a Pakistani bank that had aided the US war effort by laundering its money to terrorists in Afghanistan. But was this unexpected? The very thought, while signing onto the US agenda, that it will offer rewards for servitude was again absurd.

The Afghan war was a victory for the US but left Pakistan seared. Afghan refugee influx[6] and the resultant demographic turmoil in Balochistan, Sindh and the then NWFP; the proliferation of arms and drugs, and ethnic and sectarian violence wreaked havoc. The economy began to be weighed down by the burdens of the fiscal adventurism of the 1980s. The regime had inherited a domestic debt-GDP ratio of 24 per cent in 1977 and left it at 48 per cent in 1988.[7] The four hapless governments in the 1990s were beset with just one economic agenda: *when was the next debt service instalment due and where was the money going to come from?* Of course, the IMF had to be tapped for more loans – to repay past loans. And that is how the trap was laid.

The new saga began in the 1990s – a decade of political and economic turmoil. Authority over the political administration had been ceded to elected civilian governments. However, power brokers of the old regime continued to wield control and used the military-era 8th constitutional amendment[8] to dismiss and install governments at will. The economy though was in poor shape. A decade marked by fiscal profligacy had unhinged the country's rupee and dollar balances. Global capital smelled rich pickings and the ruling cliques needed a saviour. The latter's ingrained dependency syndrome came to the fore and a deal was made.

There began a chain of appointments of Pakistani employees of Washington-allied international financial institutions (IFIs) – official and private – to key political positions in Pakistan – from Prime Ministers to Ministers of Finance to Governors of the central bank and to positions as Ministers and Advisors.[9] Initially, the motivations of the external players were largely financial: to protect the interests of creditor organisations and countries and expand profitable avenues for global capital. Subsequently, the objectives turned political. This, of course, is what history shows: the British East India Company's initial motivations were trade-related but turned political along the way.

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[3] Editors Note. Federal Research Division Library of Congress (U.S.), Pakistan: A Country Study, ed. Peter R. Blood, Sixth Edition (Department of the Army, 1995). Available at: https://www.amazon.com/Pakistan-Country-Study-Area-Handbook/dp/0844408344

[4] Editors Note. Mussarat Jabeen and Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, "Security Game: SEATO and CENTO as Instrument of Economic and Military Assistance to Encircle Pakistan," Pakistan Economic and Social Review, Vol. 49, Iss. 1 (2011): p. 109–32. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41762426?read-now=1&seq=13#page_scan_tab_contents

[5] Editors Note. Rabia Akhtar, "The Correct Narrative on Pressler," DAWN News, May 29, 2017. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1335979

[6] Editors Note. Nasreen Ghufran, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan Current Situation and Future Scenario," Policy Perspectives, Vol. 3, Iss. 2 (2006): p. 83–104. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/42922641?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents

[7] Asad Sayeed, Kaiser Bengali, and Shahrukh R. Khan , "Three Essays on Dept" (Islamabad, Pakistan: Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), 2001). Available at: http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp015712m892k

[8] Editors Note. Constitution (Eighth Amendment) Act, 1985. Available at: https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/amendments/8amendment.html

[9] Editors Note. Natalya Naqvi, "Pakistan: Politicians, Regulations, and Banks Advocate Basel," in The Political Economy of Bank Regulation in Developing Countries: Risk and Reputation, ed. Emily Jones (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 105–25.

Armed with the power to dismiss and install governments, the ruling cliques used the pretext of political and economic volatility to install caretaker governments with IFI appointees. The year 1993 saw a non-resident Pakistani former World Bank employee fly in and take oath as Prime Minister. Another non-resident Pakistani former IMF employee flew in and took over as Governor of the country's central bank, the State Bank of Pakistan.[10] The pattern was repeated in 1996, with the appointment of a non-resident Pakistani former World Bank employee as Advisor to the Prime Minister for Finance – *de facto* Finance Minister.[11] The State Bank was already being run by the IMF appointee. The 'financial managers' were mandated to force-introduce measures that would stabilise the economy, whatever the costs in terms of income and employment growth.

Essentially, Pakistan had become a target of the predatory global capital, which had for years seen the resource-rich economy as increasingly mismanaged and dependent on foreign largesse and the State as weak and tottering, run by self-serving civilian and military cliques. In corporate terminology, it was considered a soft target for a hostile takeover, with little possibility of resistance and even willing acquiescence from elements within the ruling cliques.

Deepening the debt pit: 1990s to date

The World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have been the two major international development lending agencies providing finance to Pakistan. The first WB loan was provided in 1952 and the first ADB loan was extended in 1969. A 2015 study[12] reveals how the change in the composition of loans from the 1990s onwards spread the debt blanket. Over the 54-year period, 1960-2014, the two agencies extended 597 loans to Pakistan totalling a value of USD 50.6 billion. Of these, 262 loans valued at USD 11.8 billion were provided up to 1990 and 335 loans valued at USD 38.8 billion were extended over the period 1990-2014.[13]

Table 1
World Bank & Asian Development Bank's loans to Pakistan
By type of loan and by period

	No. of loans (#)		**Amount** (USD million)	
Type of loan	***Total***	***per cent***	***Total***	***per cent***
up to 1990	262		11,821	
Project loan	195	74.4	8,002	67.7
Programme loan	67	25.6	3,819	32.3
1990-2014	335		38,756	
Project loan	101	30.1	14,730	38.0
Programme loan	234	69.9	24,026	62.0

Source: Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Mehnaz Hafeez, "Debt Composition: Consequences for Economic Development" (PRIME-Business Recorder National Debt Conference, Islamabad: PRIME-Business Recorder National Debt Conference, 2014).

[10] Editors Note. Department of State Foreign Affairs Network and National Trade Data Bank, "Background Notes: Pakistan" (Bureau of South Asian Affairs: U.S. Department of State, March 2000). Available at: https://1997-2001.state.gov/background_notes/pakistan_0300_bgn.html
[11] Editors Note. "Shahid Javed Burki," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 21, 2021). Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahid_Javed_Burki
[12] Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Mehnaz Hafeez, "Debt Composition: Consequences for Economic Development" (PRIME-Business Recorder National Debt Conference, Islamabad: PRIME-Business Recorder National Debt Conference, 2014).
[13] Table 1.

A 'type of loan' portfolio comparison between the period prior to 1990 and 1990–2014 shows a reversal between project and programme loans. Pre-1990, the loan portfolio comprised 195 project loans valued at USD 8.0 billion and 67 programme loans valued at USD 3.8 billion. In terms of shares, project loans comprised 74 per cent of loans and 68 per cent in value; programme loans comprised 26 per cent of loans and 32 per cent in value. Post-1990, the loan portfolio comprised 101 project loans valued at USD 15.0 billion and 234 programme loans valued at USD 24 billion. In terms of shares, project loans comprised 30 per cent of loans and 38 per cent in value; programme loans comprised 70 per cent of loans and 62 per cent in value.

Project and programme loans have different impacts on public finances and development processes. The former contributes to the creation of an economic asset and the income stream it generates serves to repay the loan. Programme loans do not create an economic asset and do not enlarge the income stream. They have to be repaid out of existing income – thereby, forcing a reduction in public expenditure – or by the sale of an existing asset, or by acquiring a new loan to repay the existing loan.

Of course, it is claimed that programme loans contribute to improving the institutional and implementation quality of governance and, thereby, enhancing future incomes. That outcome is, however, not quantifiable and is not otherwise visible over the last several decades. Programme loans, labelled in budget documents as 'external financing' have largely been used as 'budget support' and encouraged fiscal profligacy. They have merely added to the debt burden and to dependence.

A WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT

1998 was a watershed year: *Pakistan went nuclear.*[14] The US and the West were alarmed. Pakistan was too unstable politically and fragile economically to be allowed to possess the mass-destructive power of nuclear weapons. There emerged an imperative and an urgency to rein in the country. Any direct action could not be contemplated. Pakistan's collaboration, howsoever two-faced, was still essential for operations in post-Taliban Afghanistan. However, the economy presented itself as a soft underbelly. And IFIs had already planted their talons into the power structure.

The Washington-based Bretton Woods and associated institutions had bankrolled Pakistan's economy for more than half a century, particularly the fiscal profligacy of the 1980s. Of course, that was not altruism.[15] Pakistan was paid for carrying out the west's dirty errands, but the errand boy was not needed any longer. Accordingly, they no longer needed to indulge the country's bottomless begging bowl and fragmented governance. To date, it had used loan conditionalities as an instrument to influence policy. Now, the situation demanded that they replace indirect measures with a degree of direct control.

The ruling cliques again proved to be the convenient facilitators. A forced change of regime in 1999,[16] one year after the nuclear test, enabled the imposition of a non-resident Pakistani former US commercial bank employee as Finance Minister, later promoted as Prime Minister. Another non-resident Pakistani former World Bank employee was appointed as Governor of the State Bank. The events of what is known as 9/11 also proved to be auspiciously timed for the ruling cliques and Pakistan once again offered its services to the US in its so-called 'war against terror'.[17] Dollars poured in.

[14] Editors Note. Rai M. Saleh Azam, "When Mountains Move: The Story of Chagai," The Pakistani Nationalist (blog), May 28, 2000. Available at: https://thepakistaninationalist.blogspot.com/2012/07/when-mountaians-move-story-of-chagai.html

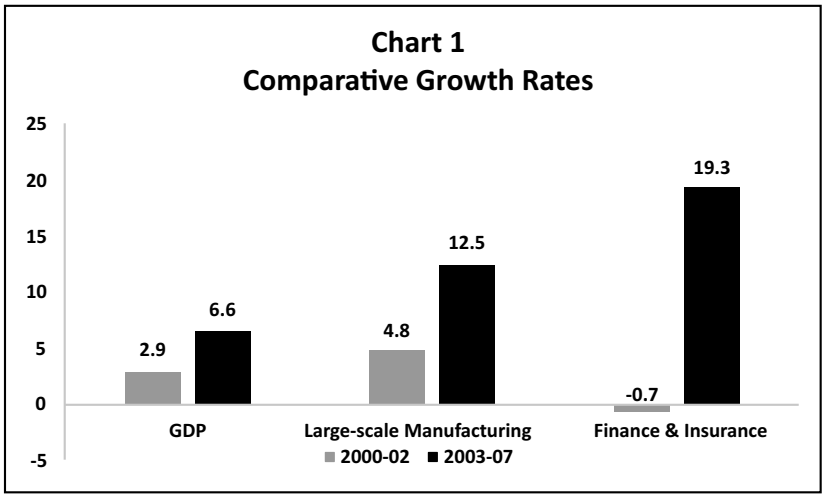
[15] Editors Note. Hassan N. Gardezi and Soofia Mumtaz, "Globalisation and Pakistan's Dilemma of Development [with Comments]," The Pakistan Development Review, Vol. 43, Iss. 4 (2004): p. 423–40. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41260697?read-now=1&seq=10#page_scan_tab_contents

[16] Editors Note. "Regime Changes in Pakistan," DAWN News, August 26, 2008. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/841292/regime-changes-in-pakistan

[17] Editors Note. Understanding the importance of Pakistan after 9/11, the Bush Administration moved quickly to rebuild a partnership with Islamabad that had atrophied in the 1990s. This led to the forgiveness of more than USD 1 billion of Pakistani debt. In response, President Musharraf decided to side with the United States in the war on terrorism after 9/11 which forced him to adjust Pakistani policy. Consequently, Pakistan has, at times, aggressively pursued al-Qaeda terrorists, killing or capturing more senior al-Qaeda leaders than any other nation. For detailed analysis, peruse "The next Chapter: The United States and Pakistan" (Pakistan Policy Working Group, September 2008). Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/09_pakistan_cohen.pdf

9/11 AND THE ERA OF ECONOMIC HAVOC: 2000-2007

The Pakistan economy for the years 2000-2007 performed in two phases: the first three years 2000-2002 and the next five years 2003-2007. The first three years were difficult. In average annual terms, GDP growth was a modest 2.9 per cent and growth in large-scale manufacturing and finance & insurance was 4.8 per cent and -0.7 per cent, respectively.[18]

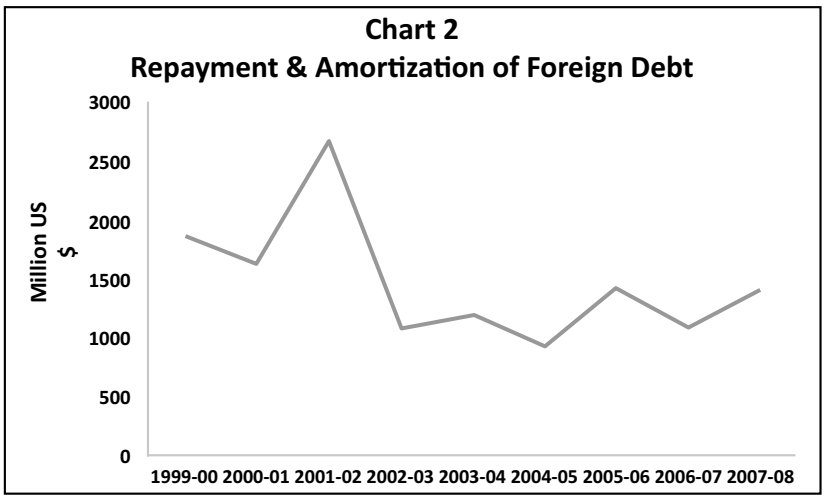


Source: Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2003-04" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2004); Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2004-05" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2005); and, Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2008-09" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2009).

The next five years were years of growth and prosperity – or so the statistics claimed. In average annual terms, GDP growth was a robust 6.6 per cent and growth in large-scale manufacturing and finance & insurance was a record 12.5 per cent and 19.3 per cent, respectively. Two years within this five-year period – 2003-04 and 2004-05 – were particularly extraordinary; GDP growth was a robust 8.3 per cent and growth in large-scale manufacturing and finance & insurance was a record 19 per cent and 36.9 per cent, respectively.

A post-mortem of the above statistics reveals a disturbing scenario of selling a piece of sovereignty for a fistful of dollars. Following 9/11, Pakistan abandoned its Taliban allies and dutifully lined up behind the US. In return, Pakistan was awarded with a 're-profiling' of its external debt. In other words, debt service payments that became due were deferred to a later date. Accordingly, Pakistan's 'Repayment and Amortisation of Foreign Debt' fell from an average of USD 2,069 million over 2000-2002 to USD 1,157 million over 2003-2007.[19]

[18] Chart 1.
[19] Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues from 1979-80 to 2019-20; Chart 2.



Source: Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2008-09" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2009). Available at: https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_0809.html.

The sharp relief in annual debt service payments represented a major relaxation of the external constraints that were strangulating the economy. The regime, packed with 'imported contract technocrats' representing global capital, adopted policies that exposed the economy to external shocks by opening wide the doors for foreign exchange outflows – without corresponding inflows. One set of measures included the reduction of interest rates and opening a window of consumer financing.

The banks – now mostly foreign-owned – launched an advertising blitz, targeting all income groups and offering low-interest loans for the purchase of consumer goods – houses, vehicles, motorcycles, refrigerators, TV sets, washing machines, etc. Understandably, demand for credit soared, with even low-income households seeking to trade their small living quarters for a larger flat, their motorcycles for a small car, and so on.[20]

Two immediate impacts were a sharp rise in bank profits and in imports. Bank profitability is reflected in finance sector value addition in national accounts statistics, which escalated from -0.7 per cent over 2000-02 to a record 19 per cent average growth over 2003-2007 and 37 per cent for two years 2003-05! Import growth accelerated from an average of 3.2 per cent over 2000-2002 to 24.7 per cent over 2003-2007.[21] Imports were of two kinds: one of directly consumable goods – food, clothing, cosmetics, and even pet food and shampoos; and the other of inputs/parts for local assembly of consumer durables – vehicles, motorcycles, refrigerators, TV sets, washing machines; all of which raised the import of components.

Average import growth of 24.7 per cent over 2003-2007 was matched with average export growth of 13.4 per cent over the same period, resulting in the trade deficit as a percentage of GDP rising from 2.4 per cent in 2000 to nearly 10 per cent in 2007. Manufacturing companies in exporting countries profited while Pakistan's foreign exchange haemorrhaged.

Further, impediments in the way of foreign investment in service and consumer sectors were removed and foreign consumer stores – restaurants and clothing chains – proliferated. More significantly, there was a wholesale transfer of several national assets in leading sectors of the economy – banking, energy, telecommunications, etc. – to foreign interests. Notably, all such entities are in the 'non-tradable' (i.e., non-export) sector offering their services in the domestic market and collecting sales revenues in rupees.

[20] For many, however, the yearning for a better life turned sour. As interest rates rose post-2007, many borrowers could not afford the higher instalments and had to surrender their possessions that had been locked as collateral.
[21] Even in the earlier decade 1990-1999, the annual average import growth was 4 per cent.

Box 1
An exercise in expediency

The regime had no ideological principles and operated on the basis of expediency. The privatization of the Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) – a State-owned enterprise – is a case in point.

The regime discarded the earlier dictum of the preceding government, which based its privatization programme on the argument that loss-making units were a drain on the national budget and merited divestment.

The new refrain was '*it is not the business of the state to be in business*'. That appeared to be a coherent position, ideologically. However, PTCL was sold to a Middle Eastern *public sector* telecommunications company.

De facto, therefore, the refrain changed to '*it is not the business of the Pakistani state to be in business in Pakistan, but it can be the business of a foreign state to be in business in Pakistan*'.

Both types of foreign investments – direct as well as by way of privatisation – earn revenues in rupees, which are converted into foreign exchange for the repatriation of profits. None contribute to exports or generate any foreign exchange inflows. All of them engender net foreign exchange outflows in terms of (reverse) remittances of profits to host countries and constitute a significant factor in the Balance of Payments crises that Pakistan perpetually faces. The unprecedented scale and speed of privatisation and invasion of foreign commercial interests were overseen directly by IFI appointees. Notably, the IFI-dominated regime's Minister for Privatisation was a non-resident Pakistani former World Bank employee.

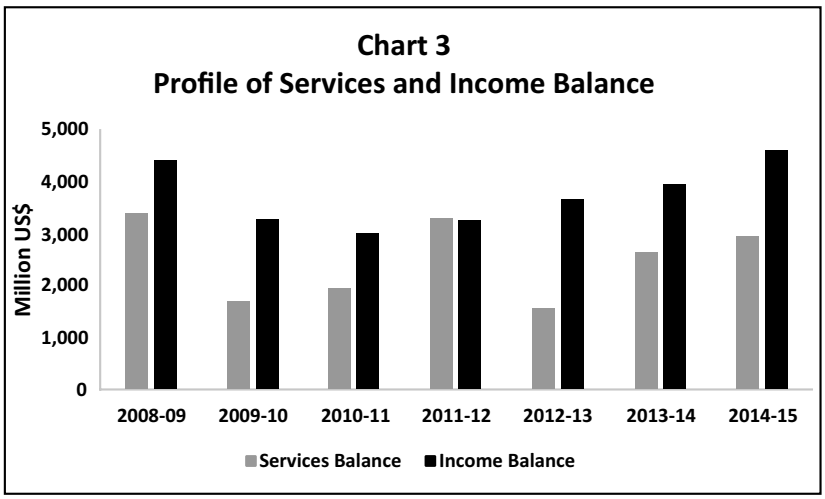
Profit repatriation, earlier reported by the State Bank as part of the Services Balance, swelled to such high levels that the State Bank had to divide the Services Balance category in 2009 and create a new sub-category of Income Balance. The deficit in the Income Balance, reflecting FDI profit outflow, has exceeded the deficit in the Services Balance by 60 per cent on average. Except in 2011-12, when the two have been almost equal, the Income deficit has been higher for all years than the Services deficit – almost double in 2009-10 and more than double in 2012-13.[22]

Table 2
Profile of Services and Income Balance (USD Millions)

Year	*Services Balance*	*Income Balance*	*Ratio of Income Balance to Services Balance*
2008-09	-3,381	-4,407	1.30
2009-10	-1,690	-3,282	1.94
2010-11	-1,940	-3,017	1.56
2011-12	-3,305	-3,245	0.98
2012-13	-1,564	-3,669	2.34
2013-14	-2,650	-3,955	1.49
2014-15	-2,963	-4,595	1.55
Average			**1.60**

Source: Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2012-13" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2013); Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-18" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2018).

[22] Dr. Kaiser Bengali, State of the Economy: 1990-2015 (Karachi: Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, 2018); Table 2; and, Chart 3



Source: Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2012-13" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2013); Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-18" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2018).

The combined impact of the upsurge in imports and acceleration in profit repatriation has seen mounting net foreign exchange outflows; a situation that is now rooted in the structure of the economy and has locked Pakistan in a state of structural dependency. The steady haemorrhaging of foreign exchange has created a permanently deteriorating Balance of Payments crisis, with more and more frequent recourse to IMF for bailouts. Worse, the continued dominance of IFI appointees in Pakistan's economic policymaking apparatus ensures that the state of dependency continues and deepens.

IN SEARCH FOR NEW PROTECTORS: 2000-2018

The turn of the century posed a challenge of a different kind for Pakistan's ruling cliques. The rise of China began to change the global politico-military equation. The US discovered a new enemy and needed new partnerships. It located a new ally that had a mutual interest in containing China: Pakistan's archrival India! In the event, Pakistan has been forsaken – again. The Pakistani ruling cliques, left in the cold, felt insecure and abandoned. Used to the comforting shade of a security umbrella and now exposed to the geopolitical elements, the latent dependency syndrome resurfaced and Pakistan reached out to China for an embrace.

Pakistan's attempt to ally itself with China has taken the form of the multi-billion dollar 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC). The core of CPEC is the development of the port at Gwadar in Balochistan province and the 2,000 km link to Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province. The Kashgar-Gwadar route and the port is of critical significance for China. It provides a shorter route to the Middle East and Africa and, more importantly, it allows China a backdoor to the world in the event of a conflict on its eastern shores. Negotiating with China as an equal partner, Pakistan could have bargained a highly lucrative deal vis-à-vis Gwadar; instead, it settled for a mere 9 per cent share in Gwadar Port's gross revenues. Other CPEC deals – power projects – have also come under ex-post scrutiny for terms that are alleged to be unfavourable to Pakistan.

CPEC holds enormous promise for Pakistan. Earlier in the 1960s and 1970s, the Indus Basin Works changed the economic geography of the country. Two crops are now grown where not a blade of grass grew and there are bustling towns where there were barren landscapes. CPEC has similar potential. However, the best of prospects can be frittered away if managed irresponsibly. CPEC has come under public questioning in this respect.

CPEC is also shrouded in opacity. Conceivably, the deal has been arrived at almost solely from the perspective of securing a Chinese security umbrella vis-à-vis India. It appears that the ruling cliques are prepared to pay any economic price for questionable political gains: questionable because any notion that China will go to war with India on Pakistan's behalf is frivolous.

2018-TO DATE

Pakistan's foreign alliances' policy shift faces a conundrum. The move to attach the country to China is held back by the chains that bind the country to the west. More than half of Pakistan's exports are destined for North American and European markets and China has little need for low-value Pakistani products. More importantly, Pakistan is heavily indebted to Washington institutions and China cannot be expected to 'adopt' the debts.

The year 2018 again saw Pakistan unable to service its foreign debts and was forced to put on its supplicant cap and go to the IMF for a bailout. In 1980, the then-military ruler complained to the US that it was offering peanuts in return for services in Afghanistan. In 2019, however, IMF offered a few bits of a peanut for its services – and Pakistan accepted. The country was facing a USD 15-20 billion annual foreign exchange deficit, but the IMF pledged a mere USD 6 billion over three years. For the rest, Pakistan has to borrow – and heavily – from expensive commercial sources. Given that Pakistan's debt servicing liabilities over the next three years already stand at close to USD 30 billion. That meant more profits for global capital and more indebtedness for the country. Additionally, Pakistan has had to accept IMF appointees to head the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank, with incumbents removed unceremoniously.

Box 2
Chronology of ex-IFI appointments

Notably, the occupation of key political positions is not a one-off passing phenomenon. The position of Prime Minister was held by a former US commercial bank employee for 8 years from 2000 to 2007 and the State Bank Governor position was held by former Bretton Woods institutions employees for an uninterrupted 16 years from 1993 to 2009. Notably again, all appointees were residents abroad and flew in to take charge. Barring one or two, all of them also left the country upon completion of their terms and relinquishing charge. Their conduct was in line with that of contractors who hover on the horizon only to fulfil their terms of reference and have little stake in outcomes.

The chronology of such appointments of ex-IFI employees is as follows.

1993-1993	World Bank employee appointed caretaker Prime Minister
1993-1999	IMF employee appointed Governor of the State Bank.
1996-1997	World Bank employee appointed caretaker Advisor Finance
1999-2007	CitiBank employee appointed Minister of Finance and then Prime Minister.
1999-2005	World Bank employee appointed Governor of the State Bank.
2003-2010	World Bank employee appointed Minister for Privatization
2005-2009	ADB employee appointed Governor of the State Bank
2010-2013	World Bank employee appointed Minister of Finance
2010-2013	ADB employee appointed caretaker Minister of Finance
2010-2013	IMF employee appointed Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission
2019-	World Bank employee appointed Advisor Finance
2019-	IMF employee appointed Governor of the State Bank

IMF: FRIEND OR FOE?

The IMF, by the nature of its function and role in managing the international financial system, has commanded the central role in this regard. Like any banker extending loans to businesses, IMF seeks to ensure the security of its capital. Just as any banker would examine the balance sheet and profit and loss accounts of any business and require it to improve its asset-to-liability ratios before extending a loan, IMF too, assesses a country's finances. If there are weaknesses, it requires remedial measures. These remedial measures are agreed to mutually benefit IMF and the concerned country and the agreed provisions then become conditions. Notably, it is a country that approaches IMF for a loan, not the other way around.

IMF has just two basic conditions: the (rupee) fiscal balance and the (foreign exchange) current account balance to be 'healthy' and deficits, if any, to be within limits. The first creates a rupee gap, and the second, a dollar gap. The rupee gap occurs as a result of the excess of expenditure over revenues; the dollar gap essentially occurs as a result of the excess of imports over exports. If the applicant country can present a plan to bridge the two gaps by reducing expenditure or raising revenues or both and by reducing imports or raising exports or both, IMF cannot have the rationale to impose any other condition. It is when the applicant country does not come up with a workable plan that IMF presents, and imposes its own agenda.

This is not to say that IMF is entirely politically benign. The profile of IMF's lending to Pakistan shows its political biases. Table 3 lists the 23 IMF bailouts over the period 1958 to 2019. The amounts till 1977 were modest – between SDR[23] 25,000 to SDR 100,000, but jumped to SDR 1.268 million in 1980 and SDR 0.919 million in

Table 3
Chronology of Pakistan - IMF Agreements

Facility	Date of Agreement	Amount (In Thousands of SDRs)
Extended Fund Facility	July 03, 2019	4,268,000
Extended Fund Facility	September 04, 2013	4,393,000
Standby Arrangement	November 24, 2008	7,235,900
Extended Credit Facility	**December 06, 2001**	**1,033,700**
Standby Arrangement	November 29, 2000	465,000
Extended Credit Facility	October 20, 1997	682,380
Extended Fund Facility	October 20, 1997	454,920
Standby Arrangement	December 13, 1995	562,590
Extended Credit Facility	February 22, 1994	606,600
Extended Fund Facility	February 22, 1994	379,100
Standby Arrangement	September 16, 1993	265,400
Structural Adjustment	December 28, 1988	382,410
Standby Arrangement	December 28, 1988	273,150
Extended Fund Facility	**December 02, 1981**	**919,000**
Extended Fund Facility	**November 24, 1980**	**1,268,000**
Standby Arrangement	March 09, 1977	80,000
Standby Arrangement	November 11, 1974	75,000
Standby Arrangement	August 11, 1973	75,000
Standby Arrangement	May 18, 1972	100,000
Standby Arrangement	October 17, 1968	75,000
Standby Arrangement	March 16, 1965	37,500
Standby Arrangement	December 08, 1958	25,000

Source: "History of Lending Commitments: Pakistan," International Monetary Fund, February 29, 2020. Available at: https://www.imf.org/external/np/fin/tad/extarr2.aspx?memberKey1=760&date1key=2020-02-29.

[23] SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF. It is not a currency, but a basket of five currencies: US Dollar, Euro, Chinese renminbi, Japanese yen, and British pound sterling.

1981 – totalling SDR 2.187 million. For the next 20 years thereafter, there were nine bailouts, averaging less than SDR 500,000. The year 2001 again saw the amount jump to SDR 1.033 million. Notably, 1980 was the year when Pakistan lined up to support the US war in Afghanistan and 2001 was the year when Pakistan lined up in the so-called US 'war on terror'.

The Bretton Woods institutions are part of the international financial system, which is controlled by western powers as a tool for promoting their global agenda. And, waiting in the queue, behind western governments, are western corporations eager to lap up lucrative assets. When a country approaches the IMF, it exposes itself to commercial manipulation by global capital and political manipulation by western governments. The more that country is in financial trouble, the greater the risk of manipulation.

Pakistan has sought and secured IMF support on 17 occasions since 1975. The basic conditions in every agreement have been and are the same. However, Pakistan's record of adhering to the terms of the contract is poor and IMF has had to terminate Agreements mid-stream. Disparagingly, Pakistan has come to be called a 'one-tranche' economy. That Pakistan fails, consistently, to bridge the rupee and dollar gaps is not IMF's fault; it is the epitome of the abject failure of Pakistani ruling cliques to manage the economy rationally over more than a quarter-century.

HOBNOBBING WITH THE IMF: 1975-2019

Pakistan has entered into IMF programmes 17 times in 44 years from 1975[24] to 2019 – at an average of one every third year! These programmes have been necessitated because of repeated and intractable domestic and foreign exchange resource deficits – the rupee and dollar gaps. Technically, they are referred to as budget and current account deficits, respectively. These gaps have tended to peak with stubborn regularity.

As stated earlier, budget deficits occur on account of expenditures exceeding revenues and current account deficits transpire on account of imports exceeding exports, with other income (e.g., remittances, services income, etc.) failing to cover the gap. A perusal of data shows a remarkable correspondence between budget deficits and current expenditures, between current account deficits and trade deficits, and between trade deficits and imports.[25]

The correlation coefficient between budget deficit and current expenditure is estimated at 0.949 and that between current account deficit and trade deficit and between trade deficit and imports is estimated at 0.623. The statistics indicate that budget deficits are driven by current expenditures and current account deficits by trade deficits, which are driven by imports. Specifically, 95 per cent of the budget deficit is determined by current expenditures and over 60 per cent of the current account deficit is determined by imports.[26]

Table 4
Relationship between Budget and Current Account Deficits and causative variables

Variables	*Correlation coefficient*
Budget Deficit and Current Expenditure	0.9492
Current Account Deficit and Trade Deficit	0.6234
Trade Deficit and Imports	0.6223

Note: Authors calculations based on data from Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues

[24] Pakistan also entered into IMF programmes in 1972, 1973 and 1974, with the support amount totalling SDR 250,000. However, the present analysis is carried out from the year 1975 onwards as the prior years were buffeted by turmoil on account of economic dislocation caused by the war with India and dismemberment of the country and tripling of international oil prices, and massive floods.

[25] Acknowledgement is due to Muhammed Farooq Memon, Lecturer at SZABIST Karachi, for diligently collating the data for this analysis.

[26] Table 4.

Clearly, the failure to reign in current expenditure and imports lie at the root of the problem. When the deficits accumulate over the years and soar to unmanageable proportions, recourse to debt becomes inevitable. Budget deficits are addressed by rupee loans from domestic banks and non-bank sources and current account deficits are covered by external loans. Pakistan's ruling cliques have availed of both avenues rather liberally.

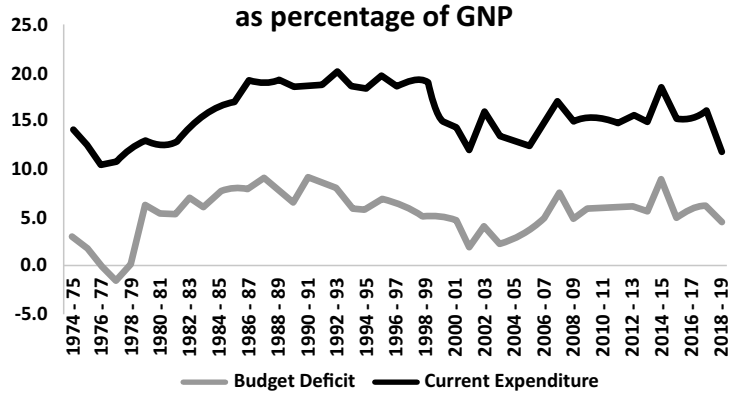
Table 5
Performance of Key Economic Variables
1975-2019

Year	Budget Deficit/	Current Expenditure/	Current Account Deficit/	Trade Deficit/	Imports/
	GNP	GNP	GNP	GNP	GNP
1974 - 75	**-3.0**	**14.0**	**-11.1**	**-10.2**	**20.0**
1975 - 76	-2.0	12.6	-7.7	-7.5	16.7
1976 - 77	**0.1**	**10.4**	**-6.7**	**-7.6**	**14.8**
1977 - 78	1.4	10.7	-3.2	-7.9	14.8
1978 - 79	0.0	12.0	-5.3	-9.3	17.4
1979 - 80	-6.4	13.0	-4.5	-9.3	18.6
1980 - 81	**-5.5**	**12.6**	**-3.4**	**-8.1**	**17.8**
1981 - 82	**-5.5**	**12.7**	**-4.3**	**-9.0**	**15.9**
1982 - 83	-6.9	14.3	-1.6	-8.4	16.9
1983 - 84	-6.0	15.7	-2.9	-8.6	16.7
1984 - 85	-7.7	16.4	-5.0	-10.1	17.5
1985 - 86	-8.0	17.0	-3.6	-7.4	16.3
1986 - 87	-8.0	19.1	-2.0	-4.8	15.2
1987 - 88	-9.0	19.0	-4.2	-4.8	16.0
1988 - 89	**-7.8**	**19.2**	**-4.7**	**-5.7**	**16.9**
1989 - 90	-6.5	18.5	-4.5	-4.8	16.7
1990 - 91	-9.3	18.7	-4.7	-5.3	18.0
1991 - 92	-8.6	18.8	-2.7	-4.5	18.3
1992 - 93	-8.1	20.2	-7.1	-6.3	19.3
1993 - 94	**18.6**	**18.6**	**-3.8**	**-3.8**	**16.6**
1994 - 95	-6.9	18.2	-4.0	-4.1	16.8
1995 - 96	**-6.9**	**19.6**	**-7.1**	**-5.8**	**18.7**
1996 - 97	-6.4	18.7	-6.2	-5.0	18.0

1997 - 98	**-5.6**	**19.2**	**-3.1**	**-3.0**	**16.8**
1998 - 99	-4.9	19.1	-3.9	-1.9	11.0
1999 - 00	-4.9	15.1	-1.6	-2.0	10.0
2000 - 01	**-4.6**	**14.4**	**-0.7**	**-1.7**	**11.0**
2001 - 02	**-1.9**	**11.9**	**1.9**	**-0.3**	**9.5**
2000 - 03	-4.1	15.9	3.7	-0.5	13.3
2003 - 04	-2.3	13.5	1.3	-1.2	13.8
2004 - 05	-2.9	13.0	-1.6	-3.9	16.7
2005 - 06	-3.6	12.4	-4.0	-5.9	17.6
2006 - 07	-4.8	14.6	-4.7	-6.1	17.2
2007 - 08	-7.5	17.1	-8.0	-8.6	20.4
2008 - 09	**-5.0**	**15.1**	**-5.4**	**-7.3**	**18.4**
2009 - 10	-6.0	15.5	-2.1	-6.3	16.9
2010 - 11	-6.0	15.2	0.1	-4.7	16.1
2011 - 12	-6.1	14.8	-2.0	-6.6	17.1
2012 - 13	-6.2	15.5	-1.0	-6.3	16.5
2013 - 14	**-5.7**	**15.1**	**-1.2**	**-6.4**	**16.1**
2014 - 15	-9.0	18.6	-0.9	-6.0	14.4
2015 - 16	-5.0	15.2	-1.7	-6.5	13.9
2016 - 17	-5.8	15.4	-3.8	-8.3	15.1
2017 - 18	-6.1	16.1	-5.8	-9.6	17.0
2018 - 19	-4.6	11.8	-4.5	-7.2	13.2

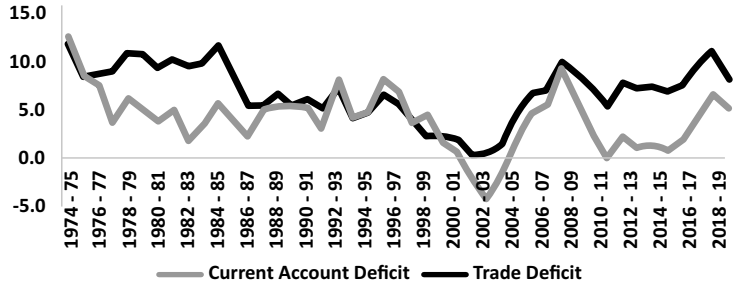
Note: Figures in bold represent years when Pakistan entered into an Agreement with IMF.
Source: Author's calculations based on Ministry of Finance, "Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues

Chart 4
Budget Deficit and Current Expenditure Trends as percentage of GNP



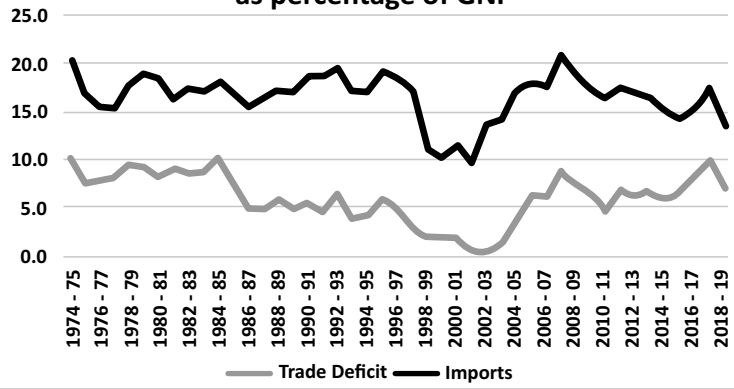
Source: Ministry of Finance, " Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues.

Chart 5
Current Account and Table Deficits Trends as percentage of GNP



Source: Ministry of Finance, " Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues.

Chart 6
Trade Deficit and Imports Trends as percentage of GNP



Source: Ministry of Finance, " Pakistan Economic Survey" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, n.d.). Various issues.

Table 5 and Charts 4-6 exhibit budget deficit, current account expenditure, current account deficit, trade deficit and imports and reveal that the twin deficits tend to drop for a year or two upon entering an IMF programme, but revert back to what can be described as the 'normal'. A 'ball-by-ball' account shows the following:

IMF bailouts in 1974-75 and 1976-77, totalling SDR 155,000

The budget deficit-GNP ratio stood at 3 per cent in 1974-75, which declined over the next 5 years to zero in 1978-79, but jumped to 6.4 per cent in 1979-80.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio stood at 11.1 per cent in 1974-75, which declined to 4.5 per cent in 1979-80.

IMF bailouts in 1980-81 and 1981-82, totalling SDR 2,187,000

The budget deficit-GNP ratio stood at 5.5 per cent in 1980-81 and climbed year after year to 9 per cent by 1987-88.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio declined from 4.3 per cent in 1981-82 to 1.6 per cent in 1982-83, but rose to 5 per cent in 1984-85 and then reverted back to 4.2 per cent in 1987-1988.

IMF bailout in 1988-89, totalling SDR 655,560

The budget deficit-GNP ratio declined from 7.8 per cent in 1988-89 to 6.5 per cent in 1989-90, but spiked again to 9.3 per cent the following year and remained at over 8 per cent till the next bailout in 1993.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio declined from 4.7 per cent in 1988-89 to 2.7 per cent in 1991-92 but escalated to 7.1 per cent the following year in 1992-93.

IMF bailouts in 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1997-98, totalling SDR 2,951,000

The budget deficit-GNP ratio stood at 6 per cent in 1993-94, hovered between 5-7 per cent for 5 years, and stood at 4.9 per cent in 1999-2000. Overall, the budget deficit-GNP ratio was lower in 1999-2000 than in 1993-94.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio stood at 3.8 per cent in 1993-94, fluctuated between 3-7 per cent for 5 years, and stood at 1.6 per cent in 1999-2000. Overall again, the current account deficit-GNP ratio was lower in 1999-2000 than in 1993-94.

IMF bailouts in 2000-01 and 2001-02, totalling SDR 1.499 million:

The budget deficit-GNP ratio stood at 4.6 per cent in 2000-01, declined to 1.9 per cent in 2001-02, fluctuated between 2-5 per cent for 5 years, and then climbed to 7.5 per cent in 2007-08.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio stood at a nominal deficit of 0.7 per cent in 2000-01, but turned to a surplus of 1.9 per cent, 3.7 per cent and 1.3 per cent in 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04, respectively, and then reverted to a deficit of 1.6 per cent in 2004-05, which soared to 8 per cent in 2007-08.

IMF bailout in 2008-09, totalling SDR 7.236 million:

The budget deficit-GNP ratio stood at 5 per cent in 2008-09 but rose to an average of 6 per cent over

2010-13.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio stood at 5.4 per cent in 2008-09 and declined to an average of 1.3 per cent over 2010-2013. Overall, the current account deficit-GNP ratio was lower in 2010-13 than in 2008-09.

IMF bailout in 2013-14, totalling SDR 4,393 million

The budget deficit-GNP stood at 5.7 per cent in 2013-14, but registered a sharp rise to 9 per cent the following year in 2014-15, and then fell to an average of 5.4 per cent over 2015-16 to 2018-19.

The current account deficit-GNP ratio stood at 1.2 per cent in 2013-14 but escalated to 5.8 per cent in 2017-18; necessitating yet another IMF programme in 2018-19.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan's slide into the web of global financial control cannot be attributed to external forces alone. Rather, it is the country's ruling cliques that have facilitated the opening of the window of external domination by rank irresponsibility in economic policy management. There has now emerged a pattern to the Pakistani ruling cliques' modus operandi: live off lavishly, and when the coffers run dry, approach the IMF for a bailout, and when the coffers are replenished with borrowed money, go back to living off lavishly, till the next crisis erupts.

Herein is a supreme irony. Pakistan is endowed with a 200 million-plus population, substantial natural resources and a capable workforce. It commands a geography that can make it a junction of international trade and a strategic geopolitical location that can enable it to wield decisive political influence in the region. It is also a nuclear power!

Yet, the country is weighed down by its ruling cliques that appear to be suffering from a deep-seated inferiority complex and a slave mentality. The country's leadership lacks the self-confidence to stand up on its own and has consistently sought a security umbrella from one or the other super-power. On account thereof, Pakistan is now not only subject to global capital diktat but has also been hauled up before the international Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to answer for 'errant' behaviour. A proud and upright people have to suffer for the sins of the ruling cliques.

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NEOLIBERALISM IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE – RAMIFICATIONS AND STRUGGLES

Azra Talat Sayeed

ABSTRACT

Framed by the global context of capitalist agricultural practices and neo-imperial strategies of dominance and control from the start of the Green Revolution from the 1960s to the present day, Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed discusses the food production and hunger crisis generally and in the global South, specifically in Pakistan including its fallout under the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing attention to the semi-colonial, semi-feudal relations between the former colonial states and the 'developing and developed' countries, the essay discusses the exploitation and control of Third World economies by rich industrialised nations and the ways in which technological advancement in tandem with neoliberal agendas have resulted in the pauperisation of rural communities and burgeoning urban slums in the global South. As possible ways forward, the essay highlights the importance of people's resistance movements and policy changes that are responsive to Pakistan's current and long-term climate change and food security needs.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed is a social and political activist and academic who has been advocating for social justice, gender equality, and workers' rights for several decades. Associated with Roots for Equity, an organisation that works with small and landless farmers, women and religious minorities in the rural and urban sector, she is also the founder and chairperson of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), a non-government organisation for labour rights, and vice-chairperson of the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS), a global alliance of progressive organisations and movements for social, economic and political justice.

Dr. Sayeed has authored several books and articles on labour rights, women's rights, and social justice issues in Pakistan, and is the recipient of several awards, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Decent Work Champion Award and the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, one of Pakistan's highest civilian awards.

It is not surprising that according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition 2021, there is global failure in progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on ensuring access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all people throughout the year and eradicating all forms of malnutrition. The Report also states that "between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 – as many as 161 million more than in 2019. Nearly 2.37 billion people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – showing an increase of 320 million people in just one year".[1]

These devastating figures cannot be put at the raging pandemic's door alone, as trends since 2014 have shown that hunger is on the rise. As such, an analysis of the political economy of hunger could yield some critical insights into how an advanced global society has drifted so far away from meeting one of the most critical and basic human needs.

Food and agriculture production constitutes the foundation of any society's survival, self-reliance and dignity, and history shows that societies have always striven for food security. Until the middle of the last century, dependency on food security was based on the knowledge and hard labour of farmers and the realm of small producers. Much of this scenario changed with the growing reliance on science and technology at the expense of traditional methods of food production. However, just within half a century this dependence on these bulwarks of progress proved to be fallacious as it laid bare the inherent risks and limitations of technological development framed by the capitalist mode of production, whether based on bioengineering, green economy or the much touted Green Revolution technologies.

On the one hand, we have affluent, well-fed people who have never grown any form of food, and on the other, the millions who work all year round to produce food for the world but themselves go hungry day after day. Furthermore, while surplus food is being produced, those who consume it face different forms of malnourishment due to its poor quality. And finally, there is the immense plunder of Nature in tandem with Nature's unwillingness to passively accept its chemical and genetic intoxication, which is now apparent in the severe weather calamities that are part and parcel of climate change.

Agriculture has been the basis of society's development since pre-historic times. In this regard, the Indus Valley Civilisation has the merit of owning an ancient and fairly sophisticated agricultural system, with seasonally

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) et al., "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All" (Rome, Italy: FAO, 2021). Available at: https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4474en

grown cereals, fruits and vegetables.[2] The historical move from traditional agricultural practices to capitalist agriculture and the onslaught of a set of technological advancements, generally referred to as the Green Revolution in the 1960s, had a vast and deeply felt structural impact on agriculture globally and locally.

By the 1980s, genetic engineering, a harbinger of further technological progress in the field of agriculture, was on the horizon. With Biotechnology as the new science providing technical application in a wide range of sectors from health, energy, food and agriculture, the result was a push for a new era of capitalism, often euphemistically called globalisation. Others have called it imperialism. Globalisation shifted the Keynesian bent of policies towards an entirely new set of policy options, namely neoliberal policies. From the 1990s to the present day, the technological advances in food and agriculture have thrust peasant politics to the forefront once again. This political battlefield encompasses 'stakeholders' that on the one hand comprise small and landless farmers, fisher folk, the urban poor and other basic producers who can be considered as collective owners of the wealth of a people's traditional knowledge and experience, and on the other, the super-rich mega corporations that own vast tracts of land and state of the art technologies; with one suffering the misery and humiliation of poverty and hunger, and the other with their corporate profiles, mega profits, scientific simulations and projections of 'Zero Hunger'.

This paper will draw out the semi-colonial and semi-feudal relations that exist between the former colonial states and their erstwhile colonial masters, now respectively called the developing and developed countries. In this relationship the rich industrialised countries are able to 'govern' the countries of the Third World by pushing neo-liberalism across the board, including food and agriculture policies, and can be held directly accountable for the massive pauperisation of rural communities and burgeoning urban poor slums across the global South. The impact of these policies and the resistance movements by peasants, women and other sectors they led to, will be analysed with possible ways forward that are responsive to the various crises now besetting the world.

FROM TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE TO CAPITALIST AGRICULTURE

The adaptation of Green Revolution policies can be seen as the initiation of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture systems; as such it is an important point of reference for understanding the context of food and agriculture policies today.

The Green Revolution was introduced at a time when a large number of countries were emerging from their colonial bondage and were paving the way to independent charters for the realisation of their development visions. This was a time when ideological struggles, based on the juxtaposed philosophies of capitalism and socialism were vying for dominance, and political blocs were emerging with very different methods of operation for policies addressing agriculture and food production and consumption. The concept of sustainable food production and consumption was still to become an issue for critical focus.

The Chinese Revolution (1940s) had clearly opted for land distribution and the formation of land collectives to address household and community livelihood and food security needs, especially of the poorest peasants. The Green Revolution technologies, on the other hand, pushed for higher productivity, and promised, instead of a Red Revolution, a green one. Green Revolution technologies were based on high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds for maize, rice and wheat supported by chemical fertilisers, pesticides and mechanisation of agricultural production. This technology had been developed in the US and had many reasons for being propagated. The mantra emphasised not a political solution i.e. equitable land distribution, but a technical intervention for increased food production to provide for growing Third World populations.

It cannot be denied that countries that adopted the Green Revolution policy approach obtained very high degrees of productivity based on HYVs seeds for targeted food crops. It was only after a number of years that the impact of chemical inputs in food and agriculture began to show the intense destruction of biodiversity as well

[2] Steven Weber, "Seeds of Urbanism: Palaeoethnobotany and the Indus Civilization," Antiquity, Vol. 73, Iss. 282 (December 1999): p. 813–26. Available at: http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~tcrndfu/articles/orignal%20Weber%20antiquity.pdf

as severe impacts on human health and environment. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the 1970s laid bare the atrocities of chemical industrial food and agriculture production and its impact on nature.

It is pertinent to draw attention to the political impact of the Green Revolution as it allowed feudal land holders and big landlords to amass great wealth, particularly as in the case of Pakistan, where they retained the vast tracts of inherited land acquired as part of their services to colonial regimes. The hacienda systems in Latin America and the Philippines also bear witness to this colonial heritage across continents. Before the arrival of HYVs, third world agriculture was reliant on internal inputs, such as indigenous seeds, farm manure, compost and non-mechanised methods of production. In short, it was totally self-reliant in production.

The new set of policies pertaining to the Green Revolution allowed the United States to acquire numerous political and economic benefits in countries where it was introduced. Politically these ensured the maintenance of a powerful elite in the so called newly independent countries. These Countries were willing to tilt the development agenda towards economic policies that created structural dependencies on industrial inputs from the first world, especially the US. In addition, several other factors led to uneven societies with the powerful colluding with advanced capitalist countries and favouring policy paradigms that allow wealth to flow from the third to first world countries. While terms such as 'liberalism', 'free speech' and 'free society' were touted as the Holy Grail, this rhetoric overshadowed the real context of capitalism: its greed for controlling raw materials, markets and labour.

Tragically, peoples' movements have remained in a confused mire aspiring towards rights while demanding development models that imbibe capitalist forms of democracy that fully allow the protection of private property and enable the private sector to thrive. As a result, the so called 'free society' remains the prerogative of the rich and those with close ties to the establishment, who aspire to democratic societies in the rich industrialised world, while maintaining close ties with the establishment.

In this context, the food and agriculture production system was and remains of critical interest to the capitalist world. Not only because this sector yields rich profits, but because of its deep political interest as a means to controlling the people and the economy of nation-states.

GLOBALISATION'S TOUCHSTONE – NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism, may be considered as globalisation's policy-face that includes deregulation, privatisation and trade liberalisation. Though these policies had already been introduced by the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), the more unified universal policy package – hence recognised and coined through the term 'Globalisation' – was introduced in 1995 through the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

With the dying away of the Soviet Union, the practice of state capitalism under Keynesian economics, which was the hall mark of the Cold War period, was put aside and neoliberalism pushed forward as the path for development and prosperity. Introduced in the 1980s, the Washington Consensus represented the first wave in the introduction of austerity policies following the oil and burgeoning debt crisis of the 1970s. Third world governments were forced to reshape their economic systems to accept the pivotal role of the open market in both production and international trade through the conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The policies emanating from the Washington Consensus were generally packaged under the SAPs well into the 21st century and are still part of policy directives from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for indebted countries.

SAP had a huge impact on agriculture production as Green Revolution technologies were essentially based on external inputs subsidised by governments throughout the Keynesian era. The removal of subsidies resulted in skyrocketing prices for fuel, seeds, fertilisers and transport. Today, these are the basis of skyrocketing poverty in our countries including Pakistan.

The role of the Green Revolution provides the key to our understanding of agriculture and food production in Pakistan. These complex interlinkages will be discussed in the following sections.

THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION – THE UNIVERSALITY OF NEOLIBERALISM

Launched in 1986, the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade set the road map for the formation of the WTO. It was here that the US, for the very first time, introduced a number of new issues, including agriculture that so far had not been governed by GATT rules.[3] An added area was intellectual property rights. These two areas, in terms of agriculture and food, were and are tied together intrinsically. Agriculture, till it was brought under the umbrella of the WTO, had largely stayed out of the international market regime. This was in line with the way the US, European and third world countries were protecting their agricultural sector as national food security was a critical political factor.[4] However, under the WTO, the US forced inclusion of a whole new set of laws defining agriculture and food trade under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).

Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are an entirely different issue. Though the fight over IPRs has a long historical context, the introduction of such a legal clause can be considered nothing but a political positioning of the United States to guard new technological innovations, especially for pharmaceuticals and agriculture as well as a fight for maintaining its market domination.[5]

In the 1980s biotechnology had advanced considerably, and a particular area of critical interests was the introduction of genetically engineered seeds. The Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), introduced in the WTO had a deeply significant impact not only on agricultural trade but also on domestic level production, as it impacted ownership of the indigenous knowledge of farming communities and indigenous peoples, especially in the context of seeds. Up until the Green Revolution, even though HYV seeds were being patented by big agro-chemical corporations, there were no international universal laws that 'protected' their claims of intellectual property. The TRIPS Agreement was pushed for and demanded by the US corporate lobby in the WTO. This highlights the importance of establishing and understanding the linkages of US long-term capitalist design to capture genetic resources:

> Global collection of plant germplasm was initiated by the U.S. Patent Office as early as 1839 … The creation of the Green Revolution research centers (e.g., the International Rice Research Institute, the International Center for the Improvement of Maize and Wheat) was the product not only of an effort to introduce capitalism into the countryside but also the need to collect systematically the exotic germplasm required by the breeding programs of developed nations. Western science … staffed an institutional network that has served as a conduit for the extraction of plant germplasm for the Third World.[6]

It can be seen that the inclusion of AoA, TRIPS, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) in the WTO regime is the most diabolical attack on agriculture, food security and livelihoods of the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalised communities across the globe, especially in third world countries.

UNDERSTANDING NEOLIBERALISM IN AGRICULTURE – AOA AND TRIPS

The Agreement on Agriculture, which is composed of three basic clauses: domestic subsidy, access to markets and export subsidy, drastically changed the rules of the game for agriculture. It not only set a very stringent system for international trade in food and agricultural products, it also forced third

[3] Chakravarthi Raghavan, Recolonization: GATT, the Uruguay Round & the Third World (Third World Network, 1990). Available at: https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Recolonization.html?id=X3mRjwEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

[4] FAO, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2000: Lessons from the Past 50 Years" (Rome, Italy: FAO, 2000). Available at: https://www.fao.org/agrifood-economics/publications/detail/en/c/122046/

[5] Azra T. Sayeed, "Impact of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on Pharmaceutical Development in the Third World" (Ph.D. Thesis, 1995).

[6] Jack R. Kloppenburg Jr., First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology, Uwpress.wisc.edu, Second ed. (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Available at: https://www.amazon.com/First-Seed-Political-Biotechnology-Technology/dp/029919244X

world governments to change domestic systems of support to the agriculture sector. Through these clauses, the agreement stipulated that national governments must bring down domestic production and export support they provide to farmers, while simultaneously opening their markets to accept imports from other countries. A baseline year was set for first and third world countries to reduce domestic subsidies based on a complex system of determining country-specific reductions.[7]

How have these stipulations impacted the small and landless farmers of the third world? What has been the impact on food security, especially household food security of rural households, the urban poor and other small producers?

In order to understand the impact of the AoA, some basic differences between first and third world agriculture producers must be taken into account. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the definition of a 'small farmer' in the US from the 1980s to 2012, was someone who had at least 250 acres of land:

> In 2015, 90 percent of U.S. farms were small family operations with under $350,000 in annual gross cash farm income (GCFI) – measure of revenue that includes sales of crops and livestock, Government payments, and other farm-related income. These small farms, however, only accounted for 24 percent of the value of production. By comparison, large-scale family farms with at least $ 1 million GCFI made up on 2.9 percent of U.S. farms but contributed 42 percent of total production.[8]

A similar comparison was made between Indian and US farmers in 2020, as follows:

> Indian farmers, having an average landholding on one hectare … with US farmers whose average landholding is 176 hectares. There are 2.1 million farms across the US employing less than 2% of the population, with an average annual on-farm income per farm household of $18,637. Whereas more than half of India's 1.3 billion that depend on agriculture so for their livelihoods, with an average annual income of per farm household (from all sources) at less than US$ 1000.[9]

The Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) describes agriculture as:

> … practiced by families (including one or more households) using only or mostly family labour and deriving from that work a large but variable share of their income, in kind or in cash. Agriculture includes crop-raising, animal husbandry, forestry and artisanal fisheries. The holdings are run by family groups, a large proportion of which are headed by women, and women play important roles in production, processing and marketing activities.[10]

It has been reported that, of the 1.4 billion extremely poor people in the world (living on less than USD 1.25/ day), 70 per cent are estimated to live in rural areas and most of them depend partly (or completely) on agriculture.[11] Further, according to data from 81 countries, which cover two-thirds of the world's population and 38 per cent of agricultural land area, 73 per cent of the total number of holdings dispose of less than 1 hectare (2.47 acres) of land and 85 per cent dispose of less than 2 hectares of land.[12]

In a country like Pakistan, small farmers are considered to be those in possession of 12.5 acres or less land, and in essence they have zero income as they are constantly in debt. A circular system of buying inputs based on loans to be paid off at the time of harvest is what keeps the production system rolling. It should be noted that the highest percentage (99%) of small farmers, often referred to as family farmers, are to be found in Asia.

> The high level of risks and the modest means available imply that unpredictable expenditures can trigger an impoverishment spiral. Second, when products are sold, there is pressure to first feed the family and repay loans or

[7] "WTO Agreement on Agriculture" (European Parliament, 2020). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/111/wto-agreement-on-agriculture

[8] James M. MacDonald and Robert A. Hoppe, "Large Family Farms Continue to Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production" (Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 6, 2017). Available at: https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2017/march/large-family-farms-continue-to-dominate-us-agricultural-production/

[9] "Perils of the US-India Free Trade Agreement for Indian Farmers" (GRAIN, May 26, 2020). Available at: https://grain.org/e/6472.

[10] High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), "Investing in Smallholder Agriculture for Food Security" (Rome, Itlay: FAO, June 2013). Available at: https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/6559f2f5-10d4-5ff6-941d-498626eb219a/

[11] Ibid, p.10.

[12] Benjamin E. Graeub et al., "The State of Family Farms in the World," World Development, Vol. 87 (November 2016): p. 1–15. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15001217

> debts. Thus the marketable surplus is reduced, cash incomes remain low and, consequently, investments through cash expenditures become difficult. This is linked to a third organizational feature of small holder production: small holders often make investments through family labour. This implies that the quality of life in terms of health and access to basic services is of primary importance for productivity, as well as education and training to improve family members' skills, both agricultural and non-farm.[13]

The debt burden referred to above correctly depicts the tragic burden millions of small farmers across Africa, Latin America and Asia. The majority of the third world countries are dependent on first world countries for agricultural technology and agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilisers and pesticides among others. At the same time, the internal national political landscape portrays that the majority of agricultural production is carried out by small and landless farmers who have no political clout or voice in the agricultural policy arena. This voice and clout lies with the powerful feudal elites and rich farmers who have control and ownership over large tracts of land. This is in absolute contrast to the immense political power and sway of farmers' association in the advanced capitalist world. In the US for instance, they are mostly represented by myriad farmer's associations with offices in Washington DC and lobbies based on their particular group of commodities or other produce.[14]

This was the scenario during the Uruguay Round negotiations and much later after the formation of the WTO. Major US farm associations have always lobbied the US government with respect to international trade deals such as during the North American Free Trade Agreement,[15] and the Uruguay Round negotiations on agriculture vying for laws and stipulations that protect their interests in the international market.[16] Apart from farm lobbies, mega-agrochemical corporations, their associations are also well known to influence governments to open up markets for their products, particularly for genetically modified seeds and crops. Agrochemical giants like Monsanto and other trade unions such as FoodDrinkEurope have made considerable efforts to impact policymakers and organisations such as the European Commission.[17] The partnership between governments and corporations is an ongoing revolving door phenomenon: Arthur Dunkel, the former Director General of GATT during the Uruguay Round, later became the chair of the International Chamber of Commerce Commission on International Trade and Investment; he was also serving on Nestlé's Board as well as a registered dispute settlement panelist for the WTO.[18]

Another important factor is regarding the domestic support provided to farmers by the rich industrialised countries. The US Farm Bill, a tool for agricultural policy, is particularly problematic as it provides enormous subsidies to 'farmers', a top per cent of whom had an annual income as high as USD 750,000. As already stated, even small farmers had an average annual income of USD 450,000 in the past decade.[19]

In the late 1990s, changes in US agricultural legislation allowed farmers to receive direct payment –this payment was regardless of crop output, with the US government providing payment on yields and acreage, based on the harvest history of the previous years.[20] In 1996, just one year after the formation of the WTO, the US passed the Freedom to Farm Act. From 1999-2001 the US government paid record subsidies to American farmers that came to over USD 30B annually.[21] In 2002, the US adopted a Farm Bill that was estimated to increase agricultural subsidies over the next ten years by 80 per cent to a total of USD 82 billion dollars.[22] The trend of supporting US farmers has never waned – the 2018 Farm Bill has provided USD 867 billion dollars in subsidies to

[13] William P. Browne, "Farm Organizations and Agribusiness," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science,* Vol. 34, Iss. 3 (1982): p. 198–211. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1173740

[14] David Orden, "Agricultural Interest Groups and the North American Free Trade Agreement," in *The Political Economy of American Trade Policy,* ed. Anne O. Krueger (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 335–84. Available at: http://www.nber.org/chapters/c8709

[15] Robert L. Thompson, "The US Farm Bill and the Doha Negotiations: On Parallel Tracks or a Collision Course?" (Washington D.C., United States: International Food and Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC), 2005). Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/posp52_ifatpc_e.pdf

[16] Darren Hoad, "The World Trade Organisation, Corporate Interests and Global Opposition: Seattle and After," *Geography,* Vol. 87, Iss. 2 (2002): 148–54. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40573670

[17] See f.n. 8 (Large Family Farms Continue To Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production).

[18] See f.n. 15 (The US Farm Bill and the Doha Negotiations).

[19] Kathleen Masterson, "The Farm Bill: From Charitable Start to Prime Budget Target," NPR, September 26, 2011. Available at: https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2011/09/26/140802243/the-farm-bill-from-charitable-start-to-prime-budget-target

[20] Claire Godfrey, "Stop the Dumping! How EU Agricultural Subsidies Are Damaging Livelihoods in the Developing World" (Oxfam Briefing Paper, October 2002). Available at: https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/114605/bp31-stop-dumping-011002-en.pdf?sequence=8

[21] Jeff Stein, "Congress Just Passed an $867 Billion Farm Bill. Here's What's in It.," The Washington Post, December 12, 2018. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/12/11/congresss-billion-farm-bill-is-out-heres-whats-it/

[22] See f.n. 8 (Large Family Farms Continue To Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production).

American farmers.[23] The direct payment stipulation in the AoA provides leeway for rich governments to keep on subsidising their farmers; a practice that is not possible for third world governments, especially because of their bondage to structural adjustment programmes that are the key agreements portraying the semi-colonial relationship between rich capitalist and post-colonial countries.

In 2002, seven years after the formation of the WTO, though the EU had decreased its export subsidies, it had increased overall support that was hurting small farmers across Asia. Oxfam's special briefing paper that details the subsidies provided by the European Union's agricultural policy known as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), puts forward specific demands to the European Union to stop dumping its produce in third world countries. The World Bank also acknowledged the impact of the Political Action Committee (PACs) on tilting agricultural policy as per their demands.[24]

Clearly, the rules of the game for agriculture for first and third world farmers are based on old colonial rules. However, this is only half the story. The TRIPS Agreement needs to be factored in to understand the changes carried in the agriculture international trade arena. Agreements such as TBT and SPS have also impacted food security and agricultural production as they have control over domestic production of food from plants to animals based on health and hygiene standards. Added to this, the TRIPS Agreement which is by and large the most critical in terms of national self-reliance, is applicable to the entire realm of technologies whether related to food, agriculture, health, education, energy and others.

In general, intellectual property has been contested since its inception, in a constant tussle between individual economic interests versus the individual and collective rights of the people and society. However, the TRIPS Agreement has gone beyond the normally contested lines as it has claimed IPRs over living organisms and genetic resources. In short, it gives agrochemical and biotechnology firms the right to patent germplasm; all of which means that agrochemical corporations have successfully created a legal recourse to patent seeds. If seeds are now a commodity controlled by capitalism, it means it has been successful in finally controlled human life.

More than sixty years ago, a well-known US Senator, Hubert Humphrey, stated in front of a Senate Committee,

> I have heard … that people may become dependent on us for food. I know that was not supposed to be good news. To me, that was good news. To me, that was good news, because before people can do anything they have got to eat. And if you are looking for a way to get people to lean on you and be dependent on you, in terms of their cooperation with you, it seems that food dependence would be terrific.[25]

The above statement may be seen to indicate the use of Green Revolution technologies and HYVs that were introduced in the 1950s, but it can certainly be seen as applicable in the context of the patenting of genetic resources in the 1990s. In 1995, thirty five years after the widespread implementation of the Green Revolution, farmers worldwide had already lost the major part of their indigenous seed bank, because seeds to be kept alive have to be sown year after year. Programmes implemented by the World Bank and the US AID had long cajoled big landlords to convert to HYVs; as for the majority of small and landless farmers, they had little recourse but to use the HYVs. Thus overtime the local indigenous seeds were lost and an irreversible biodiversity loss incurred.

The dependence of third world agriculture on corporate controlled hybrid and genetically engineered (GE) seeds is now the norm. The US to date has rigorously pursued the implementation of its trade policies paying close attention to the TRIPs Agreements. In its recent report on US Trade Policy, it has categorically stated that,

> One of the top trade priorities for the Trump Administration is to use all possible sources of leverage to encourage other countries to open their markets to U.S. exports of goods and services and to provide adequate and effective protection and enforcement of U.S. intellectual property (IP) rights.[26]

[23] Kishore Gawande and Bernard M. Hoekman, "Lobbying and Agricultural Trade Policy in the United States," World Bank (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2006). Available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/397751468314681835/lobbying-and-agricultural-trade-policy-in-the-united-states

[24] Leften S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift,* First ed. (William Morrow & Co, 1981), p. 443. Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/271171

[25] Ibid.

[26] Robert E. Lighthizer, "2020 Trade Policy Agenda and 2019 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program" (Office of

HYPER CAPITALISM – A NEW ERA OF IMPERIALISMS

The previous sections were a walk-through of contemporary historical agriculture development, from capitalism's initial encroachment to a full blown takeover of the sector. Once SAPs and WTO had laid the foundations of liberalising agriculture across third world countries, other methods were employed, ranging from a labyrinth of bilateral to regional free trade agreements to coercion through development assistance, not to mention the power of corporate investments that form the core of market reforms. Unlike the UN system, the WTO has a legal dispute mechanism system for enforcing its agreements in its member countries, thus bringing about changes in the domestic legal frameworks that support full implementation of its agreements including in the agriculture sector. A particular area that agrochemical corporations have pushed for, and largely succeeded in doing so, are plant breeding and seed laws.

A crucial change dictated through global policymaking was the creation of a new space for the corporate sector and forcing its acceptance at governmental and intergovernmental levels as a critical player in national development. As a result, the fundamental resistance and pushback against the corporate sector received a grave setback. Transnational corporations that were held accountable for being the most critical agents in creating poverty and hunger, and were considered as the hallmark of exploitation and oppression are now termed 'development actors'.

A series of high level policy forums redesigning the international government aid agenda, including the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness 2008, and the fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLP4) 2011 in Busan, categorically created policy frameworks that put civil society, resistance movements and corporations (now euphemistically called the private sector) on equal footing. The outcome document of the HLP4 put forth language on enabling "participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of development policies and strategies to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction".[27] From 1992 at the Earth Summit onwards, the private sector has been provided with an equal voice in shaping policy that favours corporate sector policy making.

Over time, the space occupied by the corporate sector has widened and deepened. For instance, the preparatory processes for the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been especially critiqued for being hijacked by the corporate sector.[28] The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that engages with a wide array of movements and organisations that include farmers, women and indigenous peoples among others through its Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), also has an allocated space for corporations through the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM). This change is a clear victory of imperialist policies. It has led to a significantly more diluted and reformist mode of fight-back against the corporate sector – a policy measure that countries like the US have actively sought through bilateral aid mechanisms such as the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In this regard, the international agricultural research institutions have also played a critical role as in this new era, they have chosen to partner with the private sectors. For instance the Consultative Group on International Research (CGIAR) Consortium has set up the CGIAR Fund (in response to the Aid Harmonisation processes), and only members who contribute more than USD 500,000 can have a seat on the Fund Council.[29] From 2011 to 2020, the highest benefactors have been the USA (23.82 per cent), followed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (16 per cent) with the contribution of USD 1,230.8 million and USD 759 million respectively.[30] Both are committed to enhancing the role of the private sector in agriculture. There can be little doubt as to the kind

the United States Trade Representative, 2020). Available at: https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2020_Trade_Policy_Agenda_and_2019_Annual_Report.pdf

[27] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation," (Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011). Available at: https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf

[28] Lou Pingeot, "Lou Pingeot Corporate Influence in the Post-2015 Process" (Aachen, Germany: Bischöfliches Hilfswerk MISEREOR e.V., January 2014). Available at: https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Sonstiges/Corporate_influence_in_the_post_2015_process.pdf

[29] Shalini Bhutani, "Re-Searching Agriculture in South Asia: The Law and Policy Context for Agricultural Research and Development and Its Impact on Smallholder Farmers" (London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), July 2013). Available at: https://www.iied.org/g03628

[30] "CGIAR Trust Fund Contributions," CGIAR (France, n.d.). Available at: https://www.cgiar.org/funders/trust-fund/trust-fund-contributions-dashboard/

of research policy recommendations that would be coming from these organisations.

It is essential to point out that first world countries have a wide range of agencies and services for promoting exports including agricultural exports, and that most of these efforts are on behalf of the corporate sector. For instance, the US embassies promote agricultural trade through the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the Commercial section embedded in these embassies across the world. This trend is also true for European nations. According to a study by the European Economic and Social committee, and advisory body of employers and workers to the EU, details effective strategies needed for increasing exports to foreign markets.

The net results of imperialist advances in agriculture have turned into an assembly line for raw material provision to the value added production chain, as well as a market for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) plants and animals, external inputs and high-tech machinery including digital technology. Third world governments, including Pakistan, have made sweeping changes in their agricultural sector, allowing for the increasing role of corporations to dictate not only production but also marketing. For example, Pakistan reduced its maximum tariff rate from 22.5 per cent in 1986 to 35 per cent in 1999.[31]

From the 1990s to the 21st century, third world countries have been gradually forced to comply with the rules and regulations enforced by the WTO. For instance, the government of Pakistan has made profound changes in its agricultural sector. These include the Pakistan Pure Food Laws 2007 (revised from 1963), the Pakistan Seed (Amendment) Act 2015, Plant Breeders' Rights Act 2016, the Punjab Forest (Amendment) Act 2015 and the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority Act (PAMRA) 2018. PAMRA has provided a legal framework for digital marketing, uniformity and harmonisation in product standards. These interventions push out small farmers, leaving rich farmers and corporations to monopolise the markets.

The impact on the agriculture sector in the third world can be seen clearly. As stated in the beginning, world hunger is rising, and has steadily increased in the past years. The State of Food Security and Nutrition Report (FAO, 2019) has stated,

> After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years at a level slightly below 11 percent. Meanwhile, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. As a result, more than 820 million people in the world were still hungry in 2018, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

The report further elaborates that the most affected areas include Asia (with 500 million), especially South Asia and Africa, but hunger is also an issue in Europe and North America. In every region, a higher number of women is more affected than men.

The reasons for this galloping hunger have been discussed in detail in the above sections. With neoliberal policies in place, subsidies provided to the poorest of poor farmers have been removed. Apart from draconian free trade agreements within the WTO framework, a plethora of bilateral and regional free trade agreements were negotiated between highly industrialised countries and poor nations such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early '90s, and were renegotiated under the Trump administration through the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that has been negotiated between 15 countries including the ASEAN countries, China, New Zealand, Australia. South Korea and Japan in 2020. India pulled out of this agreement in November 2019 and at the moment is negotiating a free trade agreement with the USA.

The agreements between rich and poor nations keep true to the neoliberal policies described above, as they guard the interests of the corporations and trade associations in these countries, as the elite segments of society blatantly ignore the impacts on small and landless farmers. It is not difficult to understand the havoc wreaked on farmers' earnings by the escalating price of production on the one hand, and the removal of subsidies on the other. In Pakistan alone, the escalating price of agricultural inputs bear testimony to the dictates of IMF and

[31] M. Ramzan. Akhtar, Effects of Trade Liberalization on Agriculture in Pakistan: Commodity Aspects (CGPRT Centre, 1999). Available at: https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/32697?ln=en

the World Bank. Pakistan's debt rose by 60 per cent from 1990 (USD 20.66 billion) to 2000 (USD 30.9 billion). By 2020, its debt was 100.81 billion. The loans provided by the IMF have come with stringent austerity measures that have impacted farmers' productive capacity immensely. In 1997, the cost of one bag of chemical fertiliser, DAP, was PKR 500; in 2020 it fluctuated between PKR 6,000-8,500; in terms of a percentage increase from 1997 to 2001, the price has gone up by 1500 per cent. However, after the formation of the WTO, wage earnings of landless farmers and agriculture workers have decreased consistently over the years. At the same time, real wages for those at the lower rung of employment have consistently declined. In Pakistan, the overtime changes in the inter-occupational wage differentials have shown that elementary occupation experienced a decline from 41 per cent in 1990/91 to 21 per cent in 2006/07. In stark terms, those at the lowest rung of the hierarchy faced real poverty – a condition which has been considered a direct result of trade liberalisation.

Across the world, especially in third world countries, there are numerous accounts of farmers caught in a vicious debt cycle, with India being highlighted for the huge number of farmers' suicides. In fact, the debt cycle among farmers reflects the colonial relationship that has been maintained post-independence between the colonisers and the colonies through a colonial mode of operations, with third-world elites ensuring a system of governance that allows surplus extraction from our lands as well as labour. Market dominance, which was an element of the colonial state, has now been reinforced through institutions such as the WTO, IMF and the World Bank, not to mention the many governmental agencies of the rich industrial nations.

Trade liberalisation has allowed heightened impunity not only to local industrialists but also to transnational corporations. In Pakistan, the case of sugarcane production showcases the collusion of the advanced industrial countries and the political elite in the Third World. Conversely, agricultural land remains in the hand of feudal lords and wealthy farmers, and on the other, the sugarcane factories are controlled by not only the feudal elites but also industrialists. According to the Sugar Inquiry Commission 2020,

> Six groups control about 51% of the production of sugar in Pakistan … These groups have the capacity to manipulate the market by joining hands for cartelization and subsequent manipulation. The control of so few, mostly with political background, of the sugar industry shows the strong influence they can exercise on Policy and Administration.[32]

Of the six groups mentioned in the report, three are the OMNI group (10 mills), Sharif family Mills (9 mills) and JDW group (6 mills). In other words, all three represent the country's key mainstream political parties: Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), respectively. As can be seen, on the one hand, there is extreme concentration of land within feudal families, and on the other, these very families have diversified into the industrial sector. According to the government of Pakistan:

> The agriculture land distribution in Pakistan is highly skewed as only five percent of the agricultural Households own 64 percent of farmland. On the other side, over 80 percent farmers own less than five Acres of land and women's share of ownership of land is less than two percent.[33]

The feudal and industrialist elite control what is produced on the land and what is imported. Over the past few years, sugarcane production has been increasing steadily. In 2017-18, there was a record production of 81.10 million tonnes, with an increase of 7.4 per cent over the previous year's production of 75.48 million tonnes (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-18). In the same period, the area in production has increased from 1.218 thousand hectares to 1,313 thousand hectares with an increase of 7.8 per cent.

Sugarcane is no longer only a source of sugar; apart from syrup and jaggery, it is also used for the production of numerous other profitable products including ethanol, molasses, bagasse and press mud. Of these ethanol, a longstanding export item for many countries including European Union members,[34] has brought massive

[32] Wajid Zia, Ahmad Kamal, and M. Goher Nafees, "Report of the Inquiry Committee Constituted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Regarding Increase in Sugar Prices" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020). Available at: https://www.app.com.pk/pdf/Commission-Reports/Sugar/Sugar-Inquiry-Committee-Main-Report-dated-24.03.2020.pdf

[33] "Poverty Alleviation: Human Resource Development and Achieving MDGs," in 11th Five Year Plans Information Management (Islamabad: Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, Government of Pakistan, n.d.), p. 67–82. Available at: https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/plans/Ch8-Poverty-alleviation1.pdf

[34] Parvaiz I. Rana, "Ethanol Export Fetches $425m," DAWN News, January 20, 2019. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1458658

profits[35] However, these profits have not been transferred to small landless farmers and agriculture workers.[36] In Pakistan, fresh milk is another critical area of liberalisation that will further erode the livelihood of millions of farmers.[37]

It must be emphasised that even during a global emergency caused by Covid 19, there has been no change in the neoliberal imperatives of either the first world or third world ruling classes. In September 2021, the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF) held the UN World Food Summit (WFS), which was a hotbed of intrigue and planning for the wealthiest nations and corporations of the world. All through the pandemic and through the WFS, policy directions were set for the benefit of giant agrochemical and seed corporations. The emphasis remains on increasing global trade and deregulation, with no mention of land distribution, land reforms or human rights.[38]

FIGHTING BACK

The years before the formation of the WTO had seen the birth of various movements calling for food sovereignty. The demand for food sovereignty may be seen as an expression of the farmers' rejection of the WTO and its agreements in the context of food and agriculture. The basic principle of food sovereignty includes the right to safe and nutritious food for all, farmers' access and control over all productive resources with an emphasis on equal rights for women farmers and decent livelihood. The term encapsulates two other key issues: no place for imperialist policies in national food and agriculture, the right to resist anti farmer policies and support for farmers' rights.

The demand for farmers' rights has led to a wide range of movements across the globe. In the Asia Pacific region it has taken root through indigenous movements as well as regional and global unity movements.

In Pakistan, the formation of the Pakistan Kisan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT), an alliance of small and landless farmers has led to demands for food sovereignty and given life to several other struggles.[39] These include resistance against land eviction in Peshawar, farmers' struggle against trade liberalisation in the livestock and dairy sector, especially by PKMT women farmers, as well as saving indigenous and local seeds.[40]

The intense farmer's strikes in India against liberalisation are also a testimony to the widespread resistance to imperialist impositions in the food and agriculture sector. Other forms of resistance include a move towards the production and consumption of safe and nutritious food that is not corporate controlled. A particular aspect of this struggle is the seed-saving initiatives across the world.

Finally, there is now a global unity against neoliberal policies. Across the globe, many movements have come forward as a united force and have held many months long resistance movement even in the face of the pandemic. The Global People's Summit on Food Systems involved thousands of people from all regions and countries and gave an alternative vision with pledges of further resistance and implementation of food sovereignty.[41] There is no doubt that for the world to survive, the demand by people's movements, women's and farmers' movements, a just, healthy and equitable food system is the only answer.

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[38] Sylvia Mallari, "Transformation for Whom? On the Corporate Capture of the UN Food Systems Summit" (The Future of Seeds in the UN Food Systems Summit, Global Coalition of Open Source Seeds Initiatives (GOSSI) and farmer-scientist network MASIPAG, 2021). Available at: https://foodsov.org/transformation-for-whom-on-the-corporate-capture-of-the-un-food-systems-summit/

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COVID-19, THE FIRST WAVE: INTERRUPTION AND CONTINUITY

Rubina Saigol
&
Nida Usman Chaudhary

ABSTRACT

Rubina Saigol and Nida Chaudhry's essay takes a look at the social and economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, less as the singular outcome of a hitherto unknown and mysterious virus than as part of the global and local continuum of inequality and misgovernance that was simultaneously interrupted and enhanced by the pandemic. The essay explores and examines the impact of the pandemic not just on the critical areas of social life and collective living, but on the ways in which it has shaken the complacency of the neoliberal world order and its attendant discourses, including the democratic paradigm. This has given rise to xenophobic immigration policies in the countries of the developed world. In developing countries such as Pakistan, it has exacerbated societal inequalities, reinforced patriarchy and widened existing vested interest civil and military, centre-province, extremist and moderate divides. As the 'way forward' the essay recommends a re-examination of existing priorities and a move towards people-centred policies and governance.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Rubina Saigol was a well-known feminist, teacher, writer, and actor. Actively involved with Pakistan Women's Movement since the 1980s, she was a member of the Women's Action Forum and a founder member of 'Ajoka'. She had a penchant for impromptu, irreverent political verse and was a prolific writer. Her works include Knowledge and Identity: Concepts and Applications in Bernstein's Sociology, Pakistan: The Economy of an Elitist State, and Women and the Law in Pakistan.

Nida Usman Chaudhry holds an LL.B (Hons) and LL.M in Law and Development from the University of London. She founded the Lahore Education and Research Network and Women in Law Initiative Pakistan and is the chairperson and founding member of the Gender Equality and Diversity Committee of the Lahore High Court Bar Association. She has co-authored Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan with Rubina Saigol, along with writing for various national and international publications.

Covid-19 ushered in a cacophony of narratives in a world of competing interpretations and discordant discourses. From conspiracy theories alleging that the virus had been produced in an enemy laboratory to be unleashed upon rivals, to religious and superstitious attribution to women's lack of modesty, there are as many 'explanations' as there are vested groups that use social media to promote their ideas. The noise surrounding the origin and spread of the virus across the globe is steeped in outlandish claims, horror fantasies, and fanciful, obstreperous notions, that can be partly explained by the dearth of serious, scientific, and analytical knowledge of the virus. The Coronavirus arrived suddenly, took the world by storm, and was shrouded in mystery. Like an invisible enemy residing within the core of our own bodies, it frightened us because it seemed to make our bodies, and those of our loved ones, dangerous for our existence. We sought explanations and found them wherever we could because the unknown is harder to deal with than the known – or even the misunderstood.

The invisible but deadly invader has disrupted several aspects of collective living – social, economical, political and cultural - in unforeseen ways altering beyond recognition, how we live, work, earn, love, consume, exercise, celebrate, and mourn. No collective rituals at births, deaths and weddings, events that form the basis of collective living and the sharing of joys and sorrows; no festive or serious gathering, whether to pray, party or work is safe; each person is suspect, anyone could be a silent carrier of the deadly enemy. Socially and culturally, this was traumatic, as the conduct of collective social life lies at the heart of being human.

At the economic and political levels, this pandemic has wrought changes that seem to have transformed global economies. Seen as the worst crisis the world has witnessed since the Great Depression, the Coronavirus outbreak has pushed down the global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), in some cases into negative territory, while wiping out USD 12 trillion from the world economy.[1]

As businesses collapse and unemployment rises, the state fails to grapple with rising poverty and joblessness amid disease and death. According to the World Bank:

> The Covid-19 pandemic has created a 'swift and massive shock', causing the broadest collapse of the global economy since 1870…Despite unprecedented government support, the world's economy is expected to contract by 5.2 percent this year alone and the number of countries suffering severe economic losses means the recession will be

[1] Ag Afp and Mehtab Haider, "Worst Economic Crisis for a Century: Corona Cripples Global Businesses," The News, June 25, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/677353-worst-economic-crisis-for-a-century-corona-cripples-global-businesses

worse than anything experienced over the last 150 years.[2]

Virulent neoliberal globalisation, in which the market came to be privileged over the state, is now being contested by equally virulent forms of nationalism. Contracting economies across the globe look increasingly inwards, closing their doors and their borders to strangers from other lands who are seen as carriers of the scourge. Fear of the outsider, xenophobia and exclusion characterise a narrow, inward looking, and insecure nationalism. Immigration laws become more rigid,[3] doors are shut upon workers from other lands, and fast-eroding jobs are reserved for only those who 'belong'. All others are unwelcome.[4]

To be sure, countries like the United States of America were already poised to diminish globalisation and the alleged export of jobs to other countries. Aside from building walls of division and distance, the US was already encouraging companies to bring their businesses back home, and to manufacture all requirements in the homeland. Europe too, looked inward, fearful, and unsure of itself as signs of rupture appeared. With Britain already gone from the European Union, the other countries too sought to close borders and tighten immigration laws.[5] The partial surrender of formerly jealously guarded sovereignty to create the European Union, now appears to give way to an 'each one for himself' mentality underscored by the instinct of survival.

Politically, the project of democracy seems to be under threat. The abject failure of the world's largest and oldest democracies to deal with the pandemic, has led to questions about the state, its legitimacy, and its fundamental duty to protect the lives of its citizens. Confused, contradictory and clueless responses by Britain and the US, along with the vacillation between imposing and lifting lockdowns, appear to have brought into sharp focus the tardy and ineffective responses of elected governments compared to the efficiency displayed by much-maligned dictatorships like China or Singapore.[6] The need for efficiency and a timely response to the spread of disease carries the barely disguised overtones of the failure of democracies, which are accused of being ten years behind dictatorship.

The life versus livelihood debate,[7] sparked by the alleged 'failure of democracy',[8] in fact underlines the centrality of neoliberal capitalism in creating narratives that privilege profit over life and the private over the public. Decades of neoliberal policies stressed the withdrawal of the state from welfare – from the provision of health, education, employment and social security – and focused the state on becoming a mere adjunct of the market, rendering it incapable of ensuring the basic rights of citizens.[9] Instead of being the guarantor of the fundamental rights of citizens, the state was reoriented towards creating conducive conditions for the operations of capital operations.

The emphasis on privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation enabled private vested interests to freely make profits with the state as a benevolent onlooker.[10] Health, education, and security could only be accessed by the rich as incredible amounts of wealth flowed upwards to a few individuals and companies, while the mass of people became unable to enjoy most of these rights. In a critique of the inequalities engendered by neoliberal

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2 "Sudden Danger," The News, June 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/672222-sudden-danger

3 Jorge Loweree, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, and Walter A. Ewing, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Noncitizens and across the U.S. Immigration System: March-September 2020" (American Immigration Council, September 30, 2020). Available at: https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-covid-19-us-immigration-system.; Anika Stobart and Stephen Duckett, "Australia's Response to COVID-19," Health Economics, Policy and Law, Vol. 17, Iss. 1 (July 27, 2021): p. 1–12. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8365101/

4 "Nearly 3 Million Migrants Stranded due to COVID-19: Stories from 17 Countries," IOM UN Migration (The Storyteller, n.d.). Available at: https://storyteller.iom.int/stories/journeys-interrupted

5 Ruxandra Paul, "Europe's Essential Workers: Migration and Pandemic Politics in Central and Eastern Europe during COVID-19," European Policy Analysis, Vol. 6, Iss. 2 (November 28, 2020): p. 238–63. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1105

6 Editors Note. Hanns Günther Hilpert and Angela Stanzel, "China - Winning the Pandemic... For Now: The People's Republic Is Exuding Strength, but Can They Keep It Up?," Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs) SWP Comments No. 1 (2021): p. 4. Available at: https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/swpcom/12021.html.; Jia Bin Tan et al., "Singapore's Pandemic Preparedness: An Overview of the First Wave of COVID-19," International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 18, no. 1 (December 31, 2020): p. 252. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7795346/

7 Editors Note. Benoit Decerf et al., "Lives and Livelihoods: Estimates of the Global Mortality and Poverty Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic," World Development, Vol. 146 (October 2021). Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X21001765

8 Editors Note. Nicholas Reece, "Failure of Some Modern Democracies Has Contributed to COVID Crisis," The Sydney Morning Herald, January 6, 2021. Available at: https://www.smh.com.au/national/failure-of-some-modern-democracies-has-contributed-to-covid-crisis-20210106-p56s2l.html

9 Álvaro De Regil, "Business and Human Rights: Upholding the Market's Social Darwinism: An Assessment of Mr. John Ruggie's Report: 'Protect, Respect and Remedy: A Framework for Business and Human Rights'" (Jus Semper Global Alliance, Human Rights and Sustainable Human Development, October 2008). Available at: https://www.jussemper.org/Resources/Corporate%20Activity/Resources/BHRRUpholding_Mkts_Darwinism.pdf

10 Ibid.

capitalism, especially as it manifests itself in the pandemic, Khaled Diab writes:

> To add insult to injury, not only has deregulation devastated the welfare state, but also among the biggest recipients of state welfare are, paradoxically, the richest, who benefit the most from the rescue packages designed to pull us out of crises, especially in the US.[11]

Covid-19 revealed the state of societal inequalities and the essential inequalities of populations left to fend for themselves in a world where the state and the rhetoric of good governance had openly become merely the political face of economic globalisation. The pandemic laid bare the existing ruptures within societies. The large numbers of working class, poor and religious minorities, who perished because of the virus, exposed the underbelly of the beast as class, race, and religion became the markers of who lives and who dies in any mass disaster.

The reluctance of states to spend on health instead of arms and ammunition challenges the entire notion of security.[12] Whose security is important, the people or the state? How can guns, bombs and fighter jets protect people against the invisible enemy occupying the body? Why did the states not use their vast scientific resources and knowledge to create more ventilators, masks, protective gear, and vaccines? These debates are likely to persist for a while because basic questions about why the state exists and what does the social contract mean, have been raised by the way the virus outbreak was handled. As Bernie Sanders said while questioning the prevalent view of national security:

> If this horrific coronavirus pandemic has shown us anything, it is that national security involves a lot more than bombs, missiles, tanks, submarines, nuclear warheads and other weapons of mass destruction. National security also means doing all we can to improve the lives of the American people…[13]

Sanders goes on to write that in order to transform national priorities, he would introduce an amendment 'to create jobs, by building affordable housing, schools, childcare centers, community health centers, libraries, sustainable energy projects and clean drinking water facilities'.[14] Needless to say that all the states need to prioritise social development and people-centric policies. Equally needless to say that too many states focus on guns, bombs, tanks, and nuclear warheads.[15] Pakistan is no exception. The virus does not seem to have substantially altered policies to address the pandemic – instead, we continue to fight.

Covid-19 is regarded as a game-changer: a phenomenon that will transform the world in significant ways. It will redraw the political and economic map of the world. It may bring war as a means of propping up failing economies and pushing up declining profits. Border skirmishes have broken out between India and China, while America crosses swords with a rising and aggressive China.[16] The fear of proxy wars being fought on other territories to jump start struggling economies and push up falling oil prices is real.

The pandemic may also change the ways in which we organise and structure our economic, social, cultural, and political lives. While discontinuities may be seen at many levels, the outbreak is likely to sharpen existing ruptures and disparities in society. It may deepen existing contradictions and intensify prevalent conflicts while reinforcing the lines of social division. However, Covid-19 may also engender continuities; the virus demands social distancing, but societies already practice division, distance, and exclusion based on hatred, prejudice, hierarchy, and a sense of alienation and otherness. The pandemic can become a convenient cover for enhanced distancing and exclusion. It can also become a means to mask state imperatives and vested interests in the name

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[11] Khaled Diab, "Do Billionaires 'Deserve' Their Wealth?," Al Jazeera, May 26, 2020. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/5/26/do-billionaires-deserve-their-wealth

[12] Maimuna Ashraf, "COVID-19 and the 'Guns versus Butter' Debate in South Asia" (The Stimson Center, July 22, 2020). Available at: https://www.stimson.org/2020/covid-19-and-the-guns-versus-butter-debate-in-south-asia/

[13] Bernie Sanders, "A 10% Cut to the US Military Budget Would Help Support Struggling Americans," The Guardian, June 30, 2020, sec. Opinion. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jun/30/a-10-budget-cut-to-the-us-military-budget-by-10-to-help-save-lives-in-this-pandemic.; See f.n. 11 (Khaled Daib)

[14] Ibid.

[15] Fredrik Dahl, "Fewer Bombs, but Nuclear States 'Determined' to Keep Arsenals -SIPRI," Reuters, June 16, 2014, sec. Industrials. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/nuclear-arms-idINL5N0OU2ZE20140615

[16] James Crabtree, "India and China's Border Skirmishes Bring Giants Closer to Clash," Nikkei Asia, June 3, 2020. Available at: https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/India-and-China-s-border-skirmishes-bring-giants-closer-to-clash.; Joanna Slater, "Soldiers Injured in Fresh Border Skirmish between India and China," Washington Post, January 25, 2021. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-china-clash-sikkim/2021/01/25/7d82883c-5edb-11eb-a177-7765f29a9524_story.html

of fighting the disease and saving lives. While people wonder about a new normal, it is vital to remember that the old normal was not exactly a paradise of eternal bliss.

In light of the above discussion, we look at the case of Pakistan where the outbreak has sharpened and deepened all the main contradictions of state and society, namely: the perpetual contradiction between civilian supremacy and military control; the constant references to the presidential system as more conducive than the current parliamentary one; the continuous attempts to centralise the state structure and resources with competing efforts at devolution; the repeated invocation of exclusionary religious narratives which in turn provoke the desire for a plural and inclusive state and society; and last but certainly not the least, is the perennial guns versus butter debate centred around the priorities of a national security state as opposed to a social development one.

These interrelated contradictions have characterised the state and society in Pakistan almost since its inception. They were never fully resolved, but the advent of Covid-19 seems to have provided a new impetus towards a centralised, unitary, presidential, military-dominated security state that relies on religious nationalism to forge an artificial and arbitrary unity imposed on an essential diversity.

THE CIVIL-MILITARY DIVIDE

The civil-military dichotomy has bedevilled Pakistan over the last sixty years of its existence. Also known as the democracy-versus-dictatorship debate,[17] essentially it is about who will rule Pakistan – its people through an elected parliament, or the military by force. The Rule of Law versus the Rule of Men implies that either a state can be ruled by a constitution - a social contract arrived at through negotiation and consensus - or by a military strongman where all power is concentrated in the person of the dictator. Thousands of years of human history have shown that the best way to prevent the abuse of power is to distribute it between different institutions, for example, between the legislature, executive and judiciary.[18] This principle of separation of powers underlies all the stable democracies in the world. Initially, Pakistan chose the path of democracy and civilian supremacy, as the founder was a civilian and a staunch constitutionalist.

However, over time democracy was undermined by unelected forces and institutions that repeatedly sought to take over, and establish absolute and unchecked power. There were direct military takeovers in 1958, 1977 and 1999. Each military takeover was legitimised by another unelected institution, the judiciary, which invented the Doctrine of Necessity to provide legal cover for acts that were essentially illegal and dictatorial.[19] The unelected colonial institutions – the military, and the judiciary as a lesser partner – held dominance over the elected institutions like the parliament, which remained weak and internally divided. As Babar Sattar comments:

> The three major fault-lines that hold our polity down have been constant: civil-military, extremist-moderate, and Centre-province. As a historical matter, our civil-military imbalance has empowered unelected institutions at the expense of the elected.[20]

Even during periods of apparent civilian rule, the military continued to be the arbiter of power and exercised

[17] Hassan N. Gardezi, "Democracy and Dictatorship in Pakistan," South Asia Citizens Web, December 22, 1999. Available at: http://www.sacw.net/aii/gardezi99.html; Shakeel Qadir, Muhammad Tariq, and Muhammad Waqas, "Democracy or Military Dictatorship: A Choice of Governance for the Economic Growth of Pakistan," IBT Journal of Business Studies (JBS), Vol. 12, Iss. 1 (2016): p. 31–51. Available at: https://ibtjbs.ilmauniversity.edu.pk/arc/Vol12/v12i1p4; David O. Smith, "Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: Positive Evolution or More of the Same?," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, January 24, 2020. Available at: https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2020/01/24/civil-military-relations-in-pakistan/; Brig. Raashid Wali Janjua, "Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: Quest for an Ideal Balance," Islamabad Policy Research Institute Journal, Vol. 21, Iss. 1 (June 30, 2021). Available at: https://www.prdb.pk/article/civil-military-relations-in-pakistan-quest-for-an-ideal-bal-8174.; Najiyah Khan, "Civil-Military Relations: A Case Study of Pakistan Civil-Military Relations: A Case Study of Pakistan" (M.A. Thesis (Political Science), 2010). Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1881&context=thesesdissertations

[18] John Yoo and James Phillips, "How to Restore Separation of Powers," National Review, February 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/02/separation-of-powers-foundational-constitutional-principle/?gclid=CjwKCAjwtp2bBhAGEiwAOZZTuEl0b_FPRMaDsaxOv8qaa2KtP7_pr8XtYYh7XrNB_Twc0QihSOKO1hoC4sEQAvD_BwE; Larry Diamond, "Why Decentralize Power in a Democracy?" (Conference on Fiscal and Administrative Decentralization Baghdad, Stanford University, 2004). Available at: https://diamond-democracy.stanford.edu/speaking/speeches/why-decentralize-power-democracy; Johann N. Neem, "The Peril of Absolute Power," Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective (The Ohio State University, November 2007). Available at: https://origins.osu.edu/history-news/peril-absolute-power?language_content_entity=en

[19] *Federation* of Pakistan v. *Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan,* PLD 1955 FC 240; *The State v. Dosso,* PLD 1958 SC (Pak.) 533.

[20] Babar Sattar, "Writ in Tatters," The News, November 3, 2018. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/388856-writ-in-tatters

real but illegal authority.[21] The lack of maturity and experience of civilian politicians, spawned by the military, provided further justification for indirect or direct military intervention.

Covid-19 and the resultant discourses of efficiency have provided fresh grounds for military intervention. While a creeping coup was already underway with the military having brought in its favoured party into power in the 2018 elections, the pandemic enabled the military to expose the weakness of the elected 'puppet' government, which appeared to be inept at handling the crisis.[22] Even prior to the outbreak of the virus, the economy was already in the hands of unelected advisors and General Bajwa, the Chief of Army Staff, was appointed to the National Economic Council to accelerate economic growth and ostensibly improve coordination between the provinces and the Centre.[23] Furthermore, Major General Amer Aslam Khan was appointed as the Deputy Chairman of the Naya Pakistan Housing and Development Authority, along with Brigadier Manzur Malik as the executive director of administration.[24]

There was a spate of appointments of retired and serving military officers on multi-billion dollar projects in the civilian domain, for example, General Asim Bajwa was appointed as the Director-General of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority on a huge salary, and was given the additional charge of Advisor to the Prime Minister (PM) on Information, basically, it appears, to control the flow of what is said and what is silenced.[25] Furthermore, the federal government proposed a bill giving sweeping powers to the CPEC Authority including the authority to overrule government decisions, and to start proceedings against public officeholders if they failed to comply with his orders.[26] The CPEC Authority Bill 2020 sought to transfer more powers from parliamentarians to unelected officials. The role of the Minister for Planning and Development was omitted, giving full authority to the Chairman who answered only to the Prime Minister, a mere formality.[27]

Other military personnel in civilian positions include Major General Amir Azeem Bajwa, head of PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority);[28] Major General Qaiser Anees Khurram, Chairman SUPARCO (Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission);[29] Lieutenant General Muhammad Afzal, Chairman NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority);[30] Air Marshal Arshad Malik, Chairman PIA (Pakistan International Airlines);[31] Lieutenant General Muzammil Hussain, Chairman WAPDA (Water and Power Development Authority).[32] As in the past, foreign and security policies continued to be in the hands of the military. The military encroachment into civilian domains was thus entrenched and institutionalised.

Not only was there an incursion of the army into civilian domains with lucrative packages, but the authorities designed to deal with the virus were also given names that reflect war language, for example, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC). Furthermore, the PM's initiatives were vitiated by military authorities whenever they deemed fit, for example, when the PM officially opposed a lockdown, the Director-General

[21] Maria Golovnina and Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Pakistan's Powerful Army Steps in to Resolve Political Crisis," Reuters, August 28, 2014, sec. Top News. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-crisis-army-idINKBN0GS29E20140828

[22] Muhammad Ziauddin, "Creeping Coup in the Offing?," Naya Daur, June 20, 2019. Available at: https://nayadaur.tv/2019/06/creeping-coup-in-the-offing; Mohammad Taqi, "A Creeping Coup d'Etat in Pakistan," The Diplomat, November 1, 2018. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-creeping-coup-detat-in-Pakistan

[23] "PM, Army Chief Part of Body Formed for Economic Revival," The Express Tribune, June 18, 2019. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/1995131/coas-part-national-development-council

[24] "Army Men Inducted in PM's Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme Team," Pakistan Today, May 13, 2020. Available at: https://issuu.com/pakistantoday-paperazzi/docs/epaperkh_2020-05-13

[25] Aamir Yasin, "Asim Bajwa Made Chairman of Newly Created CPEC Authority," DAWN News, November 27, 2019. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1519047

[26] "CPEC Authority to Get Sweeping Powers Including Authority to Overrule Govt Decisions," Naya Daur, July 14, 2020. Available at: https://nayadaur.tv/2020/07/cpec-authority-to-get-sweeping-powers-including-authority-to-overrule-govt-decisions/

[27] "CPEC Authority Bill 2020: More Powers Transfer from Parliamentarians to Un-Elected Officials?," Global Village Space, July 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.globalvillagespace.com/cpec-authority-bill-2020-more-powers-transfer-from-parliamentarians-to-un-elected-officials/

[28] Editors Note. Tahir Amin, "Major-General Amir Azeem (Retd) Made New PTA Chairman," Brecorder, January 23, 2019. Available at: https://www.brecorder.com/news/4665401/major-general-amir-azeem-retd-made-new-pta-chairman-20190123441578

[29] Editors Note. "Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 11, 2021). Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_%26_Upper_Atmosphere_Research_Commission#Chairman_of_SUPARCO

[30] Editors Note. "Lt-General Muhammad Afzal Assumes Charge as Chairman NDMA," The News, May 21, 2019. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/474399-lt-general-muhammad-afzal-assumes-charge-as-chairman-ndma

[31] Editors Note. "Arshad Malik to Continue as PIA Chief after Retirement from PAF on 12th," DAWN News, July 8, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1567590

[32] Editors Note. "Muzammil Hussain (Army Officer)," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 8, 2021). Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muzammil_Hussain_(army_officer)

Inter-Services Public Relations (DG-ISPR) overrode his policy and imposed a lockdown on his own.[33] The sense of emergency stemming from the virus provided an opportunity to the praetorians to exert power and exercise control because of a long-held but erroneous view of greater efficiency.

The vast power of the military in Pakistan is tangible and visible. The massive control over land and real estate can be seen in the Defence Housing Authorities across the country. Choice land, which is scarce, is wrested from the public and generously awarded to retiring military generals.[34] Apart from being a big part of the landed elite, the military also constitutes a vast corporate empire. Ranging from banks to provision stores, from owning cereal companies to fertiliser manufacture, the military in Pakistan is among the richest corporate capitalist in the country.[35] The praetorians go wherever there is money – the military is now manufacturing masks, sanitisers, and other medical equipment and supplies, for which huge funds have been given to Pakistan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other countries.[36] Covid-19 has offered Pakistan's military a chance to make money off the disease. Ironically, while doctors, nurses, and paramedics in Pakistan were pleading for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE),[37] and were being beaten and jailed,[38] the military was donating masks and equipment to the US military![39]

Despite all the land wrested from the people, and owning a vast corporate enterprise, the military continues to demand the lion's share of national resources.[40] After debt servicing, the biggest chunk of Pakistan's annual budget goes to the military. This is the only allocation which cannot be questioned, challenged, or audited in the name of 'national security'![41] Even the pensions of military personnel are drawn from the meagre civilian budget, which could be used for development. Now the military wants more. It demands a 20 per cent raise in pay of military personnel on the pretext of inflation and the impact of Covid-19.[42] 'Bloody Civilians'[43] can go to hell; it would appear that only army personnel were affected by inflation and disease.

The military intensified its already established social distancing from 'bloody civilians'. Cantonment areas were initially closed to the lowly (infected) civilians to save the generals and their families from infection.[44] Even now, barriers and barricades on our roads define the boundaries between the patriots and the traitors, between the sacred and the profane, between those allowed to be infected and those to be protected.

Every time a weak 'bloody civilian' has dared to challenge the hegemony of the uniformed brigade, they are taught a suitable lesson – hanged, forced out, declared a traitor, dragged through courts on trumped-up charges and put into jails for long periods without trial. The productive civilians, who generate the revenue, are forced to comply with the demands and compelled to feed the fattened, heavily armed, and unproductive generals. Despite global calls to reduce unproductive expenditure, the state is forced to feed the voracious appetite of the security state.

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[33] Fahd Husain, "Locking Horns over Lockdown," DAWN News, March 25, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1543529; Ayesha Siddiqa, "Coronavirus Crisis Makes It Clear Who Is Calling the Shots in Pakistan—Military, of Course," ThePrint, March 27, 2020. Available at: https://theprint.in/opinion/coronavirus-crisis-makes-it-clear-who-is-calling-the-shots-in-pakistan-military-of-course/389232/

[34] Babar Sattar, "For the Chosen Few," The News, January 28, 2017. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/182261-For-the-chosen-few

[35] Ayesha Siddiqa, Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy, Second Edition (2007; repr., Pluto Press, 2016), p. 231. Available at: https://www.amazon.com/Military-Inc-Inside-Pakistans-Economy/dp/0745399010

[36] Editors Note. "Pakistan - KPMG Global," KPMG, November 24, 2020. Available at: https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/pakistan-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html

[37] Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shah Meer Baloch, "Pakistan Doctors Beaten by Police as They Despair of 'Untreatable' Pandemic," The Guardian, April 9, 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/pakistan-doctors-beaten-police-despair-untreatable-pandemic

[38] Ibid; "Pakistan Arrests Doctors Protesting over Lack of Virus Safety Equipment," The Guardian, April 6, 2020. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/pakistan-arrests-doctors-protest-lack-coronavirus-safety-equipment

[39] Wajid A. Syed, "Pak Army Gifts PPEs to US Armed Forces," The News, May 23, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/662715-pak-army-gifts-ppes-to-us-armed-forces

[40] Ayesha Siddiqa, "Why Is Pakistan Spending so Much Money on Defence amid COVID-19?," Al Jazeera, July 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/1/why-is-pakistan-spending-so-much-money-on-defence-amid-covid-19

[41] Ibid; Iftikhar Hussain and Nafees Takar, "Questions about US Aid to Pakistan Put Focus on Military's Spending," VOA, January 4, 2018. Available at: https://www.voanews.com/a/us-aid-pakistan-military-spending/4193398.html.; Taha Siddiqui, "How Pakistan Is Expected to 'Fudge' Its High Defence Spending Tomorrow," ThePrint, June 10, 2019. Available at: https://theprint.in/world/how-pakistan-is-expected-to-fudge-its-high-defence-spending-tomorrow/247957/

[42] "Pakistan's Armed Forces Seek 20% Increase in Salaries of Personnel," Newsweek, May 12, 2020. Available at: https://www.newsweekpakistan.com/pakistans-armed-forces-seek-20-increase-in-salaries-of-personnel/

[43] Editors Note. "Vocabulary of Arrogance," DAWN News, September 17, 2009. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/839834/vocabulary-of-arrogance

[44] Editors Note. Mohammed Hussain, "Roads Open in Secunderabad Cantonment after Closure due to COVID Surge," The Siasat Daily, July 29, 2020. Available at: https://www.siasat.com/roads-open-in-secunderabad-cantonment-after-closure-due-to-covid-surge-1932814/

THE CENTRE-PROVINCE DIVIDE

The civil-military contradiction is deeply interlinked with the Centre-province one as the military has exhibited a repeated tendency to violate the federal structure and federalist principles enshrined in the constitution. The Pakistan Resolution of 1940 promised that the constituent units, then known as states, would have autonomy and sovereignty over their resources.[45] Soon after partition, the State of Pakistan entered into conflict with nearly all of its constituent units, as a result of which the Eastern Wing, which constituted a majority in terms of population, broke away and became a separate country in 1971.

A highly centrist civil-military bureaucracy was reluctant to transfer power and resources to the provinces, thereby constructing a centralised state which viewed the constituent units as its subordinates.[46] Rejecting the idea of federating units as subordinates, civil society activist and senior journalist I.A. Rehman avers that 'the provincial assemblies created Pakistan, they are not the creatures of the federation'.[47] Even though the federation was created by all the states (now provinces), for historical reasons, the Centre and its attendant power and resources came to represent primarily the Punjab.

A large portion of the army was drawn from Punjab, so the centralising tendencies of the state came to be viewed as Punjabi power. The other provinces responded to this centralisation by defining themselves in terms of their older, ethnic identities.[48] In a post-partition, highly centralised state, the same form of colonial governmentality was adopted. I.A. Rehman laments that:

> The problem all along was the Centre's treatment of the provinces as its colonies — like subordinate entities; they were ruled by centrally appointed bureaucrats, and their very existence as provinces was negated. It was only after 63 years of independence that, under the 18th Amendment, the first, though substantial, step towards giving the provinces their due was taken.[49]

After partition, the army tried to stitch together the fragile fabric of the 'nation' by recourse to religion and the two-nation theory as the basis of the formation of the country. Religious nationalism failed to bind the diverse and multiple nations of Pakistan into a new but somewhat facile and artificial identity of being Pakistani.[50] The more the centrist state referred to religion as the core identity of Pakistan, the stronger the ethnic movements grew and conflicts over language, resource distribution and the forced erasure of older, more stable identities ensued. The smaller provincial groups came to articulate their identities in ethnic terms as a counterpoint to the state's imposition of a monolithic religious identity.[51]

The treatment of the smaller provinces as colonies - whose resources were captured, rights trampled upon and voices suppressed – led to armed conflict between the state and the provinces - culminating in 1971 with the secession of East Pakistan.[52] With the army reeling from the defeat and in disarray, the elected civilian government was able to build a consensus among the provinces and competing interests, thus forging Pakistan's current social contract in the form of the Constitution of 1973.[53] The constitution promised that the Concurrent List, on which both the provinces and the Centre could legislate, would be abolished in ten years and the subjects enumerated in it would be devolved to the provinces. Instead, the Centre usurped all authority and the provinces became mere adjuncts of a powerful Centre.

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[45] "Archives: Lahore Resolution" (The Republic of Rumi, n.d.). Available at: https://pakistanspace.tripod.com/archives/40lahore.htm; Editors Note. Struggle for Independence 1857-1947: A Pictorial Record, Amazon (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1958). Available at: https://www.amazon.com/Struggle-Independence-1857-1947-Pictorial-Record/dp/B003OYR45S

[46] I. A. Rehman, "Provinces vs Centre," DAWN News, June 11, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1562775

[47] Ibid.

[48] Hamza Alavi, "Politics of Ethnic Identity," in Regional Imbalances and the National Question in Pakistan (Lahore: Vanguard, 1992). Available at: https://www.abebooks.com/9789694020624/Regional-imbalances-national-question-Pakistan-969402062X/plp

[49] See f.n. 46 (I. A. Rehman).

[50] Editors Note. Maria-Magdalena Fuchs and Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, "Religious Minorities in Pakistan: Identities, Citizenship and Social Belonging," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol. 43, Iss. 1 (December 12, 2019): p. 52–67. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00856401.2020.1695075

[51] Gulshan Majeed, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan (Essay)," Journal of Political Studies, Vol. 18 (December 31, 2010). Available at: https://books.apple.com/us/book/ethnicity-and-ethnic-conflict-in-pakistan-essay/id482382123

[52] Tahir Shad and Jennifer Reddish, "Managing Ethnic Conflict: The Case of Pakistan" (Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1996). Available at: https://pacificinstitute.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/resources-links/PSC_Regime_WP_16.pdf

[53] The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973. Available at: https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/

More than three decades later in 2010, the 18th Constitutional Amendment (18th Amendment) was passed to at least partially redress the imbalance, and return the power of the constituent units by removing the illegally inserted amendments of military dictators.[54] With all its shortcomings, the amendment was a landmark achievement to right the wrongs committed against the federating units over decades. As a compromise agreement, the 18th Amendment could not go far enough and much remains to be done, but it did usher in an era in which the federating units became empowered to control their own resources, pass their own laws and manage their own affairs.

However, the senior bureaucracy, which had much to gain from lucrative positions in the devolved ministries, opposed the devolution of power and resources. Instead, duplicate ministries with changed names were established at the Centre, in effect cancelling the decentralisation. The military bureaucracy too, was deeply unhappy with the new arrangement, as its security expenditures kept growing and its appetite for resources was insatiable. In a critique of centralisation designed to re-create a unitary state, Babar Sattar writes:

> Given Pakistan's bitter history of being broken up in 1971, the 18th Amendment was certainly the best thing that could have happened to keep our federation sustainable. But it is a hard sell to those who wish to dress up an authoritarian unitary state as a federation…Our constitution envisages cooperative federalism. But, notwithstanding the 18th Amendment, we retain an overgrown center and insist on fattening it further.[55]

One of the most important aspects of the reconstruction and re-designing of the state through the 18th Amendment was the National Finance Commission (NFC) award. It was decided that the Centre, which had to manage debt servicing and defence expenditures, would receive 42.5 per cent of the total revenues, while the divisible pool for the provinces would be 57.5 per cent.[56] The provincial shares were determined on the bases of population, revenue generation and development needs of the provinces. Based on the principle of associating expenditure with functions, the provinces, to which many subjects like education, health, agriculture, labour, and others had been devolved, would spend on them. The Centre would abolish the ministries dealing with these issues to reduce expenditure.

It was agreed that in each subsequent NFC award, the share of the provinces could be greater than before, but not lesser. The powers, unhappy with this division of resources, wanted a recourse to the Council of Common Interests (CCI) so that the provinces could be cajoled into willingly relinquishing a part of their share for national defence. The government of Sindh, which vociferously resisted the move, came to be constructed as 'the enemy'. With the other provinces squarely under the belt, Centrist powers tried to persuade, threaten, blackmail and goad Sindh into giving up a part of its rightful share to the perpetually hungry Centre.[57] When faced with stiff resistance to its proposal by the province, the federal government began to threaten Governor's Rule to place the province in the control of the federally appointed unelected Governor. Warning the rulers that they were 'playing with fire', I.A. Rehman wrote:

> The establishment's assault on the 18th Amendment and the NFC award is not a matter of recent origin. It is the result of the ruling elite's search over a considerably long time for a strategy to revive the highly centralized polity that authoritarian rulers, civil as well as military, in the past promoted and which was consistently opposed by democratic opinion.[58]

Nevertheless, a sustained attack had been unleashed on the 18th Amendment, with the Chief of Army Staff terming it more dangerous than Mujib-ur-Rehman's six points.[59] Those supporting the amendment came to be

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[54] Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010. Available at: https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/amendments/18amendment.html

[55] Babar Sattar, "Scofflaws at Work," The News, May 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/652689-scofflaws-at-work

[56] Ghulam Abbas, "Provinces Likely to Oppose NFC Award over Extra Shares for Centre," Profit (Pakistan Today, May 16, 2020). Available at: https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/05/16/provinces-likely-to-oppose-nfc-award-over-extra-shares-for-centre/; Editors Note. Part-VI Chapter-1 of the 1973 Constitution governs the distribution of revenues between the Federation and the Provinces. It outlines how revenues are distributed between the Federation and the provinces. The National Finance Commission (NFC) is established pursuant to Article 160 of the 1973 Constitution to periodically provide recommendations to the President. The President signed the historically significant 7th NFC Award on 30th December, 2009 through President's Order No.5 of 2010 and its recommendations were given legal cover with effect from 1st July, 2010. For more details, visit: https://www.finance.gkp.pk/attachments/2da9abc0b38511e9b3c853d7f6bb97a7/download

[57] "MNA Raps Centre for Slashing Provinces' Share in NFC," DAWN News, July 27, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1571284.; "Karachi; Situation: Centre, Sindh Ministers in Verbal Stand Off," The News, September 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/708460-karachi-situation-centre-sindh-ministers-in-verbal-stand-off

[58] I. A. Rehman, "Playing with Fire," DAWN News, May 7, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1555183

[59] Khurram Husain, "Reversing the 18th Amendment?," DAWN News, March 22, 2018. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1396834

interpreted as traitors (oblique references to the founder of Bangladesh), and political parties which had passed it were hounded.[60] There were constant calls to reverse it and divert more resources to a greedy Centre unwilling to reduce security expenditure by citing 'dangers lurking on our borders'. Efforts were made to delete Clause (3A) of Article 160 of the Constitution, which stipulates that 'the share of the provinces in each award of the National Finance Commission shall not be less than the share given to the provinces in the previous award'.[61] An attempt to amend this clause in the Senate was defeated by the political opposition, which warned against forcibly or surreptitiously introducing the presidential system.[62]

There were recurring calls to reintroduce the highly centralising presidential system preferred by dictators over the parliamentary one. Three out of four military dictators, all-powerful presidents, attempted to capture power at the district and local tiers by resorting to the idea of Basic Democracies, Non-party based electoral system, and devolution as the 'Silent Revolution'.[63] This was done by military rulers to bypass the provinces and gain legitimacy at the grassroots level. In a critique of the establishment's barely disguised efforts to scuttle the provincial autonomy granted in the 18th Amendment, Nusrat Javed wrote:

> The sudden surfacing of whispers for an "Islamic Presidential System" in early 2019 forced many leaders of the same opposition parties to worriedly question their complacency. Some of them even began to forewarn that any attempt to tweak the 18th amendment would certainly push Pakistan to a crisis, the height of which we had endured in December 1971.[64]

The arrival of Covid-19 provided another pretext to capture the resources of Sindh, undermine its elected representatives and arm-twist the province into giving up its share. Even as the Sindh government was receiving widespread praise for its serious and mature response to the pandemic, the federal government launched daily attacks on its alleged inefficiency and mocked its strategy of a lockdown to stop the spread of the virus.[65] Health is a provincial issue, but the federal government kept interfering and earlier even tried to take over three hospitals in Sindh through the Supreme Court.[66] The hospitals were returned to the province, but the insistent undermining of the provincial government's efforts to control the spread of the virus continued unabated. As Babar Sattar wrote in the aforementioned article:

> If the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted one thing about our federation, it is that diverse ideas coming out of provincial headquarters is a good thing. The much-maligned Sindh in terms of public health management is at the forefront of providing leadership and ideas during this crisis. This is a good thing[67]

The federal government pitted the economy against health. Fearful that if the economy tanked, the ruling party would lose the next elections, the federal government masked its defence of big business and traders by expressing concern over the loss of livelihoods by the poor. While the Sindh government focused on saving lives, procuring medical equipment, and trying to track and trace those infected, the federal government insisted on opening all markets and businesses.[68] The poignant appeal by doctors in Sindh to enforce a lockdown and reduce the Covid-19 spread was dismissed by federal ministers as a ploy by the Sindh government to underscore its priorities. Later, panels of doctors, male and female, in other provinces literally cried in their press conferences pleading with governments to take the outbreak seriously. Instead of imposing a strict lockdown

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[60] Mohsin Dawar, "We're Peacefully Demanding Change in Pakistan. The Military Says We're 'Traitors.,'" Washington Post, February 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/02/14/were-peacefully-demanding-change-pakistan-military-says-were-traitors/

[61] Article 160 (3A), Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.; Iftikhar A. Khan, "Bill to Cut Provincial Share in NFC Award Rejected," DAWN News, July 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1568801

[62] Saqib Virk, "Opposition Warns Govt against Bringing in Presidential System," The Express Tribune, July 13, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2254711/opposition-warns-govt-against-bringing-in-presidential-system

[63] Rubina Saigol, "Decentralization, 18th Constitutional Amendment and Women's Rights," in Pakistan Alternative NGO Report on CEDAW 2012 (Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation, 2012), p. 131–40. Available at: https://www.google.com/l?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjA3dKA0sj7AhW6_7sIHe0YBq4QFnoECBkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftbinternet.ohchr.org%2FTreaties%2FCEDAW%2FShared%2520Documents%2FPAK%2FINT_CEDAW_NGO_PAK_13269_E.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3XQAPAtABeyDkMl_7T5RHC

[64] Nusrat Javeed, "The 'Devious Agent' of Extra-Parliamentary Forces," The Nation, July 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Jul-2020/the-devious-agent-of-extra-parliamentary-forces

[65] "Bilawal Accuses Centre of Sabotaging Sindh's Every Move on Coronavirus from the Get-Go," DAWN News, May 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1553723

[66] Hasan Mansoor, "Centre Notifies Takeover of Three Karachi Hospitals Citing Jan 1 SC Judgement," DAWN News, May 24, 2019. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1484184

[67] See f.n. 55 (Scofflaws at work)

[68] "Lockdown Ineffective due to Mixed Signals from Centre, Alleges Murad Ali Shah," DAWN News, April 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1548839

to contain the disease, the federal government remained bent upon opening markets and other public spaces, arguing that Covid-19 was merely the flu which would subside in a few days.[69]

With the Sindh government viewing health as a basic right, and the federal government setting up a binary between lives and livelihoods, Covid-19 further sharpened the Centre-province contradiction in state and society. The federal government appeared oblivious to the fact that only if people live will they need a livelihood. Instead of imposing a strict lockdown, while providing rations and other basic necessities to people, the federal government remained obsessed with hounding opposition politicians for their alleged corruption, as a way of forcing them to acquiesce in its capture of more resources. The pandemic revealed the nature of the state as one that is unresponsive to the people and focused on the elite capture of all resources and discourses. This exposed 'governance as if people don't matter'.

Addressing the problems posed by Covid-19 could have been far easier if local government systems had been allowed to continue and strengthen. However, political parties, which supported the devolution of power authority and responsibility to the provincial tiers, failed to devise effective local government structures to deal with the pandemic at the level of the smallest administrative units.

THE EXTREMIST-MODERATE DIVIDE

Closely related to the civil-military and centre-province contradictions is the divide between an extremist and moderate version of religion. Although the recourse to religious nationalism of the two-nation variety became redundant after a Muslim-majority country was created in 1947, this form of exclusionary nationalism continued to be relied upon for 'national integration'. The military came to own religion as the 'national ideology of Pakistan' and perceive itself as the defender not only of territory but of the ideological frontiers of Pakistan. Even though the two-nation theory had lost its foundations in 1971 when East Pakistan separated based on ethnic and linguistic diversity, religion, like patriotism, became the 'last resort of the scoundrel'.[70] Each time a ruler wanted to impose absolute dictatorship and gain total control, he invoked religion to justify unconstitutional acts and undermine ethnic nationalisms.[71]

In the 1980s, extremist forms of religion, borrowed from Saudi Arabia, were imposed on a diverse polity composed of several sects and subsects. A resort to the idea of saving Islam and Pakistan became the cornerstone of military ideology used to usher in military rule, dismiss elected governments and change elected ministers on the pretext that they had violated Islamic injunctions.[72] When direct military rule became unfeasible due to international considerations, a hybrid system of military-backed technocrats, coupled with a hyper-nationalist and populist government, was invented to retain indirect control over resources.[73] The puppet government was installed to perpetually reiterate an imagined, largely fictional, and ahistorical version of *Riyasat-e-Madina* designed to appeal to religious sentiments.

The far-reaching effects of the imposition of a singular, monolithic, narrow and literalist interpretation of religion on an essential diversity have been widely recorded by historians and political commentators. As we erased our basic pluralism, minorities - both ethnic and religious - were alienated; women's rights were diminished, and the state became a kind of super-father figure empowered to enter into people's homes to regulate

[69] Madiha Afzal, "With a Mix of Pandemic Denialism and Exceptionalism, Pakistan Makes a Cynical Bet on the Coronavirus," Brookings, June 5, 2020. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/05/with-a-mix-of-pandemic-denialism-and-exceptionalism-pakistan-makes-a-cynical-bet-on-the-coronavirus/; "PM Imran Tells Nation to Prepare for a Coronavirus Epidemic, Rules out Lockdown," DAWN News, March 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1541689

[70] James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, ed. David Womersley, First Edition (1793; repr., Penguin Classics, 2008). Available at: https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/34415/the-life-of-samuel-johnson-by-james-boswell-ed-david-womersley/9780140436624 See Samuel Johnson quote in Diary Date: April 7, 1775.

[71] B.M. Chengappa, "Pakistan: The Role of Religion in Political Evolution," Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA, Vol. 24, Iss. 12 (March 2001). Available at: https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_mar01chb01.html

[72] Mubaraz Ahmed, "Pakistan's Emboldened Islamists," Institute for Global Change, November 30, 2017. Available at: https://institute.global/policy/pakistans-emboldened-islamists

[73] Editors Note. Mohammad Taqi, "Pakistan's Hybrid Regime: The Army's Project Imran Khan," The Diplomat, October 1, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/pakistans-hybrid-regime-the-armys-project-imran-khan/; Hassnain Moawia, "Hybrid Warfare and Its Implications for Pakistan's National Security Strategy," Paradigm Shift, March 22, 2021, https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/hybrid-warfare-pakistan/

the minute aspects of private life. The politics of piety and not principles became the ideal. The puppet government, brought in through the elections of 2018, has demonstrated ample inclination towards personal piety and superstitious practices, instead of resolving issues through solid policies and effective programmes.[74]

The discourse around Covid-19 predictably came to be centred like everything else on religion. Ignorance, superstition, and prejudice were spread from the highest echelons of power. Maulana Tariq Jameel, comfortably ensconced between the cabinet ministers and media personalities, announced that the pandemic may be attributed to society's waywardness, nudity, and immorality, particularly to women's practice of immodesty! He asserted that "When a Muslim's daughter practices immodesty and the youth indulges in immorality, then Allah's torment is unto such a nation".[75]

Coming from a religious cleric surrounded by the highest authorities in the land, a gullible populace is likely to believe in fanciful stories. God's wrath, it was stated, falls upon those who make women dance in public. The idea was that women are the guardians of virtue and morality and if they stray from the strict path set out for them, disease and death stalk the land. Women's bodies, it was implied, carry death and disease and therefore must be strictly regulated to save the nation. Blaming women for the scourge can easily make them even more vulnerable to violence. In a lockdown situation, which sees them imprisoned at home with their potential abusers, this kind of public narrative can render them liable to further incarceration and violence by frustrated families. As the Ministry of Human Rights and UN Women brief on gendered implications of Covid-19 in Pakistan showed:

> Women across the globe face a plethora of problems, and among the most serious is violence. Pakistan is no exception in this regard; 28% of women aged between 15-49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and 6% have experienced sexual violence. 7% of the women who have ever been pregnant have experienced violence during their pregnancy and 34% of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence. The most common type of spousal violence is emotional violence (26%) which is followed by physical violence (23%). 5% of the married women have experienced spousal sexual violence. Evidence suggests that epidemics and stresses involved in coping with the epidemics may increase the risk of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. Studies have also found that unemployment tends to increase the risk of depression, aggression and episodes of violent behavior in men. Hence, the country may experience a rise in cases of domestic abuse as a result of the COVID-19. It is reported that the economic repercussions of the Ebola outbreak, led to increased risk of sexual exploitation of women. Given the current climate of decreased economic activities, financial uncertainties and a situation of lockdown being faced in Pakistan, heightened tensions could translate into women facing more vulnerabilities.[76]

The pandemic exposed the existing fault lines of gender, class, and religion. There were media reports that life-saving rations were not being given to religious minorities, especially sanitation workers.[77] Numerous organisations, responsible for distributing essential foodstuff, refused to give rations to Christian, Hindu, and other minorities.[78] The outbreak reinforced the existing divisions and boundaries that separated people, long before social distancing became a household word.

Social distancing from the ideological 'Other', based on stereotypes and prejudice, was not witnessed only in Pakistan. In India, Muslims were repeatedly blamed for being the bearers of disease and death.[79] They were

[74] Nivedita Menon, "The Politics of Piety in Naya Pakistan: Afiya Zia," Kafila - Collective Explorations since 2006 (blog), July 20, 2019. Available at: https://kafila.online/2019/07/20/the-politics-of-piety-in-naya-pakistan-afiya-zia/

[75] "Pakistan: Maulana Blames COVID-19 on 'Scantily Dressed Women', as Imran Watches On," The Week, April 27, 2020. Available at: https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2020/04/27/pakistan-maulana-blames-covid-19-on-scantily-dressed-women-as-imran-watches-on.html

[76] Ministry of Human Rights and UN Women, "Gendered Impact and Implications of COVID-19 in Pakistan" (Government of Pakistan, 2020). Available at: https://mohr.gov.pk/Detail/ODZhNzY4M2YtYWUwOC00OWFiLWI3ODItMWQ3NzYzYjFhMDM3; Fatima Khan, "Pakistan Sees Rise in Gender-Based Violence during COVID-19," The News, December 6, 2021. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/914582-pakistan-sees-a-rise-in-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19

[77] "Discrimination amid Pandemic, Pakistan Refuses to Give Food to Hindus as Covid-19 Rages," ANI News, April 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/discrimination-amid-pandemic-pakistan-refuses-to-give-food-to-hindus-as-covid-19-rages20200401123439/; "USCIRF Says 'Troubled' by Denial of Food to Pakistani Hindus, Christians amid Covid-19 Crisis," Hindustan Times, April 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/uscirf-says-troubled-by-denial-of-food-to-pakistani-hindus-christians/story-E4XHUc6GOs2TfURkTelnFK.html; John Pontifex, "PAKISTAN: Christians 'Denied' Food Aid," Aid to the Church in Need, April 2, 2020. Available at: https://acnuk.org/news/pakistan-christians-denied-food-aid/

[78] "Minorities in Pakistan Claim They Were Refused Aid due to Their Religious Identities," International Christian Concern (Persecution, March 30, 2020). Available at: https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/30/minorities-pakistan-claim-refused-aid-due-religious-identities/

[79] Joanna Slater and Niha Masih, "As the World Looks for Coronavirus Scapegoats, Muslims Are Blamed in India," Washington Post, April 23, 2020. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-world-looks-for-coronavirus-scapegoats-india-pins-blame-on-muslims/2020/04/22/3cb43430-

ostracised, shunned, and attacked by neighbours. Slater and Masih write that:

> The assault reflected one of the oldest — and ugliest — human impulses: the desire to blame calamity on those who are different. In India, the search for scapegoats during the coronavirus pandemic has focused squarely on the country's sizable Muslim minority, a community of 200 million that felt under threat even before the advent of covid-19.[80]

The pre-existing prejudice, hatred, and rage against Muslims, fanned further by a fascist party in power, was exacerbated by the pandemic.[81] The Tableeghi Jamaat was viewed as the main culprit, and the inability of the government to manage and contain the spread was placed on the shoulders of an already beleaguered minority. Decrying the tendency towards biased 'social distancing' in India, Slater and Masih observe that:

> News channels and some ruling-party officials rushed to blame Muslims for the rising number of coronavirus cases in the country after an Islamic missionary group in New Delhi emerged as a super-spreader. In recent weeks, Muslims have been assaulted, denied medical care and subjected to boycotts — all in the name of fear of the virus.[82]

In the US and countries across Europe, there were reports of discrimination and attacks on people of Asian descent. In America, there were attempts to name the virus either 'China Virus' or 'Wuhan Virus',[83] signalling that it is the inferior yellow races that are contaminated and spreading disease; 'you Chinese virus spreader' was how anti-Asian racism reared its head in Australia.[84] The Australians referred to the Chinese as 'bat eaters' and 'dog eaters' – racial slurs meant to associate danger with another race. In China, Africans were evicted and refused entry to restaurants on account of fears that foreigners could spark a new round of infections.[85] In Pakistan, activists observed that the Hazara ethnic minority was unfairly blamed as the source of the virus.[86]

The widespread myth that South Asia may escape the ravages of Covid-19, has disappeared. Experts warn that South Asia, where 30 per cent of people live below the poverty line, is becoming a hotspot for the virus because of the congested conditions in which people live and the lack of healthcare facilities accompanied by high levels of illiteracy.[87]

Referring to the impact of Covid-19 on South Asia, Zunaira Inam writes that:

> Even though this is a global pandemic, countries are turning inwards. Borders are closed down, citizens are under lockdown, and international institutions have to grapple with issues of influence, cooperation and interaction. There is a rising trend of isolationism, protectionism, ethnocentrism, racism, and inequality. We are witnessing new types and forms of discrimination and inequalities where immigration/travel is being shut down for certain nationalities, and new types of health barriers and an international blame game…There are new forms of racism being created, fanning the flames of already existing hatreds. The blame game is never ending and sowing new seeds of discord.[88]

The pandemic interrupted our lives in many ways, but also exacerbated the existing barriers of race, class and religion erected by humans against one another. Even as our ways of living and dying; mourning and rejoicing; working and earning, producing, and consuming, may have been altered beyond recognition, so many of our prejudices, hatreds and exclusions not only continued but worsened. The fear created by the new invisible

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7f3f-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html

[80] Ibid.

[81] Jaffer Abbas Mirza, "COVID-19 Fans Religious Discrimination in Pakistan," The Diplomat, April 28, 2020. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/covid-19-fans-religious-discrimination-in-pakistan/; Marzia Akhlaqi, Sajjad Hussain Changezi, and Farwa Batool, "'We Need More Solidarity' - Religious Gatherings during Covid-19 in Pakistan," Institute of Development Studies, April 16, 2021. Available at: https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/we-need-more-solidarity-religious-gatherings-during-covid-19-in-pakistan/

[82] See f.n. 79 (Joanna Slater and Niha Masih).

[83] Katie Rogers, Lara Jakes, and Ana Swanson, "Trump Defends Using 'Chinese Virus' Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism," The New York Times, March 18, 2020, sec. U.S. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/china-virus.html

[84] Su-Lin Tan, "After Covid, Australia Faces Racism Outbreak," South China Morning Post, May 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3086768/you-chinese-virus-spreader-after-coronavirus-australia-has-anti

[85] "African Nationals 'Mistreated, Evicted' in China over Coronavirus," Al Jazeera, April 12, 2020. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/12/african-nationals-mistreated-evicted-in-china-over-coronavirus

[86] Jaffer A. Mirza, "Pakistan's Hazara Shia Minority Blamed for Spread of Covid-19," Institute of Development Studies, April 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/pakistans-hazara-shia-minority-blamed-for-spread-of-covid-19/

[87] "Fading Optimism," The News, June 25, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/677230-fading-optimism

[88] Zunaira Inam, "South Asia and Covid-19," The News, June 24, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/676775-south-asia-and-covid-19

enemy inside our bodies goads us into erecting new walls and fortresses of distance and alienation. As we push away others, the bodies feared to be contaminated, we push away a part of our own selves, for we are all part of the larger whole of humanity.

GUNS VERSUS BUTTER – NATIONAL SECURITY VERSUS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the major fault lines, and a glaring structural contradiction in Pakistan, has been the massive expenditure of precious national resources on unproductive sectors while spending minuscule amounts on social development. The 'guns versus butter' debate is decades old as our national priorities are skewed, making us spend exorbitant amounts on national defence along with meagre investment in people – on health, education, employment and welfare. This contradiction resides in the uneven and exploitative colonial structure inherited at independence and retained by the ruling elites of the country.[89]

The four major ruling groups in Pakistan include the civil and military bureaucracy, feudal landlords, and rich industrialists engaged in the capitalist form of production.[90] These groups are deeply interlinked and provide each other support wherein the civil-military bureaucracy creates and props up regimes led by feudal landlords and industrialists who, in turn, provide substantial resources to them, in particular to the military. The urban educated middle classes support the civil-military rulers, in part to get a share in power and partly to protect them against the excesses of the feudal-capitalist elites and the potentially dangerous revolutionary impulses in the poor and working classes. In this way, the ruling class structure maintains, sustains, and reinforces its power over the multitudes of ordinary people who produce the resources available to the rulers in abundance.

The military sits atop the pyramid of power. It determines who rules, how, and for how long. It allows seemingly civilian governments to continue their stints in power, so long as they follow the diktat of the powerful military. The most powerful part of the ruling elites, the military, also decides how the national pie is to be distributed.[91] The largest share of Pakistan's national resources goes to the global ruling elites in the form of debt repayment – debt for huge wasteful projects and expensive military toys. The global ruling elites ensure that Pakistan's military is well-supplied with armaments, as it is a mercenary army that offers its services to global capitalist elites in pursuit of their military adventures.[92] In this symbiotic relationship between global capitalists and the Pakistani military, the interests of the vast population are ignored and those of global capital are served. The same relationship of subordination and domination recurs at the national level between the national bourgeoisie and the military establishment.

The people, the citizens, are secondary in this relationship. They are given a few crumbs by the ruling structure in order to retain a semblance of legitimacy, and for preventing a possible uprising. Pakistan's spending on social development has been historically low due to the structural reasons mentioned above, and this results in glaring economic and social inequalities. Explicating Pakistan's skewed priorities, economist Pervez Tahir writes that "as far as the health expenditure is concerned, the pandemic never happened".[93] According to him:

> Pakistan's public expenditure on health has not only been notoriously below the internationally recommended percentage of GDP, but also declining. From 0.1% in 1951-52, it took 36 years to achieve the peak of 1.25% in 1987-88. Then it was downhill, touching the foothill of 0.2% in 2010-11. Thanks to the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) and the 18th Amendment, there was a recovery in the present decade to 1.2% by 2017-18.[94]

[89] Khalid Bhatti, "Reforming the Economy," The News, March 29, 2019. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/450142-reforming-the-economy
[90] Ibid.
[91] See f.n. 17 (David O Smith).
[92] Editors Note. For decades, Pakistan has provided troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions making it the fifth most significant contributor to UN peacekeeping, based on UN figures from February 2018, with over 6,000 Pakistani military personnel served under the UN flag. For detailed analysis, see UN News. "Pakistan: One of the Longest-Serving and Largest Contributors to UN Peacekeeping," n.d. Available at: https://news.un.org/en/gallery/525401
[93] Dr Pervez Tahir, "Has Covid-19 Made Health Budgets Respectable?," The Express Tribune, June 26, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2250290/covid-19-made-health-budgets-respectable
[94] Ibid.

In contrast, the resources allocated for defence in the 2020-21 budget were 18 per cent, an astronomical difference and an increase of 11.8 per cent over the previous year.

In the total outlay of the budget (2020-21) amounting to PKR. 7,294.9 billion, a whopping PKR 1.289 trillion was allocated for defence and a paltry PKR. 650 billion for social sector spending.[95] Each time the army demands a supplementary grant, the public sector development programme gets further reduced. Moreover, the main allocation does not include the pensions of the retired military personnel, which constitute another PKR. 369 billion, a 12.8 per cent increase over the previous year.[96] Pakistan's defence spending constitutes 2.82 per cent of its GDP, which is the highest in the region where the Chinese spend 1.9 per cent of GDP on defence, India spends 2.4 per cent and Iran allocates 2.3 per cent for defence purposes.[97]

The expenditure on health is insignificant compared to the defence allocation, and even when compared to other developing countries; 'Pakistan spends a paltry USD 129 per capita on health. Even Afghanistan and Zambia spend more on health than Pakistan.[98] In spite of the greater expenditure by the provinces (health is a provincial subject), the allocations are insufficient to deal with the ravages caused by the virus. Pakistan's commitment to public education is similarly low, as the country allocates a dismal per capita expenditure of PKR. 500 a month, one of the lowest on the face of the planet. The federal government has allocated PKR. 25 billion for health, despite the pandemic eating into our vitals. Economists recommend that we must double our allocation for education, for which the federal government has apportioned PKR. 83 billion. Since education is a provincial subject, the provinces have allocated more resources than in the past, but they are hugely insufficient to overcome the low literacy rates and abysmal quality of education. As economist Farrukh Saleem stated 'Education is not our priority. Neither is health'.[99]

It is not difficult to see the impending consequences of years of misplaced priorities. Echoing sentiments similar to those of Bernie Sanders in the US context, and decrying the misplaced priorities of the state which allocated even more money for defence despite a pandemic, Imad Zafar writes that:

> …in the middle of a pandemic, faced with a lack of proper medical facilities and personal protection equipment (PPE) for medical staff, the government decided to allocate more funds to the defense sector, as if guns, tanks and missiles will eradicate the virus that causes Covid-19 and increase the capacity of the health system.[100]

A beleaguered government sought to ensure its longevity by increasing the money for its backers despite the already meagre resources for the people. The national security paradigm trumped the human security narrative again; the war mindset defeated the peace and development dreams.

Lamenting the measly allocations for social protection, Najam Sethi writes that by the government's own admission, no more than PKR. 200 billion has so far been spent on Covid-19 income relief via the Ehsaas/Benazir Income Support Program and Utility Stores, and only a paltry sum of PKR. 70 billion has been allocated for social protection in the new budget for 2020-21. The federal government has 'palmed off necessary expenditures on health to the provinces which, true to their equally profound limitations, have scarcely bothered to increase them significantly. On top of it, artificial shortages and resultant price hikes in sugar and flour owing to lack of government planning and regulation have eaten into whatever incomes were afforded to the poor and needy by the miserly "relief packages"'.[101]

The consequences of low investment in human development and people's security globally are projected to be disastrous. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report states that the crisis will leave deep and long-

[95] Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Govt Proposes Rs1.29tr for Defence Spending," DAWN News, June 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1563187.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Dr Farrukh Saleem, "Is There a Connection between Defence Budget and Spending on Education?," The News, June 28, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/678762-defence-budget-part-ii
[99] Ibid.
[100] Imad Zafar, "Pakistan's Fiscal Budget Leaves Masses on Their Own," Asia Times, June 15, 2020. Available at: https://asiatimes.com/2020/06/pakistans-fiscal-budget-leaves-masses-on-their-own/
[101] Najam Sethi, "Peasants with Pitchforks," The Friday Times (Naya Daur, June 19, 2020). Available at: https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2020/06/19/peasants-with-pitchforks/

lasting scars and drive 70 to 100 million people into extreme poverty.[102] Decades of neoliberal policy prescriptions have allowed the state to recede from the welfare of populations and export its crises to the private sector, leaving people at the mercy of profit-driven markets.[103] States have neglected the most basic role of ensuring the lives, livelihoods, health, education, employment, and other public goods. Elites ruling most of the world's countries have ensured that wealth flows upwards to the rich, whose support is essential for the continuity of elite rule.

In Pakistan's case the transfer of resources to the elite, while paying lip service to the needs of the poor is aptly expressed by Khurram Hussain who writes:

> It is not the interests of the poor that animate this government but those of the rich…It is a deeply Pakistani trait for the country's leadership to serve the poor with their words and the rich with their deeds. There is a long pedigree to this peculiar brand of two-facedness, of doling out goodies to the rich in the name of the poor.[104]

Hussain argues that for the government in Pakistan, 2.2 per cent of the population dying from a highly contagious disease is an acceptable risk to take, but a 1.5 per cent contraction in total economic output is not. The government of Pakistan released around PKR. 45 billion to the 'export sectors' under the prime minister's Covid-19 package for exporters. In the previous three quarters, another PKR. 47 billion was released for them under the Export Enhancement Package. Earlier, the cabinet had approved an amnesty scheme for property developers, disguised as a 'construction package'.[105] All this was done in the name of the poor and struggling daily wagers.

The consequences of neglecting the social sector and human development are enormous. It is predicted that the world order post-Covid 'will lead to a new form of inequalities between the badly affected and the hardly affected, the digital working population and the non-digital working population, the knowledge workers vs. the non-knowledge workers'.[106] These tendencies will be even more pronounced in countries like Pakistan, where the digital divide determines who goes to school while in lockdown and who remains deprived of education. Years of low investment in education and technology are beginning to have an impact on schooling and learning even at the university level.[107]

Increasing poverty and inequality, combined with death and disease, tend to exacerbate social and cultural problems, especially for women. Covid-19 affects women's economic and social rights as well as their civil and political rights to security, protection, and freedom. Imprisoned within the home with their potential abusers, women have been subjected to increased violence borne of economic frustration combined with confinement.[108] The existing problems of women have worsened because of their lower status in the patriarchal order. They already had less access to health, education, mobility, and economic opportunities. They are less likely to find work after the crisis is over and are more likely to drop out of school once classes resume. Rural women have even less access to the internet than their urban counterparts to engage in distance learning. Furthermore, when women and girls are confined to the home, their burden of household labour increases. Women are impacted by the pandemic in myriad of ways because of pre-existing prejudices and biases based on gender.[109]

The dire impact of wasting scarce national resources on unproductive sectors, concomitant with unacceptably low spending on people and human security is beyond imagination. Citizens are affected in multiple ways and at different levels. Populations remain weak, susceptible to disease and death, uneducated and unable to find employment, economically insecure and malnourished. People, not guns, defend countries. But weak and emaciated people cannot defend a country and may not even be inclined to do so, given that they are deprived of the very resources they create. Poverty, want and hunger in turn exacerbate the social distances and walls of hatred already separating people from one another.

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[102] See f.n. 2 (Sudden Danger).
[103] Viviene Taylor, "Marketisation of Governance: Critical Feminist Perspectives from the South" (DAWN Publication, 2000). Available at: https://dawnnet.org/sites/default/files/articles/marketisation-of-governance-allpages.pdf
[104] Khurram Husain, "Words for the Poor," DAWN News, May 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1556977
[105] Ibid.
[106] See f.n. 88 (Zunaira Inam).
[107] Pervez Tahir, "Education and Covid," DAWN News, July 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1568714
[108] Nadia Agha, "Covid-19 Highlights Vulnerabilities," The News on Sunday (TNS), May 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/659189-covid-19-highlights-vulnerabilities
[109] See f.n. 76 (Gendered Impact and Implications of COVID-19).

THE WAY FORWARD

It is customary at the end of the discussions of issues to make specific and detailed recommendations. There could be many suggestions, but we outline a broad range of structural issues which must be resolved if Pakistan is to emerge from its current crisis of state and society. Superficial and band-aid approaches to ameliorate the lot of the dispossessed will not work for long. The following remedies emerge from our discussion above.

First, a radical redistribution of resources is needed to engender relative equality. A just distribution of land and wealth is needed to ensure that the exploitative groups – civil-military bureaucracies, capitalists, and feudal landlords – stop the upward movement of wealth. This can be done by giving land to the landless and a share of the capitalist wealth to the workers. Unless the nexus between the elite groups is broken, they will continue to support one another in the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich.

Second, the social contract, which defines the role of all institutions, needs to be reaffirmed. The civil-military contradiction arises from the lack of adherence to the constitutional scheme, wherein powers are divided between the legislature, executive and judiciary. The military is not a part of this trichotomy; it is a subordinate institution of the elected government. If this distortion in the system is not resolved, the military will continue to protect the landowning and capitalist classes and in turn, they will keep diverting precious resources to the unelected institution. Civilian rule and parliamentary supremacy need to be reiterated while ensuring that the labouring and peasant classes gain access to representative assemblies.

Third, decentralisation is the most important method of ensuring the upward flow of resources. The attempts to undo the 18th Amendment and redirect resources toward a powerful Centre must be resisted. Ever since the provinces have received their due share in the National Finance Commission Award, they have spent more on health and education than the Centre did in the past. Admittedly, the provinces need to carry the process of devolution further and establish effective local governments so that governance can be delivered at the doorstep. However, the process needs to go forward and not be reversed.

Fourth, the pandemic has sharpened the existing social divisions between religions, genders, classes, races, and ethnic groups. The state needs to end its reliance on religious narratives that encourage centralisation and deny diversity. Instead, it needs to establish a plural and inclusive state in which all citizens - male and female, Muslim and non-Muslim, Punjabi and Sindhi, Balochi and Pashtun and all regions are considered equal. Discourses of hate, otherness, and alienation must be replaced by those of co-existence and mutual tolerance.

Fifth, the state needs to re-examine and re-define its priorities such that the people comprise the Centre of policy and programmes. The national security paradigm, which ensures that the largest chunk of resources is spent on wasteful and unproductive sectors, needs to be challenged in favour of a people-centric approach – governance as if people matter. Unless the state's resources are diverted in significant ways to the citizens, the state will remain a top-heavy burden on society – a predator.

While reflecting upon 'lives not worth saving', Sathar writes that:

> …there is no choice but to provide the essentials like food, water, healthcare for the poorest 20 per cent of the population for the next few months. The counterfactual is skyrocketing poverty, malnutrition and death of key household members that will be difficult to repair financially and emotionally.[110]

With 30 per cent of the population below the poverty line, and more falling behind, the government needs to get serious about the pandemic. Making outlandish claims that our people are less susceptible to it, we will go for herd immunity, the heat will kill it, it will only be a mild flu, and so on is to make a mockery of the sacred relationship between the state and the citizen.

[110] Zeba Sathar, "Lives Not Worth Saving," DAWN News, June 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1563196/lives-not-worth-saving

In a critique of the neoliberal and 'national security' based priority of guns over butter, Najam Sethi writes:

> The lesson of COVID-19 is ringing loud and clear in Pakistan. The ruling elites of state and society must relinquish their stranglehold over civil society and give it a chance to breathe, grow and replenish the nation. Priorities in borrowing, spending and budget making must radically change. It is criminal for state and government functionaries to blame the people for not following anti-COVID-19 SOPs when they are ill-educated, unemployed, depressed, and alienated from their rulers. The alternative is to prepare…for the approaching storm of the peasants with pitchforks.[111]

A state unable or unwilling to provide basic protections and security to its citizens loses its legitimacy. It is in violation of the social contract and the sanctity of its relations with the people. Ensuring the basic rights of the citizens is the raison d'être of states, globally and in Pakistan. Realising and recognising this is imperative for the state's own security and continued existence.

[111] See f.n. 101 (Peasants with pitchforks).

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Asha Bedar & Farieha Aziz

ABSTRACT

The essay, Domestic Violence in the Time of Covid-19 and Beyond: Situational Analysis takes a critical look at the increase in the physical, emotional and sexual forms of gender based violence in domestic spaces during Covid-19. The writers cite patriarchal norms, perceptions and behavioural patterns regarding women's subordinate status in society, as cause and consequence of (i) the increase in domestic violence during Covid induced lockdowns, livelihood loss and financial stress and (ii) lack of data on the VAW and women's low priority in budgetary allocation and service provision. The essay examines and analyses the psychosocial impact of the forms of violence faced by economically underprivileged women and children compelled to live in close proximity to abusers in the context of lockdowns, job loss and financial stress. Speaking about the long term impact of this violence on the mental and emotional health of women and children, it argues for the provision of social and psychological support systems, improved public healthcare and comprehensive data collection for the prevention and redress of domestic violence.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Asha Bedar is a feminist, a member of Pakistan Women's Movement and a practising psychologist, with a PhD from the University of Melbourne. Her work revolves around mental and psychological health issues; violence against women and children; life skills; peace and human rights education for children; post-disaster psychosocial support; and, life skills development in children. She has a working relationship with 'Bedari' and 'Rozan' Pakistan, 'Early Learning Centre' University of Melbourne, Anglicare Choices, the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights and The Psychosocial Centre, Australia.

Farieha Aziz is a human rights activist, feminist, journalist, an erstwhile teacher, and a member of the Pakistan Women's Movement. She holds a Master's degree in English

Literature from the University of Karachi. She is also the founder and director of 'Bolo Bhi', a not-for-profit that advocates for internet freedom and digital rights in Pakistan. Farieha Aziz worked for Newsline and has contributed to various media outlets in Pakistan. She served as Amicus Curiae in a case where she successfully got YouTube unblocked in the country and received the prestigious APNS award.

It is the end of the year 2020 and Pakistan is at the brink of a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. As the country braces itself for more illness, more protection mechanisms, and restrictions, it also faces a sharp rise in the accompanying 'shadow pandemic'[1] of domestic violence. The link between domestic violence and emergencies, natural disasters, wars, or outbreaks is well-recognised today, and civil society and UN agencies moved in swiftly at the start of the pandemic to warn and push the government to make calls for the protection of women from abuse and violence in anticipation of an increase. While some noises were initially made by the government to address the predicted rise (e.g., helpline numbers), in reality, no effort was made to examine and cater to the needs of women in any informed or systematic manner in these unprecedented times.

The Covid-19 pandemic is characterised by unique features that are different from any other emergency in recent times, as are its gendered impact and implications beyond the peak phases. Before we attempt to examine this unique impact and the potential challenges involved, both in the private and public domain, it would be useful to briefly discuss the pre-Covid context of Domestic Violence (DV) and review the range of structural and psycho-social factors that influence its trajectory.

The latest national data on DV indicates that an estimated 34 per cent of married Pakistani women have faced some form of violence perpetrated by their husbands.[2] According to women's rights groups working at the grassroots level for decades, this figure reflects nowhere close to the actual extent of violence faced by Pakistani women in their own homes because of a serious lack of research, reporting, or even recognition of many of the forms of domestic violence. As pervasive as it is, a true picture of domestic violence has been impossible to capture, even more so than (stranger) rape perhaps, because of the patriarchal notions of privacy, honour and preservation of the family unit rooted in Pakistani society. What goes on inside the revered and often cited symbol of women's protection and her place – *the chaddar aur char deevari* (the veil and four walls) - is rigidly protected and confined to that space. In the socio-economically lower rungs of society, this is not so much a matter of secrecy, but of acceptance. It is normative behaviour, a painful but accepted reality of women's lives.[3]

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[1] "The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19," UN Women (United Nations, 2020). Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19

[2] "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18," National Institute of Population Studies (Islamabad, Pakistan and Rockville, Maryland, ISA: National Institute of Population Studies and The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), International Coaching Federation (ICF), January 2019). Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjY2tvs19L7AhVq_rsIHQfiBNUQFnoECBgQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdhsprogram.com%2Fpubs%2Fpdf%2FFR354%2FFR354.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2QuYtieQnwq2DtOdcmrJdH

[3] F. Rabbani, F. Qureshi, and N. Rizvi, "Perspectives on Domestic Violence: Case Study from Karachi, Pakistan," Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, Vol. 14, Iss. 2 (March 1, 2008): p. 415–26. Available at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18561735/; Also see; Adeel Khan and Rafat Hussain, "Violence against Women in Pakistan: Perceptions and Experiences of Domestic Violence," Asian Studies Review, Vol. 32, Iss. 2 (June 2008): p. 239–53. Available at: https://rune.une.edu.au/web/handle/1959.11/1394

As we move up the socio-economic ladder, however, social constructs of class, status and education enter to shroud the abuse in more sophisticated and less visible forms.[4]

Pakistani women's options for responding to the violence they experience at home, ranging from verbal/psychological abuse to 'light beating' (or *halka phulka tashaddud)*[5] all the way to that which causes severe injury, have always been limited. This is so, both because of gendered expectations and norms dictating that family matters be kept within the home and that the unit be preserved at all costs, as well as structural barriers to justice, despite the existence of laws, including those specific to domestic violence in some provinces.[6]

As a result, women tend to rely more on informal pathways to respond to the violence they face at home. For the most part, these are everyday coping mechanisms to help them maintain a safe distance from their perpetrators as far as possible, aimed at reducing the frequency of the violence and/or to regulate the emotional distress associated with it.[7] These mechanisms comprise the natural breaks that occur in the ebb and flow of their daily lives, such as when they (or their partners) are at work, when women are socialising with family (e.g., visiting their parents or siblings), friends, neighbours and at community events, which constitute a large part of cultural life in Pakistan; and when pursuing activities that give their lives a structure, rhythm and/or a sense of normalcy and perhaps even peace, however fragile and temporary that may be. When the abuse moves beyond what survivors of violence perceive as being manageable, only then do they seek external support. At a basic level, this may involve disclosing and speaking about the abuse with trusted friends, family or workers/professionals who may be supporting them (for a health/mental health issue, community work, etc.). The second level may entail seeking mediation by family members, which often translates into attempts at reconciliation. It is typically only in crisis situations when women's (or their children's) immediate safety is threatened or staying at home is no longer a viable option that women consider alternatives, such as seeking shelter accommodation, reporting the violence to the police, or instituting legal proceedings.

It is an unfortunate reality that the very domains that define women's responses to DV - social interactions (as a distraction strategy or for emotional support), breaks from the abuse through distancing from the perpetrator, and seeking help from crisis services - have been hit the hardest in the Covid-19 pandemic and its accompanying restrictions via social distancing and lockdowns.[8] The already limited range of pathways available to women for coping, safety and justice have been severely compromised, and with growing fears and warnings of the next wave of infection, it is unlikely that the situation will normalise any time in the near future.

Data on the rates of domestic violence during the continuing pandemic is severely lacking. However, some existing information gathered from helplines (some specifically for domestic violence), shelters and human rights organisations combined with anecdotal data obtained from workers, activists and mental health professionals (including the authors of the paper)[9] who work with women, present substantial evidence that the rates and severity of domestic violence have been rising significantly during the pandemic, most notably during peak lockdown periods.[10] Various features of this violence and women's coping have emerged through the analysis of this data, presenting an alarming picture of women's vulnerability during the pandemic.

The various lockdowns in the country resulted in the curtailment of outdoor work and the instant and complete shutdown or at the very least, severe restriction of other activities. With the entire family locked down together at home, women living with abusive partners were exposed to more frequent and serious violence triggered by

[4] Ibid.

[5] The phrase 'halka phulka tashaddud' (light beating) was used by the Islamic Council of Ideology (ICI) in 2016 as a way of explaining what degree of domestic violence was acceptable in Islam. The use of the phrase attracted widespread outrage from women's rights groups across the country.

[6] "Legislation on Violence against Women and Girls," UN Women (Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). Available at: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan/evaw-pakistan/legislation-on-vaw; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021; Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016.

[7] Parveen A. Ali et al., "Intimate Partner Violence in Pakistan," Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, Vol. 16, Iss. 3 (March 12, 2014): p. 299–315. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1524838014526065

[8] Asha Bedar. "Clinical Observations/Notes made during Pandemic," 2020. Also see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Gender and Pandemic: Urgent Call for Action - Advocacy Brief 4" (Government of Punjab, 2020). Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/pakistan/Advocacy_Brief_4_Gender_-COVID-19-Punjab.pdf

[9] Farieha Aziz is an APNS award-winning journalist. She is a co-founder of Bolo Bhi, a digital rights and civil liberties group. She provides training on digital safety and anti-harassment policies. Asha Bedar is a practising clinical psychologist, trainer and researcher working on issues related to gender, violence against women and children and trauma.

[10] See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); Also see Rozan. "GBV client data insight April – July 2020," 2020.

greater proximity and increased overall stress.[11] Changed roles, additional household/children's responsibilities, fears of or actual illness, financial worries and anxiety regarding an uncertain future cumulatively created a highly pressured environment in which marital/family conflicts were easily triggered, often escalating into violence. In other words, the pandemic reinforced patriarchal control in the home. Men's domination is a defining feature of patriarchy[12] but in the private sphere, some of this power is shared, albeit briefly and within defined limits[13] when men are physically absent from home, such as when they are at work or travelling, with their wives holding the fort temporarily. For this time, the home becomes an acceptable space for women to exercise some agency and even step outside to other acceptable spaces from time to time. This delineation of spaces and opportunities for occasional shared power have been dramatically challenged by the lockdowns and job losses, with men being at home over prolonged periods of time and taking over the one space and time that has traditionally belonged to women.

Women's sense of self-worth in a traditional patriarchal system is defined by their functioning in relation to the men in their families, as wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law.[14] With the enormous increase in their work burden during the pandemic, women's capacities have been stretched, resulting in their efficiency being compromised. Mistakes, lapses, and delays are often seen as a failure to perform their duties towards their families, particularly the men (or mothers-in-law) who feel entitled to their regular needs and comforts being met, even (or perhaps more so), when nothing else in life is 'normal'. These failures, combined with women's expectations that husbands help at home in these times to lighten their workloads triggered conflict, often spiralling into verbal, psychological and ultimately, physical abuse.[15]

It is worth noting here that the concept of masculinity, rooted deeply in patriarchal values, leads to a gendered socialisation process whereby boys are taught to neither acknowledge to themselves nor show to others their vulnerabilities lest they appear weak or feminine. Therefore, the expression of natural emotional conditions such as fear, anxiety, stress, or grief is discouraged, sometimes brutally, pressurising grown men to mask these emotions by displaying acceptable masculine emotions and behaviour instead, such as anger, irritability, impatience, and aggression.[16] Covid-19 has been a time of stress, anxiety, and grief for many, and with no skills for emotional management, some men fall back on this conditioning, using anger and aggression towards women and children as a way of channelling their stress and distress.

There are also reports of domestic sexual abuse and marital rape being on the rise during lockdowns.[17] With more time at home and with no other activities and responsibilities, men were more sexually demanding of their wives, sometimes placing immense pressure and even using threats and force to meet their increased needs. At times, this sexual coercion extended to acts that made women uncomfortable, but refusal to participate either as frequently or in ways in which their husbands demanded, resulted in physical violence in addition to sexual abuse. Disclosures made to counsellors indicated that some women were afraid of unwanted pregnancies during this time.[18]

The Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened patriarchal norms in yet another way: by reinforcing the idea of a woman's place being 'in the home', and this in a country where the concept of women's mobility is already fragile.[19] Restrictions on mobility, whether self-imposed or because of lockdown, aimed ironically at increasing safety, have proved to significantly limit women's ability to protect themselves from dangers within the home.

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[11] Mirza Altamish M. Baig, Sajjad Ali, and Numra A. Tunio, "Domestic Violence amid COVID-19 Pandemic: Pakistan's Perspective," Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health, Vol. 32, Iss. 8 (October 5, 2020): p. 525. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1010539520962965; See Sumbul Mujeeb (a clinical psychologist at Panah, a Karachi-based private shelter). "Interview," November 2020; Also see f.n. 8 (Clinical Observations/Notes).

[12] Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Uthara Soman, "Patriarchy: Theoretical Postulates and Empirical Findings," Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 58, Iss. 2 (2009): p. 253–72. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23620688

[13] Rosalind Rosenberg, Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism, Amazon.com, Revised ed. (Yale University Press, 1983).

[14] Unaiza Niaz and Sehar Hassan, "Culture and Mental Health of Women in South-East Asia," World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), Vol. 5, Iss. 2 (June 1, 2006): p. 118–20. Available at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16946955/

[15] See f.n. 11 (Sumbul Mujeeb Interview); Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).

[16] Victor J. Seidler, "Masculinities, Bodies, and Emotional Life," Men and Masculinities, Vol. 10, Iss. 1 (July 2007): p. 9–21. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/jmma/10/1

[17] See f.n. 11 (Domestic Violence amid COVID-19); See f.n. 11 (Sumbul Mujeeb Interview).

[18] Asha Bedar. "Interview with Roohi Ghani (Senior Psychologist at Rozan, an Islamabad-based NGO working on violence against women and children)," November 2020; See f.n. 8 (Clinical Observations/Notes).

[19] See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); See f.n. 10 (Rozan); Also see Muhammad Adeel, Anthony G. O. Yeh, and Feng Zhang, "Gender Inequality in Mobility and Mode Choice in Pakistan," Transportation, Springer, Vol. 44, Iss. 6 (2017): p. 1519–34. Available at: https://ideas.repec.org/a/kap/transp/v44y2017i6d10.1007_s11116-016-9712-8.html

These restrictions have been blatantly exploited by perpetrators to justify imposing full control over women's movement[20] most visibly in situations where women had some level of engagement outside their homes in pre-Covid-19 times, thereby reversing strides that women may have gradually made in their family relationships.

Curbing women's mobility is a powerful patriarchal tool used by men to exert power,[21] and reports of the growing rates of infection provided them with a ready-made, even moral reason to keep women at home and at the mercy of their husbands, most of whom continued to engage relatively more with the outside world.

Women's capacities to take a break from or escape abuse at home were further constrained by the digital divide and a lack of access to important, accurate information regarding self-protection strategies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) outside the home.[22] Consequently, even when women could have taken calculated exposure risks and had opportunities to move to safer spaces, whether for physical breaks from their perpetrators, to escape a dangerous situation or to seek justice, many chose not to, believing that they would almost certainly expose themselves and their families to the Covid-19 infection. It is worth remembering here that women also undergo deeply gendered psychological conditioning to prioritise the protection and well-being of their families over their own safety.[23] Women with children or elderly parents, therefore, harboured even greater fears, effectively 'choosing' abuse over potential exposure, however minimal its chances.

Women affected by violence during the pandemic have reported how drastically their safe spaces and emotional coping strategies shrank, with even a visit to their parents, neighbours, friends or trips to public spaces such as markets and eating places becoming difficult, if not impossible.[24] For most women affected by domestic violence, this isolation, distance from loved ones and from their support system and confinement within the home have been a source of significant emotional distress, leading to varying degrees of depressive symptomatology, anxiety, trauma and thoughts of/attempts at self-harm and suicide.[25] Women already suffering from mental health issues before the pandemic are even more vulnerable to the effects of limited options, especially those who had worked hard to construct a workable coping system for themselves, now rendered instantly ineffectual by pandemic-related restrictions.

For many women, even home-based options for social breaks and support seeking, such as through the phone and video calls became inaccessible because of the loss of privacy and of their own time or because many do not have access to phones or the internet.[26] Even where they were able to access phones, contact with services such as counselling helplines, legal advice or crisis support was restricted to brief moments; often fraught with the fear of being discovered and triggering more abuse. Many women were forced to develop creative ways of utilising their brief opportunities to make calls or send texts for support, which in itself was a source of stress and anxiety because of the genuine risks involved. Support services report how a range of safety mechanisms and alerts (e.g., words to be used as signals that privacy was compromised during a call) had to be considered and set up to minimise the risks involved in women seeking help.[27]

Women also worried about, and strove to protect their children in violent homes during lockdowns.[28] Research corpus shows that even if they are not direct victims of domestic violence, children who witness domestic violence are affected by it and this effect may be long-term.[29] During the pandemic, children have been witnessing greater, severer and more frequent violence than before, and this exposure has sometimes been the impetus for women to take action of some sort.

When women have considered acting against the violence, such as in cases where the violence reached danger-

[20] See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[21] See f.n. 12 (Uthara Soman).
[22] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Uzma Noorani (Director Panah Shelter, Karachi)," November 2020; Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[23] Stephanie Golden, Slaying the Mermaid: Women and the Culture of Sacrifice (Harmony, 1998).
[24] See f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[25] See f.n. 10 (Rozan); See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); Sabrine Sediri et al., "Women's Mental Health: Acute Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Domestic Violence," Archives of Women's Mental Health, Vol. 23, Iss. 6 (October 17, 2020). Available at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33068161/
[26] See f.n. 10 (Rozan); See f.n. 8 (Clinical Observations/Notes).
[27] See f.n. 18 (Roohi Ghani).
[28] See f.n. 12 (Uthara Soman).
[29] Terra Pingley, "The Impact of Witnessing Domestic Violence on Children: A Systematic Review," Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers, May 1, 2017. Available at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/776/

ous levels or in crisis situations, they have experienced considerable stress in weighing their safety options. The fear of being infected, coupled with significant barriers in seeking help at the time has resulted in many women giving up on, or not being able to act on utilising existing protection mechanisms. Most support services for women around the country, such as shelters, legal aid groups and NGOs, and for a time even essential services such as health clinics and public transport, were significantly scaled down in the initial period.[30] Government shelters shut down their operations completely in the early days as they developed new strategies to adjust to the pandemic. Even now, many services which resumed operations continue to function at diminished capacity, and understandably still require stringent observance of SOPs, screening, etc.[31] For many women, the idea of escaping home in a state of crisis, sometimes with young children, only to face challenges in access to shelter, lengthy procedures and testing (and possible isolation or quarantine) before attaining a sense of safety acted as a deterrent. In many cases, even the ability to escape to their parents' homes was difficult because of the lack of privacy and problems accessing transport during the pandemic. This gave rise to feelings of deep helplessness as women turned to passive coping strategies, such as keeping their distance from their perpetrators as far as possible and making painful efforts to avoid any conflict that could escalate, even if that could only be achieved at the cost of their physical and mental health and wellbeing.[32] The use of self-prescribed or unregulated drugs for sleeping, anxiety and depression rose substantially as women strove to function while tolerating the increased violence that threatened to become yet another 'new normal'.[33]

The Covid-19 pandemic is far from being under control, with cases of Covid-19 and related hospitalisations being on the rise again throughout the country. When the situation does eventually settle, it would be optimistic to assume that the rate of DV and its impact on individuals and society would automatically drop along with it. Unfortunately, many of the patterns created or reinforced during the pandemic can be resistant to change and may persist for some time, especially if they remain unchecked.

The pandemic is likely to have an overall regressive effect on gender equality, and hence enable violence against women to flourish.[34] The socio-economic circumstances created or exacerbated by the pandemic, such as job losses, business failures, educational/career setbacks, etc. have long-term implications and will likely continue to be sources of stress for many families for some time to come, with the economic fall disproportionately affecting women.[35] Women tend to work in more insecure work sectors, and job hunting will be more difficult for them, especially during times when work is scarce. With growing financial uncertainty and anxiety, men too will continue to experience immense pressure, especially if their wives were previously in the workforce but are now unemployed. This can trigger and maintain the cycle of stress-induced conflict at home.

Even if rates of violence at home drop, the psycho-social damage that may already have occurred is not easily reversible. The combination of violence of varying types and severity during the pandemic, long periods of isolation, limited options for support and individual responses such as self-control, helplessness, anxiety and emotional distress have implications for women's (and their children's) long-term mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.[36] Data from research on the psycho-social consequences of other emergencies, both within and outside Pakistan, indicate that mental and emotional health concerns persist well after the emergency phase has settled.[37] This is because: a) people undergo significant mental adjustments in order to cope with trauma and abuse, some of which become normative coping patterns that are resistant to change; and, b) patriarchal power dynamics are strengthened during times of crisis and emergency, and a re-challenging of power structures is a long and complex process.[38]

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[30] See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[31] See f.n. 22 (Uzma Noorani); Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[32] See f.n. 8. (Advocacy brief); Also see f.n. 10 (Rozan).
[33] See f.n. 8 (Clinical Observations/Notes).
[34] Carmen de Paz et al., "Gender Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Washington, DC: World Bank, April 16, 2020). Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33622
[35] Anu Madgavkar et al., "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects," McKinsey & Company, July 15, 2020. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects
[36] Asha Bedar, "Children's Exposed to Interparental Violence in Pakistan: Experiences, Perceptions and Responses" ((Unpublished) Doctoral Dissertation, 2004).
[37] See f.n. 22 (Uzma Noorani).
[38] PACTT: Pakistan–Aberdeen Collaborative Trauma Team* et al., "The Psychological and Psychosocial Impact of the Pakistan Kashmir Earthquake after 8 Months: A Preliminary Evaluation by PACTT," International Psychiatry: Bulletin of the Board of International Affairs of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Vol. 5, Iss. 2 (April 1, 2008): p. 43–46. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322377266_The_psychological_and_psychosocial_impact_of_the_Pakistan_Kashmir_earthquake_after_8_months_a_preliminary_evaluation_by_PACTT

At an individual level, the extent of the long-term impact may vary, depending on a number of moderating and mediating factors in women's lives. Those in situations where the abuse has been relatively less severe and less frequent, where the pre-Covid-19 marital relationship was relatively stable, where women generally have effective coping systems and strong supports and where they have other avenues of attaining self-worth (such as productive jobs, focus on children, etc), psycho-social outcomes are likely to be better once the space and power dynamic have been reset, and the major pressures and stressors (i.e., lockdown and Covid-19) are removed.

At a societal level, much more complex and sustained efforts are needed to both undo and improve for the future gender relations, vulnerabilities, and power dynamics that have been normalised over so many months during the pandemic. If left entirely to the management of Covid-19, these socio-political dynamics will continue and gain further strength in the post-Covid-19 world for some time to come, and the progress made in terms of equality, whether in the individual or the societal domain could potentially go into reverse.[39] It is therefore critical to re-assess the current situation and put in strong, informed measures to control both the predicted rise in domestic violence in the upcoming wave and its incidence, as well as root causes in the post-Covid-19 world.

The government will need to move beyond tokenistic calls for protection and helpline numbers to urgently make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for Covid-19.[40] This includes collecting data at all levels and from various sources – helplines, NGOs, police, shelters, health/mental health professionals, courts, research institutes, etc., to develop a fair estimate of the extent of domestic violence occurring during the pandemic. This data must then inform specific protection mechanisms aimed at both prevention and redressal. Data and support mechanisms can only be effective if they are developed in consultation with grassroots organisations and workers, who may be the first points of contact or provide support to women.

It is therefore also important that these organisations are supported through funding and resources to enable them to continue to carry out their roles in the current situation and beyond. SOPs for all services working with survivors of domestic violence under normal and emergency situations are essential for their functioning and for survivors in vulnerable situations to ease women's access under normal times and crises and to create faith. This includes the police, shelters, helplines, telehealth, online counselling services, etc. Building staff capacity to both work with clients sensitively and to use technology (e.g., for remote access) must be invested in. Creating solutions for improving women's access through phones and safe transport also begs consideration and reform, especially for women with special vulnerabilities, such as those with disabilities, those living in remote areas, minority groups, etc.

Most importantly, however, what needs focus is a concerted effort to challenge the power structures that give rise to, enable and trigger violence against women in all its forms. Covid-19 did not create domestic violence – its root causes and enablers are ever-present, but emergencies do aggravate existing power imbalances and vulnerabilities, which in Pakistan's patriarchal social structure are part of every aspect of life. Unless these inequalities are addressed through serious assessment, changes and reform at every level – societal attitudes developing early in life, the media, educational institutions, the law, protection mechanisms (police, hospitals, shelters and so on), the justice system, etc., emergency situations will continue to further threaten the safety and wellbeing of women individually and collectively.

While domestic violence is not unique to Covid-19, lockdowns – whether complete or partial – did exacerbate pre-existing conflict, especially with perpetrators and victims locked in together. Honour codes and patriarchal norms continued to manifest themselves in crimes committed against women during the pandemic too. Reportedly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a woman was killed on the pretext of 'honour'. To cover up the crime, the family wrapped her in a shroud and buried her saying she had died of Covid-19, so no one would inquire further.[41] In the initial days of the lockdown, burials of those who passed away due to Covid-19 were restricted, so this was a convenient excuse to evade suspicion. In a separate incident, also in KP, disturbed by children playing outdoors and making a noise, their uncle fired shots which resulted in the death of his young niece.

[39] Deepa Mahajan et al., "Don't Let the Pandemic Set Back Gender Equality," Harvard Business Review, September 16, 2020. Available at: https://hbr.org/2020/09/dont-let-the-pandemic-set-back-gender-equality
[40] See f.n. 1 (Shadow Pandemic); Also see f.n. 22 (Uzma Noorani).
[41] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Rukhshanda Naz," n.d.

The question activists asked was; "*why just the niece?*" Patriarchal norms demand not just that children should be seen and not heard, but more so if it is a girl child. Women are expected to manage the noise and children when the men come home, but during the pandemic, they were mostly home. Their being home all the time posed an additional challenge due to the mounting burden of expectations. Whether working at home or those who work outside, Covid-19 made it doubly hard for women.

Much domestic strife and threat of violence faced by women is linked to control over a woman's choice and agency. Activists interviewed across the country describe situations in which, despite the pandemic, women were forced to flee their homes. In Quetta, a man wanted to remarry and was abusive towards his wife.[42] A late adolescent girl who wanted to pursue a relationship with a boy of her choice fled her house as her family did not permit it and there was a threat of violence. In KP, a woman in her 70s sought refuge in an Edhi home because her adult children were preventing her from remarrying after the death of her husband. In Lahore, a husband and wife fought over the purchase of sanitary napkins.[43]

Women's needs were secondary to those of the family. If cooking oil was required for the house and a woman needed sanitary pads, the family's collective needs and benefits were prioritised over the individual need of the woman. Male members prevented spouses from visiting their family or threatened to remarry. Typically, domestic violence is conceived as violence perpetrated by a male spouse, but there were reports of violence perpetrated by adult offspring against parents, by parents against young children or even male siblings against female siblings.[44] There were incidents where women also reacted, and children faced the brunt. Reporting these cases to the police is even more complex. It's easier to file petitions in the case of spouses, but there is stigma and other concerns when the perpetrator is a father or a brother, and the police responds differently to such cases. In terms of data, the only available information is what is reported in the media, compiled at the women's police cell or then phone calls made directly to activists. In upper Sindh, after the Aurat March, several cases of violence were reported.

Usually, till the time an incident does not take on a criminal dimension, it does not get reported in the media, to the police or gets spoken about. But during the pandemic, women did reach out repeatedly and spoke to activists they were in touch with, about brothers and other male members of the family causing psychological distress due to verbal abuse. Often women do not step outside their homes or get a First Information Report (FIR) registered unless in extremely physically violent situations. During the pandemic, psychological violence was also reported, whereas typically only physical violence is perceived to be domestic violence.[45] What emerged during the pandemic was the intensification and reporting of psychological distress. During this time, alternative coping mechanisms were not available either to ease the pressure, to speak to others in their family and neighbouring households.

On April 3, 2020, the Women Action Forum (WAF) Karachi Chapter wrote a letter to the Chief Minister of Sindh[46] drawing his attention to the increased risk faced by domestic violence victims during the Covid-19 lockdown. A series of recommendations were made which included designating operations for the protection of women and children as essential services; ensuring complaint cells run by the women's department were made functional; the police helpline remained responsive to complaints of domestic violence; mass awareness campaigns to be run to ensure victims/survivors knew who and where to reach out; police to go to a person's home if a distress call is made since mobility was hampered by lockdown; shelters and safe homes to continue to take in victims/survivors while maintaining protocols; temporary shelters be set up.

[42] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Huma Fouladi," n.d.
[43] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Ayra Inderyas," n.d.
[44] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Amar Sindhu," n.d.
[45] See f.n. 44; Editors Note. Succinctly, when victims of domestic violence reported such matters to the police, no criminal case is registered against their perpetrator due to the non-recognition of psychological violence and mental torture as a criminal offence under general law, namely, the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860. Although, after the promulgation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013 ('the Act of 2013') and the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 ('Act of 2016'), 'Psychological Abuse' is recognised as domestic violence under Section 5(f) of the Act of 2013 and Provisio (2) of Section 2(R) of the Act of 2016, however, the Provincial Governments in both provinces have miserably failed to enforce the aforementioned Acts in letter and spirit, in part due to non-issuance of notification as envisaged under the aforementioned Acts. Due to this, even though psychological violence is an offence on the books, the investigating agencies do not view it as such.
[46] Women's Action Forum's letter to Chief Minister, Sindh, bearing letter dated 02.04.2020. Available at: https://twitter.com/WAFKarachi/status/1245930683631128576?s=20

In interviews conducted with activists who deal with cases of VAW across the country, it was apparent that existing services were inadequate to begin with. Covid-19 posed an additional challenge. Locked in with perpetrators, with a diminished ability to seek help outside the home or even communicate, was the immediate challenge.[47] Another was that the few services in existence were not operational during the early days of the lockdown. Ministries and departments running services such as helplines remained inaccessible as they were not categorised as essential services. Many shelters required Covid-19 tests, which was not possible in the time frame within which the women required shelter. During the early days of the lockdown when testing facilities were not available to those who did not have symptoms, their distress increased as shelter was a dire need. Mobility was impaired since public transport and ride-hailing apps were not operational, and visits to courts, hospitals or testing facilities meant further exposure.

It was observed that women did seek divorce and khula during the lockdown and the pandemic due to the intensification of violence.[48] However, during the lockdown, courts suspended regular cause lists and were only hearing urgent cases such as bail. While protection orders were granted, women seeking maintenance, custody or even divorce, faced additional delays in the hearing of these cases.[49] Urgent cases were entertained but divorce and khula[50] cases did not qualify as urgent.

For a woman caught in a domestically volatile situation, a divorce or khula is urgent for her, but the nature of the suit was such that it was not categorised as an urgent matter. Maintenance, custody, divorce and khula cases have a bearing on the day-to-day lives of women - and children if any. In some instances these can be domestically volatile or violent situations and the ability to leave, escape or find alternatives is imperative.

Mandatory appearances of the accused and witnesses were dispensed with. In one case filed during the lockdown, the other party did not appear for days, but the court did not issue a warrant.[51] Appearance of the other party was not enforced due to the pandemic, resulting in several adjournments and delays in the cases that were heard. Phone and video hearings were not instituted.[52]

Initially due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown and then, on account of the summer vacations, it was not until August 2020 that courts resumed regular functions. Once the lockdown lifted, services became operational once again. Given the initial experience, some measures were taken, such as allocating rooms where those who tested positive could isolate. Government and private testing facilities also increased over the months.

Sindh enacted the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in 2013[53] and Balochistan in 2014.[54] In Punjab, the Protection of Women Against Violence Act[55] got promulgated in 2016, however, it has only been implemented in Multan.[56] In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the absence of a domestic violence law, sections of the Pakistan Penal Code were invoked to deal with DV situations. It wasn't until January 2021 that a domestic violence bill was passed by the KP Assembly and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence against Women

[47] Soch, "Domestic Violence and Covid-19," May 4, 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SochVideos/videos/domestic-violence-and-covid-19/233860461174610/

[48] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Imaan Mazari," n.d.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Editors Note. In the wake of Covid, to curtail the spread of Covid-19, various Circulars were issued by the honourable High Courts. In the circulars, it was directed that cases of urgent nature are to be entertained by the honourable High Courts. For instance, see Circular bearing Circular No. GAZ/XII.Z.14(iii) dated 30.04.2021 duly published by the High Court of Sindh wherein it was declared that the following constitute urgent matters; Bail Matters; Habeas Corpus and other detention matters; Injunction/Stay matters involving imminent threat of irreparable loss; Criminal Appeals where the convict was still confined in imprisonment. Further, directions were issued to the District, as well as the Court of Sessions to treat the aforementioned as urgent matter, in addition to, Revision Petitions, Cases at final arguments, and SMAs involving the passing of immediate orders or Family/Guardian matters requiring adjudication on interim maintenance/meeting of minors while strictly adhering to Covid-19 SOPs.

[51] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Sara Malkani," n.d.

[52] Sara Malkani, "The Shadow Pandemic," DAWN News, April 27, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1552551/the-shadow-pandemic

[53] Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013. Available at: http://www.pas.gov.pk/uploads/acts/Sindh%20Act%20No.XX%20of%202013.pdf

[54] Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2014. Available at: http://pabalochistan.gov.pk/pab/pab/tables/alldocuments/actdocx/2018-10-23%2014:37:37act072014.pdf

[55] Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016. Available at: http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2634.html

[56] Editors Note. It is pertinent to mention here that as per the para-wise comments submitted by the Law & Parliamentary Affairs Department, Government of Punjab in *Prof. M. Ibrahim Khan and another etc v. Province of Punjab etc,* Shariat Petition No. 03/I of 2016, the first, and unfortunately, Multan is the only district in the entire province of Punjab where the Act of 2016 is being implemented due to notification as envisaged under Section 1(3) of the Act not being issued by the Provincial Government in other cities. This has led to a habeas corpus being converted into a constitutional petition by the Lahore High Court, Lahore in case bearing title *Mst. Shanam Dil Muhammad v. District Police Officer etc,* W.P. No. 48196-J/2021. Whether the Lahore High Court will follow the precedent set by the High Court of Sindh in *Mst. Hina v. Province of Sindh through Secretary Home Department Sindh at Karachi,* PLD 2019 KAR 363 remains to be seen.

(Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021 came into force. For Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), a bill was passed in the Senate but has not been enacted yet.

However, while laws are enacted, their implementation often falls short, especially with respect to mechanisms required to be set up under them. In May 2019, the High Court of Sindh issued a series of directions to the government and related departments regarding the implementation of domestic violence law and the mechanisms under it. In the case of *Mst. Hina v. Province of Sindh,* the Court's directed the government to provide: "rescue and assistance aggrieved (as defined in the Act)...in every single district, committees are required to be formulated hence a mechanism of ambulance/rescue service shall be provided with a toll-free number accessible to everyone".[57] The Order further said that the Protection Committee's objective could not be achieved unless a special task force was created "with special training in that field to deal with women, children and destitute persons". The Court issued directions to fill the posts of psychologist and protection officers, as required under the Act, within three months. Until November 2020, the posts for protection officers were still vacant. Even those appointed did not have a staff, an office, or a budget.[58]

A series of recommendations were made to the court by WAF Karachi, which included appointing special prosecutors, raising awareness through media and social media campaigns, role and responsibilities of different departments by clearly outlined, coordination and communication mechanism be strengthened, list of functioning shelter homes and safe houses to be put up in relevant centres such as hospitals, police stations and on government websites, provincial commissions be given the mandate to assist victims, one stop centred be piloted in major cities and an impact assessment be undertaken to assess their effectiveness and functioning crisis centred be maintained to provide temporary shelter for women in need.

A second Order by the same Court proposed setting up one-stop centres in different districts.[59] The government still has to identify buildings in each district. Identifying staff and facilities has not taken place. Where women's police stations exist, the condition of the stations is such that they require an uplift whereas in other districts, women's police stations don't exist at all and need to be set up.

There is also a tendency to create phone applications (Apps) as a solution for women or to combat violence against women without recognising some of the ground realities: many women when in possession of a phone are accused of immoral conduct or illicit relations with others, which also leads to 'honour' crimes against them.[60] Apps are accessible only to women in urban areas and, that too to a limited section of the society. They are not available to someone who cannot speak or write in English or Urdu and does not have a phone. Most applications are internet based, whereas many rural areas do not have access to internet services or are too expensive.

Similarly, although helplines are set up, survivors do not always have the means of accessing these helplines as they do not have access to mobile phones. Generally, written complaints are required in order for the police to act, especially to recover someone from their home. Women are hesitant to put something in writing due to the fear it may be used against them. At other times, women do not have the ability to file a written complaint and are trapped in the home with no way to communicate with anybody. Delays in reaching them put them at risk of life-threatening situations. Once removed from the house, there are various stages through which women require assistance, from the police station to the hospital where they undergo medico-legal examination, and from there to the court before they are placed in a shelter or place of choice.

There need to be people on the ground to assist survivors through these stages at the district level. Getting out is the first step but often there is no one to help pursue legal cases or provide timely legal aid and assistance, which is crucial. When a woman goes to register an FIR against someone who is powerful, unless someone supports her, the FIR is not registered. Even under ordinary circumstances, access to a shelter or assistance and navigating legal hurdles are impediments.[61]

[57] *Mst. Hina v. Province of Sindh through Secretary Home Department, Sindh at Karachi,* PLD 2019 KAR 363.
[58] See f.n. 51 (Sara Malkani).
[59] Ibid.
[60] See f.n. 41 (Rukhshanda Naz).
[61] Farieha Aziz, "Dealing with VAW," The News, July 27, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/678241-

Walking with the victim is necessary. An interlinked system is required, where you make one call, and can be directed to a facility to get a test and medico-legal examination, assistance with the police, legal aid and referral and transport to the facility and a shelter if necessary.

Shelters only solve the issue temporarily. Going to a shelter home is also taboo for many due to the stigma attached. There is often fear about what happens at these facilities. Moreover, women's mobility and ability to communicate with others outside the shelter is mostly restricted. There have been instances in which a male child over a particular age has not been permitted to stay with the mother. There is a lack of family quarters or spaces where families can be housed instead of separated. The fear of separation prevented one family from seeking relief from a domestically violent situation for weeks.[62] There is also no effective provision for what is to follow when the immediate situation is dealt with. It is becoming common for working women to access shelters in order to escape violent situations, however, while shelters provide the much needed legal aid to residents who have ongoing cases, not only do they offer little or no help to those in the former category, they hinder their ability to e.g. attend university, earn a livelihood or look for employment opportunities to achieve financial stability and independence. Further, children are also unable to attend school unless there is provision for receiving instruction provided by the shelter.

Most shelters do not permit women to retain their mobile phones, so not only is mobility restricted but so is communication with support networks that may exist outside and are essential for emotional and psychological well-being, as well as a necessary tool for work. They also do not have many options for where to go from the shelter. Safe, low-cost housing options for single women or single women with families is a challenge. Even those who are not financially independent and not faced with domestic violence face discrimination and bias when they try to find accommodation, as landlords do not want to rent their spaces to single women. Safety with freedom, dignity, and quality of life within the shelters and outside shelters is necessary too.

With no long-term mechanism for where to keep women in need of shelter and how to pursue such cases, there are instances in which even though a girl or woman manages to escape a violent situation, she gets caught in a similar or worse situation again. In Sanghar, a girl was declared as *Kari*. She was kept in the Dar-ul-Aman in Hyderabad. The father came to take her away saying the issue had been resolved but the girl was later killed by her brother. No one was ready to bury the girl except the father. This is one of three cases in lower Sindh.[63] How do you protect women from murderers in their own home? Activists believe the role of the judiciary is crucial because the kind of judgements issued to protect and secure a girl/woman's life matter. Critical for this is lower judiciary reform, both in terms of gender sensitisation and understanding of what the magistrate or judge is empowered to do in such cases.

Vide Order dated 14.02.2019, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar of the High Court of Sindh opined:

> …normally the victims of 'domestic violence' do not find any immediate reliefs but remain dependant upon others (not morally and legally obliged to maintain) or in shelter house (s) therefore, legislatures did address such situation. One of the aims of the Act is also to ensure immediate interim relief to an aggrieved from being dispossessed / removed from house hold but also :
>
> a) compensation to the aggrieved person for suffering as a consequence of economic abuse to be determined by the court;
>
> b) loss of earning;
>
> c) medical expense;
>
> d) the loss caused due to the destruction, damage or removal of any property from the control of the aggrieved person; and
>
> e) the maintenance for the aggrieved person as well her children, if any, including an order under or in addition to an order of maintenance under family laws.

[62] Asha Bedar and Farieha Aziz. "Interview with Maham Ali," n.d.
[63] See f.n. 44 (Amar Sindhu).

couple with direction to respondent to:

pay monetary relief to the person aggrieved within the period specified, as directed in accordance with law.

Therefore, the Magisterial Court (s), the law hopes, shall feel courageous in dealing with such situation (s) by passing interim order (s) but on being satisfied of *prima facie* substance.[64]

While the state most certainly has a responsibility, law and formal mechanisms alone do not offer a solution.[65] Many activists point out the need for community intervention and community-based mechanisms for survivors. Conversations with medico-legal officers and doctors reveal women do step out to seek help, including medical help.[66] Medical officers disclose that usually it is a woman's mother who accompanies them for check-ups but they are also witnessing women from their neighbourhoods bring them in. Even where a woman does not directly report an incident herself, others in the neighbourhood report what they witness and ask others to intervene. Through the KP Ombudsperson's office, SOPs for aid workers were devised in collaboration with Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), so that when aid workers stepped out into communities, they also inquired whether there was any violence and harassment. More can be achieved at the district level for service delivery through coordination and collaborations with organisations such as National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and PDMA, whose mandate is to deal with disaster relief and also the pandemic.

In the absence of adequate functioning mechanisms in general, Covid-19 presents additional challenges. But the way to get around these challenges is by establishing what is required under given laws, strengthening existing facilities, and ensuring there is coordination among them. Instead of shutting down completely or reducing services, mitigation measures will need to be in place for the long term. Recommendations made by lawyers and activists include:

- Strengthening civil defence institutions to ensure service delivery at the district level;
- Public and private partnerships are required;
- Spare rooms that serve as spaces to quarantine will need to become a permanent feature in shelters etc. This was done at the *Mera Ghar,* so no one is refused shelter when they require it.[67] Testing by liaising with government facilities, as was witnessed in Hyderabad, is also something to sustain;[68]
- Courts will need to switch to phone and video hearings and develop guidelines around them. Requests for a protection order should be made online and a court should issue an order on an ex parte basis. Family courts should not suspend hearings altogether, they should have an option for families to appear via video conferencing, similarly for maintenance. In custody cases in Karachi, interim orders have been passed based on facts presented so things are not completely left in limbo;[69]

[64] *Mst. Haseen Bano v. Province of Sindh & others,* CPNo.S-277 of 2019 & *Mst. Rehmat-ul-Azeem v. Province of Sindh,* CPNo.S-258 of 2019, Consolidated Order dated. 14.02.2019. The relevant excerpt is reproduced at p. 6 of *Mst. Afsheen v. Province of Sindh,* CPNo.S-2662 of 2018. Available at: https://districtcourtseast.gos.pk/pdfs/1113.pdf

[65] Sara Malkani, "Restorative Justice," DAWN News, November 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1590293/restorative-justice

[66] See f.n. 44 (Amar Sindhu).

[67] See f.n. 41 (Rukhshanda Naz).

[68] See f.n. 44 (Amar Sindhu).

[69] Editors Note. There is reluctance to proceed with virtual hearings, sometimes due to a lack of infrastructure available in courtrooms, however, Courts do have the authority to adjudicate on matters via modern devices. There have been precedents in the past, especially in the province of Punjab, where constitutional courts have directed trial courts to record the statement of parties via video link while strictly adhering to the guidelines laid down in *Munawar Hussain v. The State,* 2020 P.Cr.L.J 1184 LAH. Similarly, the Peshawar High Court in *Muhammad Israr v. The State and another,* PLD 2021 Pesh 105 formulated Protocol/ Guidelines for conducting proceedings and directed that such guidelines shall be observed by the Trial Courts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Generally, the courts do not suo moto direct depositions to be recorded via video or audio link, as such, an application needs to be moved by the prosecution before the trial court. Only after the aforementioned application is accepted will the court allow for the recording of evidence via modern devices. Even prior to *Munawar Hussain* (Supra) and *Muhammad Israr* (Supra), the Supreme Court of Pakistan in *Salman Akram Raja and another v. Government of Punjab through Chief Secretary and others,* 2013 SCMR 203, directed that, in appropriate cases, evidence of rape victims should be recorded through video conferencing so that the victims, particularly the juvenile, may not have to come to the Court. More recently, the Lahore High Court through Letter bearing Letter No. 2045/MIT/HC/2017 dated 27.01.2017 directed all Trial Courts in Punjab to record evidence of magistrates who conduct identification parades through modern devices. However, the use of modern devices while recording testimonies of witnesses is restrained to witnesses or other persons connected with the investigation, prosecution and trial of certain criminal proceedings relating to the offence of terrorism, sexual offence or any other serious offence. Be that as it may, the Islamabad High Court was the first to allow virtual hearings during the pandemic in all urgent case. The Apex Court did the same and at the time of writing is still adjudicating cases via video links in Supreme Court registry branches.

- Follow-ups and rehabilitative measures are required to monitor the progress of cases: what happens once the women get out of the home, make it to a shelter and even win a case. What happens to their lives after? Women's ministries, departments and commissions can play a role in this;

- Union councils should have a neighbourhood monitoring role.[70] Local governments do not exist any more effectively. A woman who does not want to go to a *thana,* can go to her councillor to speak to her or to a village council or neighbourhood counsel that would participate in reconciliation and would monitor situations. Community referral programmes can be developed by liaising with community leaders;

- The state must facilitate access to counselling as the effects of DV are long-term. In every district, there should be a place where psychological counselling is accessible for women who require it; and,

- There needs to be better information sharing and data collection to map patterns;

- There needs to be greater awareness of the laws that are passed for protection. Police needs to be sen sitised. There need to be more female prosecutors and judges and within the police, judiciary and soci ety in general, there needs to be an understanding of domestic violence, that does not include just physical violence.

While the pandemic and resultant restrictions presented new challenges, existing infrastructure and services proved to be inadequate. These need to be streamlined by learning lessons from situations that emerged dur-ing the pandemic and also ensuring that on a regular basis, services are available to those who require help by catering to what they require rather than imposing on them abstract experiments of what would alleviate their suffering. There are already various recommendations in the field, what remains is for these to be effectively acted upon, implemented and assessed.

[70] See f.n. 41 (Rukhshanda Naz).

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YEAR 1 OF THE PANDEMIC – WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Ume Laila Azhar

ABSTRACT

The essay, Year 1 of the Pandemic – Women in the Informal Economy discusses the impact of Covid-19 on women home-based workers and the feminisation of poverty in global and local contexts. The writer identifies the extractive principles of the neoliberal world order and global and local low prioritization of the rights of women in the informal economy and assesses the reasons for the failure of government relief projects such as Ehsaas as a face saving instead of an efficient and fully functional intervention. Citing lack of reliable data on women as an indicator of the government's indifference to the needs of the country's most vulnerable majority, she bases her analysis on interviews with women home-based workers in Karachi and Lahore to assess the impact of lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, the disruption of children's education and women's enhanced vulnerability to economic and domestic violence as drivers of the poverty cycle. Recommendations that address immediate Covid-19 induced needs include updating Ehsaas lists, provision of economic opportunities to informal sector workers and interest free loans and provision of social and legal protection under the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act, 2018 including training sessions for prevention of virus spread.

BACKGROUND

Ume Laila Azhar has a Master's in Applied Psychology from Government College University, Lahore (GCU). Known for her work with women in the informal economy, she is the Executive Director of HomeNet Pakistan, a non-government organisation for the rights of home-based workers. Azhar worked single-mindedly for the passage of the Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019. She has written extensively on women's labour rights and her articles including Home Bound, which was carried by The News International, have been published in The News on Sunday, Bol News and The Daily Times.

Internationally, under globalisation, neoliberalism and cross-border and rural-urban migrations, informal work has flourished and expanded since the 1970s. In the process, it has appeared in new guises leading to an unprecedented increase of women in paid employment. However, as globally in labour markets, women are concentrated in lower quality, irregular and informal employment, the multinational trend to relocate, in some instances many times, in search of the cheapest possible labour, has made women in informal economies the 'weakest links in the global value chain'. In the main, women in the informal sector work at lower pay for longer work hours with irregular access to benefits, no social protections and job security. As stated by Sylvia Chant and Carolyn Pedwell, in their paper "Women, gender and the informal economy: An assessment of International Labour Organisation (ILO) research and suggested ways forward", for women the increase in global integration and competition has fuelled a "race to the bottom".[1]

COVID-19 – THE FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

Women workers from the Global South, as well as female migrants from a variety of international settings, generally fare worse than their male counterparts because of a highly gendered and exploitative system. This is borne out by the fact that in Pakistan, where the informal sector contributes to over 70% of the national economy, women who make up the majority of this workforce end up in precarious employment situations. Concentrated in 'invisible areas' that include, but are not limited to domestic labour, piece-rate home-based work, and assistance with small family business units, women in the informal economy work long hours with next to little or no remuneration and non-existent access to benefits and social security protections.[2] Lacking the ability to organise and ensure that international labour standards and human rights are enforced, they have no recourse to redress.[3]

Covid-19 turned 2020 into a year of loss and gloom, particularly for those in the informal sector. As governments across the world imposed lockdowns to prevent the spread of infection, life became more insecure for self-employed female home-based workers (HBWs) and daily wagers (DW) who were left without jobs and incomes. In Punjab and Sindh, where the lockdowns were absolute or more stringently observed, they were

[1] Sylvia Chant and Carolyn Pedwell, "Empower Women - Women, Gender and the Informal Economy: An Assessment of ILO Research and Suggested Ways Forward," International Labour Organization, 2008. Available at: https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/resources/documents/2014/7/women-gender-and-the-informal-economy--an-assessment-of-ilo-research-and-suggested-ways-forward?lang=en

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

not only unable to meet clients or customers but also found it difficult to step outside their homes for essentials like food.[4]

The pandemic, which made an already bad situation worse, impacted their lives and livelihoods in multiple ways. Laid off from work because of periodic lockdowns, Covid Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and fear of infection spread, and unable to meet their daily needs, the millions of Pakistani women who do piecework for national and international brands were severely impacted.[5] Many Home-based Workers, or homeworkers as they are often called, belong to self-help groups or cooperatives that depend on steady orders from brands and social enterprises. With no orders coming in, they were unable to make ends meet. With non-essential shutdowns forcing them to stay at home, not only did they not receive pay for the period they were furloughed, many were laid off permanently, and when these sectors began to open up after the relaxation of Covid SOPs, many were compelled to join at lower salaries and work fewer hours. Others had to switch to less desirable jobs with lower pay.

HBWs, who were subcontracted by national and international supply chains, reported that not only were their regular orders not renewed for weeks even months after the onset of Covid-19, they also did not get any new ones. Further, as much of the raw material these workers rely on comes from different countries including China, pieceworkers were unable to get supplies early on in the global crisis or if they did, had to pay more for inputs. Others had been unable to stock raw materials due to lack of ready cash or storage space before the lockdowns began. These factors affected those who produce garments as well as those who assemble electronics, games and other products and prevented them from using this time in isolation to stockpile products they could sell once the lockdown was over.[6]

Despite trying to cut down expenditures as much as possible, many households had to borrow quite heavily over the Covid-19 affected months. It is envisaged that not only will this borrowing impact on future consumption patterns, with the disruption of cash flow, their working capital will also be eaten up. This will seriously impact the survival rate of their micro-businesses, as the debt taken by many entrepreneurs has compromised and directly impacted their ability to restart and sustain their businesses.[7]

Speaking about their experiences, HBWs from Karachi inform that despite the enactment of the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act, 2018 (HBWs Law) by the Sindh government including the steps taken by it for the facilitation of daily wagers, women homeworkers were still not fully covered or able to avail given social services.[8] They further stated that these women lacked the information needed to keep their work going while maintaining their safety because as members of large families living in small houses, staying at home and sharing space with jobless men became a risk.[9]

Covid-19 restrictions on public transport also impacted both HBWs and domestic workers (DWs).[10] The former because they could not commute to markets to purchase raw materials and/or deliver their products to retailers, and the latter because they could not get to their workplaces.

The number of private sector employers who were given support and salaries during peak Covid-19 periods and resultant work breaks was minimal. For the most part, domestic workers who were stopped from entering homes that are their workplaces[11] due to fear of infection, lost out on jobs and wages: "We barely have enough for ourselves" say the employers.

[4] "Challenges for Women Home Based Workers of Karachi," HomeNet Pakistan (HNP), May 29, 2020. Available at: https://homenetpakistan.org/homenet-pakistan/
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ume L. Azhar, "Women and the Informal Economy: Home-Based Workers Most Neglected in Dealing with Coronavirus Pandemic," *The News on Sunday (TNS),* May 20, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/659184-women-and-the-informal-economy; Also see Faisal Bari, "Women in the Informal Sector," *DAWN News,* September 18, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1580309; Also see Ume L Azhar and Aisha Mughal, "Home Bound!," *The News,* June 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/magazine/you/666293-home-bound
[7] See f.n. 6 (Faisal Bari).
[8] See f.n. 6 (Women and the Informal Economy).
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

HEALTH CONCERNS OF THE WORKING POOR

Financial precarity was just one of the problems faced by daily wagers, HBWs and their families during the pandemic. Poverty, low access to health services and nutrition combined with the dynamics of their work and living conditions enhanced their vulnerability to Covid-19. It is difficult to maintain physical distance in overcrowded low-income settlements and congested urban neighbourhoods. The fact that little information was available to the general public on the nature and mechanism of virus spread and how to avoid it, made matters worse, particularly for low-income sections of society where people lacked basic amenities such as clean water, soap and sanitisers for the removal of infectious bacteria, including essential protective gear for frontline workers such as those engaged in sanitation and waste management in hospitals and high-risk situations. This was borne out by the experience of MBOs (Membership-based Organisations), who stated they were expected to provide themselves with protective gear in this time of price-gouging inflation, income loss and difficulties in availing government run income support schemes. They also reported that in this regard, women were the hardest hit, because as a rule, they do not own digital bank accounts and/or cell phones for online money transfers.[12]

Lack of scheme specific data has been cited as a major reason why Ehsaas, the government programme for financial relief for needy populations, has not been able to reach large sections of the target populations. Other reasons are procedural, such as lack of Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) registration and long waiting hours at Ehsaas offices.[13]

HBWs claimed that none of them have been provided with any health facilities. While the price of masks inflated as virus cases increased, they were not covered by any social protection scheme, despite the enactment of the HBWs Law and the steps taken by the Sindh government in this regard. Along with financial insecurity and other pressures, HBWs were finding it hard to keep their work going and maintain safety. These factors made it difficult if not impossible for them to buy and/or stock essential basic need items such as food, leave alone the ability to maintain Covid SOPs or buy protective gear. The pressures and stress generated by this situation resulted in emotional and psychological health challenges, difficulties in childcare and enhanced their vulnerability not only to Covid-19 but to other illnesses as well.[14]

DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Apart from the adverse effect of the pandemic on the economy, women reported an increase in both domestic responsibilities and incidents of abuse and violence, particularly at the hands of spouses and family members. Traditionally seen as the women's preserve, responsibility for household chores and care work for children and the elderly falls on women. Alongside financial pressures and related stress, by reducing women's ability to leave their homes or search for work opportunities, Covid-19 enhanced their vulnerability to multiple forms of domestic abuse and violence.

An IDEAS-Asia Foundation Research on the impact of Covid-19 on women in selected sectors of the informal economy corroborates the link between lockdown measures and increased domestic violence. The findings of a phone based survey with 1,100 women comprising home-based workers, women in domestic service, salons, beauticians, agricultural workers, teachers and micro-enterprise owners show that the impact of the pandemic was beginning to be felt even before the formal lockdowns, as news of the pandemic slowed down the demand for many services.[15]

[12] "COVID-19 Crisis a Global Picture of Sudden Impact and Long-Term Risk" (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), 2020). Available at: https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Informal%20Workers%20in%20the%20COVID-19%20Crisis_WIEGO_July_2020;pdf; "The Gendered Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Informal Workers," Ebrary, n.d. Available at: https://ebrary.net/167504/economics/gendered_impact_covid_pandemic_informal_workers

[13] See f.n. 4 (Challenges for Women Home Based Workers of Karachi).

[14] See f.n. 6 (Faisal Bari).

[15] Ibid.

Not only did lockdowns cause significant disruption and/or closure of businesses and income-generating opportunities, but in the aftermath of Covid-19 restrictions, businesses were slow to return to normal, resulting in fewer job openings and a decrease in the number of employees needed. Consequently, laid off labour, particularly those with little or no savings, could only smooth out income fluctuations by cutting expenditures and/or borrowing. Their desperation is evidenced by the fact that despite limited borrowing options, many women reported borrowing the maximum amount possible but were still unable to pay utility bills and/or make rental payments and had to cut back on education and health expenses.[16]

An increase in domestic violence was among the major and more disturbing outcomes of the combined impact of financial stress and the 'stay-at-home' measures imposed by Covid-19 SOPs. Many city-based women reported that these measures led to increased domestic responsibilities, ranging from household chores to looking after their offspring and/or elders.[17] Government SOPs and other measures for the prevention of Covid-19 spread were suffocating at times, as they reduced the women's ability to leave their small squatter slum houses for work and other forms of social interaction.

Concerns from various segments of society about the increase in rates of domestic violence, and its post-pandemic implications rose. Pakistani households are numerically large as they are not limited to the nuclear family but include other dependents such as elderly parents, siblings etc. Most women reported having six to seven people in their households besides their immediate family. Due to decreased income and financial hardships, inability to leave the house, a lack of access to support mechanisms, and being cooped up in confined spaces, tensions arose, tempers were frayed and women, the elderly, and children became vulnerable to family member, especially spousal violence. In this regard, strong policy responses including support systems are desperately needed in this area to curb domestic violence and abuse.[18]

Furthermore, the participants also stated that, due to the factors discussed above, they have not been able to, nor would they have the ability to provide support to their offspring for some time, especially with regard to home-schooling, tuition and/or remote learning (even when available) in the near future. With lack of financial resources, being able to finance the education of their children has become a distant dream for many. Some disclosed, that compared to boys this had a far worse impact on girls.[19]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Ehsaas Programme, which was launched by the Government of Pakistan in March 2019 as a key initiative towards a welfare state"[20] coincided with the onset of the pandemic. Meant to offer relief to "the, extreme poor, orphans, widows, the homeless, the disabled, those who risk medical impoverishment, for the jobless, for poor farmers, for laborers (sic), for the sick and undernourished; for students from low-income backgrounds and for poor women and elderly citizens … (as) a plan … about lifting lagging areas where poverty is higher".[21]

The Ehsaas Programme failed to fulfil its mandate or did so with limited impact. This is borne out by research findings that draw attention to the inherently flawed dynamics of the programme's policy and planning. These findings show that instead of undertaking a survey of proposed target populations viz women, their work and households commensurate with Ehsaas aims, the government relied on the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) lists that had targeted families earning less than PKR. 6000/- per month with a female applicant holding a valid CNIC, including widows and divorced women without male family members and families that include physically or mentally disabled persons.[22] As Ehsaas focused on the very poor and not on low to

[16] Ibid.
[17] Faisal Bari, "Pakistan: Women in the Informal Sector," *Europe Solidaire sans Frontières (ESSF)*, October 18, 2020. Available at: https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article55040
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Editors Note. "Ehsaas Programme," Wikipedia, April 4, 2021. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ehsaas_Programme
[21] Ibid.
[22] Editors Note. "Benazir Income Support Programme," Wikipedia, November 1, 2020. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benazir_Income_Support_Programme

medium-income groups who were the primary beneficiaries under BISP, most of the women working in urban settlements as HBWs and DWs were not registered due to BISP filters.

Survey participants disclosed that no support was offered to them by the government. Some felt that the underlying reason that Ehsaas payments never reached them was that these payments were not meant for them. Others who applied for financial support under the programme failed because they lacked the necessary documents or understanding of Ehsaas procedures to acquire due benefits. It appears that the inability of so many women homeworkers to meet the government's required mandate stood in their way to Ehsaas registration. For instance, many women in the informal economy did not have computerised national identity cards (CNIC) and therefore failed to avail the promised benefits. Others who did not fall within the defined category of daily wage workers were unable to benefit from the programme despite financial destitution. Further, as BISP was absorbed into the Ehsaas programme in 2020, and made part of the newly established Poverty Alleviation and Social Security Division,[23] many women who had benefited in the past under the BISP were not only excluded from the benefits offered under the Ehsaas programme but also lost their BISP allowance.[24]

Clearly, there is disconnect between policymakers and planners and the populations whose needs they are meant to address. Lack of political will, lack of relevant data and information and absence of local government mechanisms, combined with the use of official jargon in Ehsaas guidelines and other documents, have made it almost impossible for the government and its major actors to reach out to women in the informal economy. This is borne out by the experience of women running micro-enterprises, most of whom stated that due to lack of clarity, they were (a) unaware of support projects such as Ehsaas, and (b) did not know if they could be applied to for financial aid.[25] This not only exposes poor planning on part of the provincial government, but also highlights the government's inability to (i) set communication and outreach channels in place to share relevant information and (ii) provide relief on an emergency basis through programmes that could be targeted at specific groups with robust, comprehensive and inclusive social protection policies and schemes for risk mitigation. It appears that apart from face-saving value for the government, such relief programmes are of no use. Not only do they fail to benefit those for whom they have been advertised, as evidenced by HBW comments, but they also serve to increase their sense of helplessness and add to their anxiety and depression.

The May 2020 'Covid 19 Vulnerability Assessment' paper by the Accountability & Inclusion Team of the National Governance Programme (SNG) stated that in addition to already marginalised groups, those not considered vulnerable at the onset of the pandemic were now at risk of becoming vulnerable depending on how the government responds to pandemic engendered needs. As the peril of abrupt and sudden loss of monetary gain or access to support can have dire and unpredictable consequences, identifying new potentially vulnerable groups constitutes a challenge. In this regard, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the combined impact of the pandemic and government policies on the vulnerabilities, susceptibilities and proneness to strains exceeds and impacts the more vulnerable groups with indiscriminate effect. As a result, a wide range of socio-economic groups, along with the poor, the elderly, persons with disability (PWDs), and those with ill health and co-morbidities, are struggling to cope financially, mentally, or physically during this crisis.

WOMEN'S VOICES FROM THE URBAN SETTLEMENTS OF DISTRICT WEST, KARACHI AND KASUR, PUNJAB

The women homeworkers, whose stories are given in this section, belong to different townships in District West, Karachi and District Kasur, Punjab. According to the United World Cities Report 2016, District West houses some of the largest slums in South Asia.

1. Fozia who lives in Saeedabad in Baldia Town says: "The routine was to get work and deliver the fin-

[23] Editors Note. Wali K. Khalil, "Pakistan's Poverty Alleviation Ehsaas Programme," Pakistan Today, October 29, 2021. Available at: https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/10/29/pakistans-poverty-alleviation-ehsaas-programme/
[24] See f.n. 4 (Challenges for Women Home Based Workers of Karachi).
[25] See f.n. 6 (Faisal Bari).

ished product in three days. This has been completely disrupted by the lockdown in Karachi. We – as a group of women, have no work now. Suspension of one month's work has given us a loss of six months. On top of that, workers in our area have not received any rations! I am the sole earner of the family and I have three school-going children. Although schools are closed, there is no exemption and I still have to pay school fees, which is an extra burden".

2. Rasheeda, another home-based worker from Musharraf Colony, Baldia Town, also speaks about lack of access to relief rations: "Rations were distributed in our area, but only among the Kachhi Biradari.[26] Other needy people who did not belong to that biradari were left out".

3. Farhana from Sabri Chowk, 11 Orangi Town, who is without work says: "Along with disruptions in work, we have to pay all household bills and school fees even though the schools are closed. This is not a developed area where online classes can be conducted, even then the school has not given any fee exemption".

4. Sadaf from Musharraf Colony, Baldia Town speaks about the condition of the home-based workers who are in a state of crisis because they get paid after the work has been done:
"We don't get advance payment. The middleman pays us only when the work has been completed. This time, because of the lockdown the middleman couldn't pick up the completed work from me. This has left me with finished products without payment. I belong to a group of 60 homebased pieceworkers who are paid per piece and we have all been left unpaid".

5. Haseena Ali from Nathan Goth who runs a vocational centre, is facing the following problems: "Be cause of social distancing, this pandemic has seriously affected my work as HBWs are unable to sit together to make products. Also, because the shops are shut, they are unable to buy raw materials. I had to close down the centre because of Covid, and now I'm at a loss as I still have to pay the centre rent and teachers' salaries. I set up the centre hoping to provide skills to young girls who are not allowed to leave their homes for work in other localities, but Covid has changed everything. I have taken a huge loss and I can't tell how many months it will take me to recover".[27]

Other Karachi HBWs shared that none of them had been provided health facilities. In fact, the price of masks had risen with the spread of infection and rise in Covid-19 cases. These conversations also revealed that despite the enactment of the 2018 HBW Law in Sindh and the steps taken by the Sindh government for the facilitation of daily wagers, women home-based workers were still not fully covered by given benefits and social services including SOP awareness despite awareness raising programmes by the government and community-based organisations. They also lacked the know-how and skills to maintain their safety and keep their work going, especially when dealing with out-of-work male family members in small houses with large families.[28]

While there is evidence of limited relief work in Sindh for home-based workers, it has been observed that there has been no relief response from the Punjab government. What little relief has been provided has been through local organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs). Due to procedural and other factors including the use of official terminology in government guidelines that potential beneficiaries find difficult to understand, registration with and implementation of the Ehsaas programme has been low and only a few have received cash under this programme. This is exemplified by a report from Kasur where more than 50 women received eligibility messages from Ehsaas without further follow-up.[29] Government indifference is also reflected in the statement of a local civil society organisations (CSO) representative, Fazeelat, also from Kasur:

> We have provided data on deserving workers to the Punjab government, but the government has taken no action. It has been a month now and we are still waiting for relief. Women HBWs don't own android phones and we are assisting them in getting registered with Ehsaas. We don't have enough money ourselves and it is becoming difficult for us to support them. The local DC is not paying any heed to our applications.

[26] Editors Note. An ethnic kingroup.
[27] See f.n. 6 (Home Bound).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

While fear of Covid-19 spread, lockdowns and restrictions on public transport has impacted public mobility, the situation of HBWs and DWs is more serious as due to absence of transport, these workers are now facing cash flow issues because of their inability to access their workplaces and/or markets for raw materials and delivery of completed products to retailers.[30]

The point to be noted is that whether or not they are recognised formally as essential workers by the government, informal workers across a broad range of sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, waste management, childcare and transport are on the frontline of national responses to the pandemic. This recognition underscores the importance of informal workers to our economies.

WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

> Pakistan is estimated to have faced an economic loss of up to PKR. 2.5 trillion because of Covid-19 in the current fiscal year and government figures project that around three million jobs are expected to be lost in the "initial round" of the novel coronavirus outbreak.
>
> Those Pakistanis who have suffered the most from the economic impact of the outbreak on the lives and livelihoods are primarily the country's daily wage workers and urban slum dwellers.[31]

In order to make greater sense of the above and gain some understanding of the political economy of daily wagers and HBWs, it is necessary to take a look at the imperatives of neoliberal globalisation and its impact on the world's most vulnerable populations. The findings of the rapid assessment survey by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) between 23 March and 8 April 2020 with the purpose of understanding the ways in which Covid-19 and related health measures were impacting informal workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America are pertinent in this regard. The survey comprised 16 interviews with national or local MBOs in addition to five regional and global networks of informal workers' organisations, including NGOs and research institutes working closely with informal workers.[32]

Findings showed that despite the fact that in many countries market food vendors and waste pickers are seen as essential workers, Covid's impact on informal worker livelihoods resulted in a permanent loss of income due to actions and interventions by government institutions and private companies. For instance, in India, local governments took advantage of the lockdown to break the street vending infrastructure. In Columbia, waste pickers were unwilling to stop work as they were afraid that private companies would use this as an excuse to take over silk-stocking waste contracts. In Lahore, Pakistan the outsourcing of waste disposal work by the Lahore Municipal Corporation in 2010 to Turkish companies, changed the status of street cleaners and janitorial staff from formal employees to contract labour resulting in the loss of job security and benefits of permanent employment.[33] The situation of domestic workers is equally precarious as their work conditions are almost entirely dependent on the whims and demands of employees. In addition to offering home care to the ill and elderly, domestic workers' organisations are calling for recognition in care worker packages for their members.[34]

The contradictions highlighted by this information tallies with Vicente Navarro's definition of 'neoliberalism' as the dominant ideology permeating the public policies of many governments in developed and developing countries and of international agencies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation, and many technical agencies of the United Nations, including the World Health.[35]

In contemporary usage, the term neoliberalism refers to market-oriented reform policies that involve the elimination of price controls, deregulation of capital markets, lowering of trade barriers, and the reduction of state

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Saiyna Bashir, "The Impact of Covid-19: How Pakistani Workers Are Living with the New Reality," *DAWN News,* June 7, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1560876/the-impact-of-covid-19-how-pakistani-workers-are-living-with-the-new-reality
[32] See f.n. 12 (WIEGO).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Vicente Navarro, "Neoliberalism as a Class Ideology; Or, the Political Causes of the Growth of Inequalities," *International Journal of Health Services* 37, Vol. 37, Iss. 1 (2007): p. 47–62. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/45138405

influence over the economy through austerity measures and privatisation. In other words, it describes the transformation of a society in which the state holds itself responsible for ensuring citizens' basic rights to food security, health, education etc., to one based on market based reforms and policies involving the reduction of state expenditure on public services through the privatisation of public sector services, even as the deregulation of corporates and multinationals minimises the role of the state as the regulatory body. This goes far to explaining the rise in income inequality as well as the benefits accruing to those who are already wealthy and the removal of safety nets for those who already lack financial resources.

Using the theory of human capital, proponents of neoliberal capitalism argue that labour unions are redundant and markets should be allowed to decide how much the workers should be paid. This may sound good on paper, but in fact, it has benefitted neither workers nor companies through increased productivity. Indeed, critics of human capital theory have raised questions as to whether the big bosses in finance really deserve their huge salaries, since they often just take money from other people instead of making systems better in terms of greater efficiency and productivity.[36]

Neoliberal policy economic frameworks are driven by laissez-faire individualism that allows companies to increase profits by cutting down investment costs and reducing social security. In effect, the claim of neoliberal policies of the benefits of an open and free market are countered by neoliberal regime practices that promote rules created by private owners of capital in ways that prevent governments from applying the rules of countervailing social interests and fair competition. This is evidenced in the way multinational interests are seen to prevail over consumer rights. Not only do the rules of competition and intellectual property favour dominant global interests, they also enable the industry to subject employees and consumers to binding arbitration that compels them to relinquish a range of statutory and common law rights.[37]

As markets cannot be expected to ensure fairness and opportunities for everyone, rules are needed to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all market actors in terms of transparent collective bargaining including negotiations for minimum/fair wages for workers. In this regard, the benignity of market actors cannot be relied upon. Equitable rules can only be set by democratic governments. In weak democracies and oligarchies where rules are made by corrupt plutocrats, the rules they make will exploit and not protect economically marginalised populations.

Neoliberalism has provided a serious setback to the benefits of 20th-century welfare citizenship. The removal of economic safety nets, such as publicly funded support systems combined with rising privatisation and related checks on labour rights, has seriously impacted the economically vulnerable sections of society, particularly women. With lower access to economic resources, post Covid-19 they are now compelled to do more work for less money. This not only makes their lives harder, it also makes it harder for them to escape poverty.[38]

Having said that, it needs to be noted that in practice the rights of pre-neoliberal 20th century social citizenship, which in themselves were neither equal nor egalitarian, encouraged the institutionalisation of a racialised and gendered hierarchy in welfare policies that controlled and regulated women's dependent position and reinforced the stereotype of the male breadwinner as family wage model. Consequently, not only was their access to social benefits dependent on registered male workers rather than as independent individuals and workers in the informal economy, it was less than the benefits received by men. In the same vein, protective labour legislation excluded occupations that were largely seen as the preserve of women and people of colour, such as agricultural, domestic, part-time and temporary work. Apart from creating hurdles to their demands for better pay and/or working conditions, this approach denigrated their work by showing it as less important. Despite changes in laws, the perception that some jobs are more important than others has remained and continues to undermine the interests of women and people of colour including lower caste non-Muslim minorities.[39]

[36] Robert Kuttner, "Neoliberalism: Political Success, Economic Failure," *The American Prospect,* June 26, 2019. Available at: https://prospect.org/economy/neoliberalism-political-success-economic-failure/
[37] Ibid.
[38] Premilla Nadasen, "Domestic Work, Neoliberalism, and Transforming Labor," S&F Online, Iss. 11.1-11.2 (2012). Available at: http://sfonline.barnard.edu/gender-justice-and-neoliberal-transformations/domestic-work-neoliberalism-and-transforming-labor/
[39] Ibid.

Poor women in the informal economy face many health and safety risks, such as dangerous working conditions, sexual and gender-based violence, and increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They also have to deal with a lack of infrastructure and limited time and space to do their work efficiently. Women in informal jobs are paid less than men, including other ongoing inequalities related to women's unpaid work. Therefore, it is important to study the relationship between informal work, gender inequality, and poverty carefully.[40]

It is seen that in assessments of the interconnection between informal work and gender, parallels are drawn between in-transition and industrialised countries. ILO's replacement of the term 'informal sector' with 'informal economy' highlights the need to include both wageworkers and account workers in discussion and analysis of informal work. The term also draws attention to the cross cutting diversity of informal work and its overlaps with the formal economy. By showing the two as interlinked, this perspective erases the definitional dichotomy between informal and formal work. In the Global South context, where barely 50% of the wage labour forms part of the formal sector, the 'informal' and 'formal' terminology is not always beneficial for analytical purposes. Similarly, a fixed meaning cannot be attributed to 'gender', because as a relational concept, it is shaped by a variety of factors such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, age etc. and is constituted differently in different social, cultural and geographical contexts.[41] As such it is important to consider the power dynamics and social constructs that influence different groups of women and men in diverse ways. Therefore strategies aimed at addressing informality should take into account the broader societal context that shapes various forms of work.[42]

COVID-19 - RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES:

1. Ehsaas Programme:

    - Lack of or poor access to relief because of delays caused by Ehsaas verification procedures. Many individuals, particularly women, have failed to get relief due to lack of mandatory citizenship documents viz National Identity Cards;[43]

    - Worn-out fingerprints (due to the nature of their work) of informal workers that hinder mandatory biometric verification for registration with Ehsaas and other government social protection programmes. This has excluded large numbers of women from accessing relief during the pandemic.

2. The lack of data on informal labour makes it challenging for the government to provide social protection benefits to workers, mostly women, who are not registered in any policy or scheme.

3. Economic or health crises can increase the risk of women being forced into bonded labour, where they face multiple forms of exploitation, such as being kept as collateral, experiencing sexual exploitation, and remaining in bonded labour even after the person responsible for taking a loan or advance passes away.

4. Women and children's vulnerability to domestic abuse and violence including sexual violence can increase due to lockdowns that compel men to stay at home while undergoing the stress of livelihood loss, food insecurity etc.

5. The impossibility of social distancing in over-crowded homes and urban settlements.

6. Lack of information about Covid-19 and preventative measures.

7. Misinformation and public disbelief in preventative measures.

[40] See f.n. 1 (Sylvia Chant).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] See f.n. 6 (Home Bound).

8. Lack of access to Covid-19 protective gear, particularly among low-income, high-risk frontline workers.

9. Difficulty in observing Covid-19 SOPs due to lack of access to soap, sanitisers, masks etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Updating of Ehsaas lists to include those immediately above the poverty-line of PMT score who have now fallen under it, including HBWs.[44]

2. Provision of economic opportunities to informal sector workers so they can be linked with private companies producing personal protective equipment (PPE). This will help alleviate the negative im pact of pandemics on them and their livelihoods.

3. The government can provide monthly or fortnightly ration or monetary support, equivalent to the minimum wage of the province, to underprivileged workers who are unable to earn the minimum wage. This support can be provided for a period of three months through schemes such as Ehsaas.[45]

4. Introduction of household ration cards to limit social interaction and ensure provision to those in need.

5. Local CSOs should use community-level socio-demographic and economic data to reach out to those who require assistance. Temporary identification numbers should be issued based on household data to people who do not have CNICs, making them eligible for government relief programmes.

6. To ensure equal access to education, online schooling facilities should be introduced in peri-urban areas and slums, and school fees for March, April, and May should be waived for families who cannot access online classes.

7. People who earn up to the minimum wage should be exempted or compensated for their gas, water, and electricity bills to ease their financial burden.

8. Provision of comprehensive training sessions to local HBW leaders for awareness raising on Covid-19 preventive measures including personal and community hygiene, social distancing and use of protective equipment. By doing so, HBW leaders can play a vital role in disseminating accurate information and promoting healthy practices in their communities, ultimately reducing the spread of the virus.

9. Provision of interest free loans to women in the garment and stitching sector for purchase of raw materials including soap, face masks, sanitisers and PPE kits.

10. Provision of social and legal protection to HBWs under the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act, 2018, including master training sessions on the prevention of virus spread for greater outreach.[46]

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

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WOMEN AND HEALTHCARE IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF COVID-19 *

Ayesha Khan

ABSTRACT

The essay, Women and Healthcare in the Crosshairs of Covid-19, discusses the impact of the virus on women's sexual and reproductive health against the backdrop of the Pakistan government's policy shift towards the privatisation of the public health sector. Based on a fact-finding exercise, Khan highlights the links between the diversion of healthcare resources towards the pandemic and the decline in the availability of reproductive health services and contraceptives and the concomitant rise in the price of safe abortion as some of its significant outcomes. Others include the alarming increase in domestic violence and growing unavailability of shelters due to fear of virus spread, and the digital divide that excludes the poorest women and largest populations from telehealth services. Discussing the gap between Pakistan's commitment to international treaty obligations and SDG goals and practice evidenced in its low gender development ranking, the essay identifies women's agency and collective action as a critical factor in addressing women's reproductive health issues and freedom from gender based violence as testified by the crucial role played by women as service providers and as activists who have elicited some level of responsiveness from the government.

BACKGROUND

Ayesha Khan read Philosophy at Yale before going on for a Master's in South Asian Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London and is currently working on her doctoral thesis from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex. A Senior Researcher at the Collective for Social Science Research Karachi, she has extensive research experience on issues pertaining to gender and development, social policy and conflict and refugee issues, and has participated in IDS-led multi-country research programmes Action for Empowerment and Accountability and Pathways to Women's Empowerment. She is also the author of the book The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy.

The Covid-19 crisis unfolded during the first half of 2020 against the backdrop of one of the lowest gender development rankings in the world and shifting government policies towards privatisation of the public health sector.[1] While it is too early to assess the full implications of the pandemic for women's sexual and reproductive health, this article is based on a fact-finding exercise and follow-up research with civil society actors to make some initial observations. Our findings show that with the onset of the pandemic, there was a dramatic decline in the availability of reproductive health services. The federal and provincial governments and healthcare providers diverted resources towards the pandemic to the detriment of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) service provision. There were severe disruptions to the supply chain of contraceptives, the price of safe abortion services soared, and the rate of institutional deliveries fell. As the pandemic wore on, the few shelters for women fleeing domestic violence became increasingly inaccessible, and rates of gender-based violence rose alarmingly. The nascent telehealth services emerged critical to service provision, yet the absence of regulatory standards and a clear digital divide left the poorest women excluded and the larger population uninformed about how to use new platforms.

Women's agency and collective action are critical to how the story unfolded and where it will end, with the second wave underway at the time of writing. Feminists and non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in service delivery raised the alarm in the press and with policymakers as SRH issues became apparent within weeks of the first wave. Lady Health Workers, (LHW) on the front line of primary health care delivery in poor communities, used their formidable association to stage sit-ins and demand proper protections and employment conditions.

In effect, it was from vibrant civic spaces that women's voices about SRH needs emerged during this crisis, with valuable effect when coupled with the Sindh provincial government's willingness to engage with their concerns. This holds a valuable lesson for achieving health outcomes, more so in the context of closing civic spaces and decline in participatory politics.

[1] The background for this article is the fact-finding study conducted on the "Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh" by Sara Malkani from Advocacy Advisor for Asia at the Center for Reproductive Rights, and Ayesha Khan and Komal Qidwai from the Collective for Social Science Research. See Sara Malkani, Ayesha Khan, and Komal Qidwai, "Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh," ed. Asiya Jawed (Karachi: Collective for Social Science Research, n.d.). Available at: https://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/Khan_Ayesha_Impact_of_Covid-19_on_Sexual_and_Reproductive_Health_and_Rights_in_Sindh.pdf

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on findings from two research studies exploring the impact of Covid-19 in Pakistan. In the first, from March to August 2020, we conducted a fact-finding[2] to identify the pandemic's impact on sexual and reproductive health, focusing on the Sindh province. From mid-March to the end of June 2020, over 140 articles from local and international press sources were identified, documenting the emerging impact of Covid-19 on SRH, along with social media sources to identify issues and debates. Key informant online interviews were held with frontline medical staff and community health workers and staff of service provider NGOs in Sindh.

In the second, a parallel study was conducted to assess the impact of Covid-19 on civic spaces. We documented health workers' protests using similar media tracking methodology and held online key informant interviews with health sector providers from July till October 2020.[3]

POLICY AND PROGRAMME CONTEXT

There is a consensus amongst women's movement actors, service providers, and progressive policymakers that a strong architecture of international treaty obligations and domestic laws and policies is essential to improving gender outcomes in Pakistan, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Yet these are the product of charged negotiations amongst stakeholders representing women's interests, political interest groups, and government positions. Patriarchal practices and political concessions to religious right-wing groups remain powerful forces influencing the policymaking process.[4]

The fundamental rights guaranteed under Constitution of Pakistan[5] remain a crucial touchstone for advocates of the rights-based approach to women's health.[6] The Constitution guarantees the right to life (Article 9), which has been interpreted by the courts to include the right to health and the right to dignity.[7] All citizens are equal, and discrimination on the basis of sex alone is forbidden, although the state is not prevented from making special provisions to protect women and children.[8]

Pakistan's international treaty obligations require it to ensure access to reproductive health services, although they are not enforceable unless implementing laws are passed domestically. Pakistan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC), as well as, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Courts have relied on these commitments to direct the federal government to implement laws and policies upholding fundamental human rights in specific cases.[9]

International human rights bodies remind Pakistan to guarantee the availability and access to quality and affordable reproductive health services. Access to reproductive healthcare is part of the core minimum obliga-

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[2] This study was conducted in collaboration with the Center for Reproductive Rights in New York.

[3] I would like to thank Asiya Jawed from the Collective for Social Science Research for her support in this research on Navigating Civic Space, which forms part of Research Phase 2 by Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme, a multi-country study in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), funded by the U.K. government. A4EA pivoted some of its research to explore the implications of Covid-19 for accountability and claims making – particularly in light of shrinking civic space in many countries around the world. For particulars, see Ayesha Khan, Aslam Khwaja, and Asiya Jawed, "Navigating Civic Spaces during a Pandemic: Pakistan Report," Institute of Development Studies (Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme, December 2020). Available at: https://www.ids.ac.uk/projects/navigating-civic-space/

[4] Ayesha Khan, *The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[5] The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 (Hereinafter referred to as the 'Constitution').

[6] Editors Note. The High Court of Sindh in *Getz Pharma (pvt) Ltd. v. Federation of Pakistan,* PLD 2017 Karachi 157, held that although the Right to Health is not expressly provided in our Constitution, however, Article 9 (right to life) read with Article 14 (right to dignity) gives birth to 'right to health' as a fundamental right.

[7] Article 14, Constitution; *Shehla Zia v. WAPDA,* PLD 1994 Supreme Court 693.

[8] Article 25, Constitution. Editors note. See *Muhammad Riaz v. Government of Punjab,* PLD 2021 Lahore 33; *Shaukat Ali v. Election Commission of Pakistan through Secretary, Islamabad,* 2018 SCMR 2086; and, *Chairman, PIA v. Sherin Dokhth,* 1996 SCMR 1520.

[9] See f.n. 7 (Shehla Zia).

tions for states to enforce the right to health in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[10] In 2020, the CEDAW Committee called on the government to strengthen its efforts to reduce maternal mortality and improve access to affordable modern contraceptive methods.[11] These commitments remained in place even during the pandemic, with UN officials calling for the public health response to be guided by human rights.[12] In fact, human rights bodies stated that sexual and reproductive health is a component of essential health services that must be provided during a pandemic, including quality maternal healthcare and safe abortion.[13]

Pakistan played an important role at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and adopted its Program of Action recognising reproductive rights as human rights, calling for population policies to empower women to exercise these rights through adequate information and resources. It adopted the Beijing Platform of Action at the 1995 UN World Conference for Women, which reinforced the rights-based approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR).

Pakistan's commitments to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do not diverge from the rights-based approach. They include gender equality (Goal 5), with targets framed in terms of rights, stating that universal access to SRHR in accordance with the ICPD 1994 and Beijing 1995 Platforms for Action should be ensured. Its SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) targets include reducing the maternal mortality rate from 178 to less than 130 deaths per 100,000 live births, and increasing the proportion of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who need family planning and are satisfied with modern methods, from 47 per cent (2013) to 70 per cent.[14]

In 2010, after an amendment to the Constitution, devolved substantial powers from the federal government to the provinces, the Sindh province took the lead in crafting progressive legislation. It built upon legislation begun in 2006 to reform laws criminalising sex outside of marriage, curb honour killings, acid crimes and harmful customary practices, improve prosecution for rape, and sanctioning sexual harassment at the workplace. Sindh became the first, and only province, to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18, and was the first to pass a law prohibiting domestic violence.[15] Still, implementing these laws has been challenging for both law enforcement agencies and communities alike.[16]

Induced abortion in Pakistan is prohibited with some exceptions, allowing for the procedure before organs have been formed for the purpose of saving the life of the woman or providing her with necessary treatment.[17] However, it does not define which abortions constitute "necessary treatment". Feminist lawyers and health activists have refrained from publicly calling for further reforms to the law, which contains some latitude, for fear of attracting attention from right-wing groups who may seek to further restrict the law.

The Sindh Reproductive Healthcare Rights Act, 2019 (Sindh Act) echoes the ICPD language. It defines reproductive health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing … in all matters related to the reproductive system, its functions and processes", and recognises it as a fundamental right.[18] The law promotes the right to reproductive health care information, non-discrimination in access to reproductive health services,

[10] "General Comment No. 22 (2016) on the Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)," *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (New York: United Nations, May 2, 2016). Available at: https://bityl.co/4dpP

[11] UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, "Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Pakistan." (Geneva: United Nations, March 10, 2020). Report bears No. CEDAW/C/PAK/CO/5. Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3856608?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header

[12] "Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Is a Human Rights Imperative during the COVID-19 Pandemic" (New York: Center for Reproductive Rights, May 2020). Available at: https://reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Access%20to%20Comprehensive%20Sexual%20and%20Reproductive%20Health%20Care%20is%20a%20Human%20Rights%20Imperative%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.pdf

[13] CEDAW, "Guidance Note on CEDAW and Covid-19" (New York: United Nations, 2020). Available at: https://bityl.co/4duh; "Maintaining Essential Health Services: Operational Guidance for the COVID-19 Context: Interim Guidance," (Geneva: World Health Organization, June 1, 2020). Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/332240; See f.n. 12 (Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Care)

[14] SDG Section, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms, review of *Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,* by Government of Pakistan, 2019. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/233812019_06_15_VNR_2019_Pakistan_latest_version.pdf

[15] Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act, 2013; Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013.

[16] Sara Malkani, Ms. Shah, and Ms. Regmi, "Ending Impunity for Child Marriage in Pakistan: Normative and Implementation Gaps" (New York: Center for Reproductive Rights, 2018): p. 33-34. Available at: https://bityl.co/4awX

[17] "Pakistan's Abortion Provisions," Center for Reproductive Rights, n.d. Available at: https://reproductiverights.org/maps/provision/pakistans-abortion-provisions/

[18] Sindh Reproductive Healthcare Rights Act, 2019.

and strengthening of the delivery system to ensure quality services and encourage informed choice by its users. The new law contains some weaknesses, including vaguely defined roles and duties of service providers, unclear consequences for violations of the law or remedies for women and girls facing reproductive rights violations. Nor does it provide for the right to access safe abortion services.[19]

The government runs major programmes to achieve improved reproductive health. The National Maternal, Neonatal & Child Health (NMNCH) Programme, launched in 2005, includes as core components integrated delivery of basic maternal and newborn health services, comprehensive emergency obstetric care, deployment of community midwives, and provision of family planning services.[20] Complementing this, the Sindh Health Sector Strategy of 2012 committed itself to reducing the maternal mortality ratio to 140 per 100,000 live births.[21] The Costed Implementation Plan (CIP) on Family Planning is a national programme with provincial counterparts.[22] CIP Sindh seeks to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate to 45 per cent and reduce the unmet need to 14 per cent by 2020. The Lady Health Workers Programme (LHWP) is a community health outreach programme delivering family planning, immunisation, and antenatal screening to rural and peri-urban areas. It has over one hundred thousand workers across Pakistan, who despite their significant accomplishments have been compelled to stage strikes and protests for improvement in employment benefits and conditions.[23]

FINDINGS

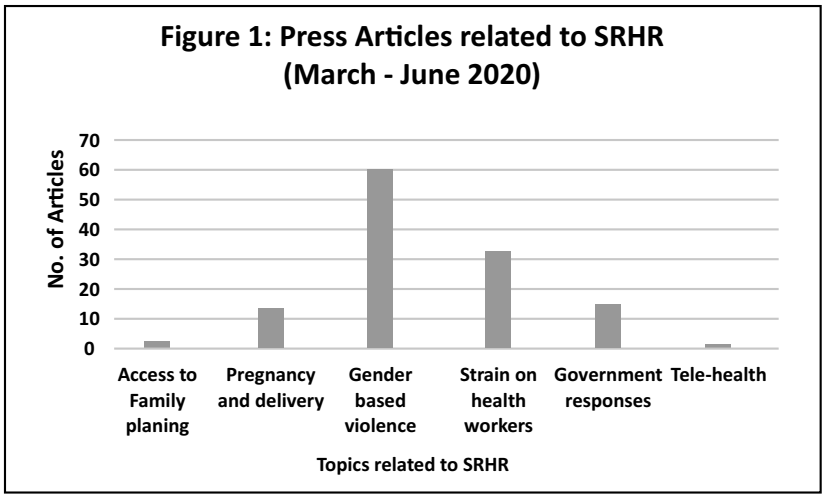
The government imposed a lockdown across the province of Sindh on 22 March 2020 ordering all public places closed except those providing 'essential services',[24] and a ban on the movement of persons other than for medical care or essential purchases. After one month, it permitted some movement and reopened businesses and public places in certain areas. By August, most movement was permitted with SOPs in place for markets and businesses. Hospital caseloads decreased and only began to increase slowly again during September. Meanwhile, the national and provincial governments continued to impose 'smart lockdowns' to restrict movement in neighbourhoods experiencing outbreaks, thereby avoiding the social, political and economic fall-out of the unpopular measures during the start of the pandemic. After peaking in June, the first wave of spread slowed down, with less damage in terms of hospitalisation and deaths than in nearby Iran or India. Ordinary life resumed, with only the more cautious individuals observing SOPs, while Covid-19 wards in hospitals emptied out. As the cold weather set in, cases picked up again, filling hospitals and forcing a resumption of more stringent measures.

During the first phase of the pandemic, women faced increased barriers in accessing reproductive health services, particularly in the areas of family planning services, safe abortion, obstetric care and gender-based violence. The reproductive health needs of adolescents and girls were almost absent from media and policy discourse. Healthcare workers, from doctors to nurses and LHWs, worked under conditions of extreme strain and inadequate protection from infection.

Our press tracking of 140 articles covering SRH (Figure 1) during March-June found that most articles (n=61) reported cases or concerns regarding a potential increase in gender-based violence. Articles related to service provision focused mostly on women's access to safe pregnancy and delivery (n=15). The strain on various levels of health service providers, particularly women providers in the reproductive health sector, also received

[19] See f.n. 1 (Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Sindh).
[20] "Strategic Framework," National Maternal, Neonatal & Child Health Program (Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan, 2020). Available at: http://dynasoft.org/mnch/strategies.php
[21] Shehla Zaidi, "Sindh Health Sector Strategy 2012 - 2020," Department of Community Sciences, the Aga Khan University, January 2012, p. 1–124. Available at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1215&context=pakistan_fhs_mc_chs_chs
[22] Population Welfare Department, Department of Health and People's Primary Healthcare Initiative, "Costed Implementation Plan (CIP) on Family Planning for Sindh" (Karachi: Government of Sindh, December 2015). Available at: https://www.familyplanning2020.org/sites/default/files/CIP-Sindh-03-15-16-final-1_0.pdf
[23] "Navigating Civic Spaces in Pakistan: Baseline Report" (Karachi: Collective for Social Science Research, September 2020). Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwju97mF-Iz8AhUYxAIHHTpqC9AQFnoECAsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.researchcollective.org%2FDocuments%2FKhan_Ayesha_Navigating_Civic_Spaces_In_Pakistan_Baseline_Report.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2_HYVzOk1SPoPXMUyO6q0x
[24] Imtiaz Mugheri, "Lockdown Imposed in Sindh for next 15 Days; Movement Restricted to Need-Only Basis," DAWN News, March 22, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1542901

substantial coverage (n=33), as did government measures (n=14) related to SRH.



Source: CSSR Media Timeline

Due to the lockdown and access to rural areas, the bias in media coverage towards urban areas was more enhanced.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IMPACT

The sexual and reproductive health impact emerged in three main areas: access to contraception and safe abortion, obstetric services, and gender-based violence. They are briefly summarised below.

Women's access to contraception and safe abortion services is low in the province of Sindh, as in the rest of Pakistan. As a result, women's total fertility rate remains high - in rural areas (4.7 births) is higher than in urban (2.9) Sindh. The Sindh contraceptive prevalence rate (24.4%), is second among the four provinces. Urban areas exhibit higher levels (28%) than rural (20.4%).[25] Research has identified weak marketing and motivational services, and lack of access to supplies among the reasons for this persistent low contraceptive prevalence.[26]

The pandemic affected access to contraceptives by disrupting the supply chain, available options, and reliable information. A global shortage of contraceptive supply impact led to shortages and price hikes.[27] High import duties on condoms remained and further complicated procurement. To worsen matters, private-sector community providers with supplies were not allowed to build up stocks without a pharmacy license.[28] Government-run family planning and counselling services were shut during the lockdown, as they had not been included in the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) list of essential services.[29] Post-partum family planning services were not available to women delivering in government facilities.[30]

Private family planning providers, such as Marie Stopes and Greenstar Social Marketing, continued to provide scaled-back services. Nonetheless, the numbers of users of family planning products and services decreased during the first phase of the pandemic. As early as March, LHWs reported that the government had not refilled their supplies and contraceptives were running out.[31] Closures of product distributors forced users to rely on chemists for products, which offered limited choices, e.g. they prefer to stock fast-running products, such as

[25] National Institute for Population Studies, "Pakistan: Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2019). Available at: https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR354/FR354.pdf
[26] Women's Development Department, "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy" (Karachi: Government of Sindh, 2020).
[27] "Virus May Spark 'Devastating' Global Condom Shortage," The Express Tribune, April 9, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2194091/virus-may-spark-devastating-global-condom-shortage
[28] Ayesha Khan. "Interview with Dr. Syed Azizur Rab," June 2020.
[29] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Rahal Saeed," May 2020; Ayesha Khan. "Interview with Yasmeen Qazi," June 2020.
[30] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Dr. Sadia Pal," April 2020.
[31] See f.n. 29 (Rahal Saeed Interview).

condoms, rather than long-acting reversible contraceptives.

The cost of induced abortion soared during the pandemic's first phase. Safe and reliable Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) kits became unavailable[32] and a shortage of misoprostol negatively impacted post-abortion care.[33] Service providers and facilities were forced to shut down during the lockdown because it was not considered an essential service.[34]

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated a huge potential impact of Covid-19 on access to contraception in Pakistan, caused by the disruption in supplies, shortages of contraceptive stocks, switch to traditional methods and limited method choices, and extended confinement of couples within homes. It calculated a 10-20 per cent decline in the use of modern contraceptives, which in turn could lead to almost one million additional unintended pregnancies and over 350,000 additional unsafe abortions.[35]

Official Maternal Mortality Ratios (MMR) for Pakistan indicate an improvement in the overall total, at 186 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (Table 1). Sindh has the second-highest MMR in the country (224), an improvement from the last available figure of 276 over a decade ago.[36]

Table 1. Maternal mortality ratios in Pakistan

	Maternal mortality ratio
Residence	
Urban	158
Rural	199
Region	
Punjab	157
Sindh	224
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	165
Balochistan	298
Total*	**186**
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	104
Gilgit Baltistan	157

[32] Ibid.
[33] See f.n. 28 (Dr. Syed Azizur Rab Interview).
[34] See f.n. 29 (Yasmeen Qazi Interview).
[35] See f.n. 1 (Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh), p. 13.
[36] National Institute for Population Studies, "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, June 2008). Available at: https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR200/FR200.pdf

*Total excludes the disputed territories of AJK and GB, shown in the rows below.
Source: Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey 2019.[37]

Amongst the main issues in maternal health care for women in Sindh are lack of access to antenatal care, emergency obstetric and neonatal care, and trained birth attendants.[38] Nearly three-quarters of maternal deaths occur during delivery and post-partum (the period 40 days after delivery). High-quality care to prevent and manage post-partum haemorrhage is critical to reducing mortality.[39]

Sindh has the highest preference (52%) for private sector deliveries amongst all the provinces, which increases to sixty-four per cent in urban areas.[40] Due to inefficiencies in the public sector, women feel they have no choice but to use private-sector providers. This sector is largely unregulated, catering to low-income patients and including quacks posing as medical doctors and even conducting C-sections.[41]

Before the pandemic, policy focus relied on encouraging deliveries with skilled attendance and improving hospital-based deliveries. These efforts resulted in almost 75 per cent of births in Sindh taking place with a skilled provider and 72 per cent of women delivering in a public or private health facility. Still, coverage is not universal, and figures are higher in urban areas.[42] These limited gains in maternal health risk were undermined due to disruptions in the availability of services during the pandemic. UNFPA estimated if there is a ten to twenty per cent decline in services nationally, it would lead to between approximately four to eight hundred thousand additional births without access to health facilities, and up to 2100 additional maternal deaths.[43]

Pregnant women were found to experience high levels of anxiety, during the pandemic, as they were unable to meet their doctors for in-person antenatal appointments.[44] They were also more likely to experience delays in reaching hospitals during emergencies.[45] This led to a renewed emphasis by the government on equipping skilled midwives to deliver safely in communities instead. Some hospitals refused to accept pregnant patients, requiring proof of Covid-19 negative tests.[46] Some major hospitals in Sindh were forced to close their maternity/gynaecology wards due to several staff members testing positive.[47]

The decline in institutional deliveries during the lockdown, underscored the need for trained community midwives to aid in home births.[48] However, the number of trained midwives was already inadequate to meet the needs of pregnant women. Those in place needed protective equipment to deliver babies in the home setting safely.[49] Years of public health messaging to encourage pregnant women to participate in antenatal screening and access hospital-based deliveries, appeared to be reversed through the new emphasis on home-based deliveries.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING THE PANDEMIC

Violence against women is a severe and persistent area of concern, even though Sindh has made significant strides by improving legislation to curb child marriage and domestic violence. Implementation

[37] National Institute of Population Studies and ICF, "Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey 2019: Key Indicators Report" (Islamabad, Pakistan, and Rockville, Maryland, USA, August 2020). Available at: https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR128/PR128.pdf
[38] Naushin Mahmood, Durr-e-Nayab, and Abdul Hakim, "An Analysis of Reproductive Health Issues in Pakistan [with Comments]," The Pakistan Development Review, Vol. 39, Iss. 4 (2000): 675–93. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41260291?seq=1
[39] See f.n. 36 (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07), p. 171.
[40] Ibid.
[41] See f.n. 1 (Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh), p. 14.
[42] See f.n. 25 (Pakistan: Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18), p. 172.
[43] See f.n. 1 (Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh), p. 14.
[44] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Dr. Azra Ahsan," April 2020; Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Dr. Nighat Shah," May 2020; See f.n. 30 (Dr. Sadia Pal Interview).
[45] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Noor Fatima," April 2020; Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Zaryab Sethna," May 2020; See f.n. 30 (Dr. Sadia Pal Interview).
[46] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Neha Mankani," May 2020.
[47] Nighat Shah, "Stories from the Frontlines: 'We Cannot Lockdown Hospital Wards. Progressive Planning Is the Way to Go,'" DAWN News, May 7, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1555063/stories-from-the-frontlines-we-cannot-lockdown-hospital-wards-progressive-planning-is-the-way-to-go
[48] See f.n. 45 (Zaryab Sethna Interview); See f.n. 46 (Neha Mankani Interview).
[49] Expert Consultation was conducted via Zoom on 12 June 2020, which was facilitated by Ayesha Khan. Some of the Interviews mentioned in the footnotes were part of the Expert Consultation.

of these laws is weak, and women contend with overwhelming barriers to access justice.[50] Early and forced marriages of girls continue in practice. Underage Hindu and Christian girls are subject to forced conversions.[51] UNFPA predicted the pandemic would worsen gender-based violence and harmful cultural practices, with long-term negative impacts on women's health and wellbeing, which would undermine gender equality gains in other areas.[52]

As expected, the lockdown did lead to a significant increase in domestic violence across the country.[53] The NGO Bedari reported double the number of calls for assistance.[54] Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province reported over 500 cases of domestic violence during lockdown.[55] Our media tracking identified 17 reports of domestic violence resulting in the death of women and/or their children. Advocacy groups grew increasingly alarmed about the impact of the pandemic on women's safety, as social media discourse, webinars, and articles on the subject proliferated. In April, the feminist group Women's Action Forum (WAF) urged the Sindh government to ensure the protection of women and uphold the Sindh Domestic Violence Act 2013.[56]

Lockdown restrictions led to confusion and new barriers to women's access to protective services. Some women were refused admission to a shelter without a medical certificate from a government hospital, which in turn could not be obtained while outpatient services remained suspended.[57] The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women revealed that direct calls for help could not be processed in a timely manner.[58] Panah, a Karachi-based shelter, quickly developed SOPs to facilitate women's admission, however, with the closure of public transportation during lockdown, it was impossible for many women to access the shelter.

Some digital solutions proved helpful. A mobile application, namely the Women Safety App, developed in collaboration with UNFPA, was effectively rolled out.[59] The Ministry of Human Rights launched its own helpline for domestic violence.[60] While useful, activists were concerned that these platforms were not able to provide women with in-depth counselling, legal advice or guidance on how to escape a violent situation.[61]

IMPACT ON HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

The health sector in Pakistan is a major employer of women. While most qualified doctors in the workforce are men, almost half (110,000) of all registered doctors are women. Unfortunately, a large number of qualified women doctors are not currently employed. It is estimated that Pakistan needs 436,000 practising doctors to meet the needs of its population of 218 million.[62]

[50] Omar B. Maniar, "The Victim and the Accused: An Analysis of Legal Needs in the Criminal Justice System in Sindh," Legal Aid Society, 2018. Available at: https://www.las.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Victim-and-Accused-An-Analysis-of-Legal-Needs-in-the-Criminal-Justice-System-in-Sindh.pdf

[51] See f.n. 16 (Ending Impunity for Child Marriage in Pakistan).

[52] See f.n. 1 (Impact of Covid-19 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Sindh), p. 15.

[53] Najam Soharwardi, "Mental Health Professionals Report Rise in Domestic Abuse Cases," The News, April 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/637936-mental-health-professionals-report-rise-in-domestic-abuse-cases

[54] Syeda Tuba Aamir, "In the Shadows of a Pandemic…," The News, May 5, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/magazine/you/660486-in-the-shadows-of-a-pandemic

[55] Fayaz Ahmed, "Over 500 Domestic Violence Cases Reported during KP Lockdown: Official," Samaa, May 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.samaaenglish.tv/news/2029171/pakistan-over-500-domestic-violence-cases-reported-during-kp-lockdown-official

[56] "Domestic Violence," DAWN News, April 15, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1549304/domestic-violence

[57] Sara Malkani. "Email to Ayesha Khan," April 2020.

[58] Ayesha Khan. "Phone Call with Nuzhat Shirin," April 2020.

[59] "Connecting Women with Safety in Pakistan at a Time of COVID-19 – and Beyond," UNFPA Asiapacific, April 18, 2020. Available at: https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/connecting-women-safety-pakistan-time-covid-19-%E2%80%93-and-beyond

[60] Ministry of Human Rights, "Lockdowns and Quarantine Measures Often Leave Women and Children Vulnerable to Domestic Abuse and Violence - Which Is Known to Rise during Emergencies," Twitter, March 30, 2020. Available at: https://twitter.com/mohrpakistan/status/1244529154772668417

[61] Soch, "Domestic Violence and the Coronavirus Lockdown," Facebook, May 1, 2020. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/SochVideos/videos/2720274634858206/

[62] Dr Wajahat Bokhari, "Medical Colleges and Doctors in Pakistan - Too Many or Too Few?," The Nation, September 20, 2019. Available at: https://nation.com.pk/21-Sep-2019/medical-colleges-and-doctors-in-pakistan-too-many-or-too-few

Table 2. Registered Medical and Paramedical Personnel in Pakistan

Health workers	2019
Doctors	233,261
Dentists	24,930
Nurses	112,123
Midwives	41,810

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics[63]

While 80% of students in Pakistan's medical colleges are female, only 44% are registered with the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council. These missing women doctors are unable to work due to family pressures and related compulsions, contributing to the dearth of practising doctors in the country.[64]

Most nurses and midwives are women, as is the entire Lady Health Workers' cadre of community-based primary health care providers. There are 125,000 females currently employed in the LHW Programme,[65] which still does not have universal coverage over the population. World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that Pakistan needs a million more nurses to meet the needs of its population.[66]

Given the unprecedented crisis and demands on healthcare providers, it is not surprising that the pandemic triggered further turbulence in the health sector. First, the strain on capacity and absence of adequate protections led to stress amongst providers, many of whom were women. The new circumstances, however, did bring promising innovations in the telehealth sector. Second, the government's policies preceding and during the crisis exacerbated unrest among different types of providers, triggering protest actions that undermined a cohesive and effective healthcare response.

As Covid-19 cases rose, the press reported hospitals running out of capacity.[67] Frontline service providers reported a deepening of rural-urban inequalities in access to care.[68] Curbs on public transport curtailed rural patients access to urban-based tertiary facilities.[69]

Outbreaks of Covid-19 began amongst healthcare providers, in particular amongst front-line workers such as support staff and junior doctors.[70] Over 1200 doctors, 333 nurses and 628 paramedics contracted the coronavirus by June.[71] Their stress and anxiety levels were exacerbated by inadequate personal protective equipment

[63] Finance Division, "Pakistan Economic Survey 2019-20" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020), https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_1920.html
[64] Mariam Mohsin and Jawad Syed, "The Missing Doctors – an Analysis of Educated Women and Female Domesticity in Pakistan," Gender, Work & Organization, Vol. 27, Iss. 6 (March 9, 2020): p. 1077–1102. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12444#:~:text=The%20phenomenon%20is%20also%20described,Council%20(PMDC)%20are%20female
[65] Hafsa Adil, "The Plight of Pakistan's Lady Health Workers," Al Jazeera, April 10, 2018. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/4/10/the-plight-of-pakistans-lady-health-workers#:~:text=The%20Lady%20Health%20Worker%20Programme,part%20of%20the%20health%20programme; Ayesha Khan, Komal Qidwai and Zonia Yousuf. "Interview with Bushra Arain," July 2020.
[66] "Pakistan Needs 'a Million More Nurses,'" The Express Tribune, August 23, 2019. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2039989/pakistan-needs-million-nurses
[67] "Hospitals under Strain as Covid-19 Peak Approaches," DAWN News, June 9, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1562323/hospitals-under-strain-as-covid-19-peak-approaches
[68] See f.n. 29 (Rahal Saeed).
[69] See f.n. 44 (Dr. Azra Ahsan Interview).
[70] See f.n. 44 (Dr. Nighat Shah Interview).
[71] M. Waqar Bhatti, "Facing Covid-19 and Violence Simultaneously, Healthcare Community in Pakistan Has Lost 24 Colleagues so Far," The News, June 2, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/666539-facing-covid-19-and-violence-simultaneously-healthcare-community-in-pakistan-has-lost-24-colleagues-so-far

(PPE) and SOPs in public and private healthcare facilities. Doctors turned to NGOs for protective equipment supplies.[72] Those in Sindh pleaded for the enforcement of stricter lockdown measures in April to ease the burden on healthcare facilities.[73]

The turn to digital solutions where possible in the workforce during 2020 also produced innovations in health provision in Pakistan. Because outpatient services in all major hospitals in Sindh were suspended from mid-March,[74] and only partially opened during April,[75] doctors reported they used phone calls, WhatsApp and Zoom to conduct online consultations, including antenatal appointments. This limited access for those patients without internet or smartphones.[76]

Fledgling telehealth initiatives, such as the Sehat Kahani mobile app and helplines of the Aman Foundation and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Pakistan (SOGP) gained new attention.[77] These helplines provide family planning and mental health counselling, along with guidance on illness.

It soon became apparent that the telehealth sector needed to develop quality guidelines and regulations. Pakistan lacks a legal framework around telemedicine, which discourages both doctors and patients from using online services.[78] Women doctors reported harassment online, which was a further disincentive for using these platforms.[79] Gynaecologists and professionals from service provider NGOs observed that telehealth regulations for reproductive health care provisions needed to be formulated, noting that helplines were not permitted to offer patients guidance on the use of misoprostol for self-care.[80]

PROTEST

The pandemic struck when healthcare workers were already agitating against planned reforms to partially privatise public health facilities; a move that resulted from a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2019 stipulating cuts to public sector healthcare budgets.[81] The province of Punjab was the first to act on this deal, triggering protests that gained traction in the other provinces. Healthcare workers opposed privatisation, arguing it would make healthcare less accessible to the poor, along with endangering their job security.[82] Regardless, Punjab legislators went ahead and passed the Medical Teaching Institutes (MTI) Reforms Act in March 2020. Paramedical staff, nurses and young doctors formed the Grand Health Alliance (GHA), to mobilise against the new law and the possibility of similar legislation in other provinces.

Street protests took place around Pakistan in response to health providers' concerns related to the pandemic. Police arrested many healthcare providers protesting against lack of PPE in Quetta,[83] while in Lahore doctors of GHA held a sit-in to demand PPE, regular screening of providers, and a risk allowance. The government agreed to a negotiation after two weeks.[84] In Sindh, and elsewhere in the country, doctors alleged that the government had not provided them with adequate safety kits.[85] As one doctor put it, they were being sent to

[72] Ibid.
[73] Faiza Ilyas, "Doctors Demand Strict Enforcement of Lockdown in Sindh," DAWN News, April 18, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1550099/doctors-demand-strict-enforcement-of-lockdown-in-sindh
[74] M. Waqar Bhatti, "Sindh Closes OPDs at Major Public Hospitals Closed for next 15 Days," The News, March 17, 2020. Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/630567-opds-at-large-public-hospitals-closed-for-15-days-in-sindh
[75] "Hospitals Still Treating Those in Need of Urgent Care, OPDs Partially Open," The Express Tribune, April 1, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2189114/1-hospitals-still-treating-need-urgent-care-opds-partially-open
[76] See f.n. 44 (Dr. Azra Ahsan Interview); See f.n. 30 (Dr. Sadia Pal Interview).
[77] Ibid.
[78] See f.n. 29 (Yasmeen Qazi Interview).
[79] Sonia Ashraf, "Even during a Pandemic, Female Doctors Are Facing Harassment," Images, DAWN News, May 4, 2020. Available at: https://images.dawn.com/news/1184941
[80] Ayesha Khan. "Interview with Sana Durvesh," June 2020.
[81] Ammar A. Jan, "How Pakistan's Terrible COVID-19 Response Forced Doctors onto a Hunger Strike," Jacobin, March 5, 2020. Available at: https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/05/pakistan-coronavirus-doctors-protests-hunger-strike-coronavirus
[82] Aamir Yasin, "Grand Health Alliance Calls off Strike against MTI Reforms Act after 10 Days," DAWN News, May 13, 2019. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1481907
[83] Ghalib Nihad and Syed A. Shah, "Police Baton-Charge, Arrest Young Doctors in Quetta during Protest against Lack of PPEs," DAWN News, April 6, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1546921
[84] "Punjab Doctors End Protest after Successful Talks," Pakistan Today, May 2, 2020. Available at: https://issuu.com/pakistantoday-paperazzi/docs/epaper___may_2_lhr_2020
[85] "Sindh's Doctors Decry Lack of Safety Kits in Hospitals," The Express Tribune, April 1, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2189070/1-sindhs-

the frontline to save patients, without PPE, unlike soldiers who are equipped for the battles they must fight.[86] Many doctors and nurses boycotted Out-Patient Departments (OPDs) in protest.[87]

Provider safety concerns heightened in May with attacks on healthcare providers and facilities involved in treating Covid-19 patients. Providers said patients had become more aggressive than usual, risking their safety and worsening the strain.[88] Relatives of a deceased Covid-19 patient attacked a doctor in one of Karachi's main government tertiary care hospitals.[89]

The government hired additional nurses to cope with the emergency in hospitals, but they, too, were forced to protest by staging a sit-in in Karachi when dozens became infected with Covid-19 in May.[90] They continued to protest against inadequate provision of PPEs and irregular salaries during subsequent months, eventually joining a larger protest in Islamabad alongside Lady Health Workers in October.[91]

Lady Health Workers are critical to an effective national response to the pandemic, given their vast outreach in communities and role as front-line primary health care providers. They have a successful history of forming employees' associations to improve their working conditions. Since 2010, LHWs have been staging strikes, sit-ins and filing legal petitions to demand salary raises, integration into the government service structure, and other benefits.[92] During the pandemic, they, too, were sent to the 'frontline' without adequate PPE, with a limited health risk allowance.[93] Their important role in the distribution of contraceptive supplies was severely compromised when supplies ran out, and they were unable to meet the demand in the communities.[94] Finally, during October, they staged a sit-in in front of the National Assembly in Islamabad to demand improvements to their service structure and employment benefits, along with life insurance and greater security during their outreach work. After seven days, the protest ended when the government promised to meet their demands.[95]

Medical students, too, were not spared a spate of unpopular new laws. A surprise federal bill mandated all medical students, to sit for a national license examination that previously had only applied to foreign graduates wishing to practice in Pakistan.[96] This unpopular move, just at a time when medical students were called upon to volunteer their support in hospitals to assist with Covid-19 patients, was ill-timed, with medical experts agreeing that these new regulations would compromise students' overall learning and increase their financial burden.[97] The Young Doctors' Association (YDA) staged street protests against these moves, and students filed a petition against new admissions test announced for medical colleges, which led to its temporary delay in Sindh.[98]

CRAFTING A WOMEN-CENTRED RESPONSE

The above discussion has shown how the pandemic deeply impacted women, their health, and their work in the health sector. The ongoing crisis nonetheless provided opportunities for women's voice and

doctors-decry-lack-safety-kits-hospitals

[86] Aslam Khwaja and Asiya Jawed. "Interview with Dr. Alia Haider," October 2020.

[87] "Health Workers Boycott OPDs, Operation Theatres," The Express Tribune, October 18, 2020. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/2268834/health-workers-boycott-opds-operation-theatres

[88] See f.n. 44 (Dr. Azra Ahsan Interview); See f.n. 30 (Dr. Sadia Pal Interview).

[89] Dr. Taneer Ahmed and Dr. Moomal Nasir, "Coronavirus Updates: Essential Information for Pakistan," Samaa, July 23, 2021. Available at: https://www.samaaenglish.tv/news/1985732

[90] Joy YT Chang, "Pakistan Nurses Boycott Work, Stage Protest for Better Job Conditions during Pandemic," South China Morning Post, May 12, 2020. Available at: https://www.scmp.com/video/coronavirus/3084086/pakistan-nurses-boycott-work-stage-protest-better-working-conditions

[91] "Govt Health Staff Boycotts OPDs in Protest," The Express Tribune, October 14. Available at: 2020, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2268246/govt-health-staff-boycotts-opds-in-protest8

[92] Ayesha Khan, "Lady Health Workers and Social Change in Pakistan," Collective for Social Science Research, Vol. XLVI, Iss. 30 (July 23, 2011): p. 28–31. Available at: https://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/lady_health_workers_in_pakistan.pdf

[93] Aslam Khwaja and Asiya Jawed. "Interview with Halima Leghari," October 2020.

[94] Komal Qidwai. "Interview with Bushra Arain," April 2020.

[95] See f.n. 23 (Navigating Civic Spaces in Pakistan: Baseline Report), p. 13.

[96] "PMC and NLE," DAWN News, September 23, 2020. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1581191

[97] Rahul Basharat, "PMC Likely to Compromise Medical Education Standard by Ending Central Admission Test Policy," The Nation, September 22, 2020. Available at: https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Sep-2020/pmc-likely-to-compromise-medical-education-standard-by-ending-central-admission-test-policy

[98] "YDA Urges Federal Govt to Abolish PMC," The Nation, October 10, 2020. Available at: https://nation.com.pk/10-Oct-2020/yda-urges-federal-govt-to-abolish-pmc; "MDCAT 2020 Cancelled, SHC Orders PMC to Form Academic Board and Authority," GEO News, November 11, 2020. Available at: https://www.geo.tv/latest/318003-mdcat-2020-cancelled-as-shc-orders-pmc-to-form-academic-board-authority

agency to emerge clearly and influence policy. Feminists turned to digital platforms to discuss the implications of the pandemic for women and brainstorm solutions – kicking off a dizzying array of consultations that continue until today. One outcome of the amount of information and discourse generated during the crisis was a successful engagement between the Sindh government and Shirkat Gah, a leading advocacy NGO, to develop a gender-sensitive approach as Covid-19 policies were hastily put together.

Pakistan's National Action Plan for Covid-19 initially had no mention of SRH services.[99] Because health policymaking is actually devolved to the provincial level, civil society groups and service providers from the non-government sector in Sindh worked together with the provincial government to prepare guidelines on maintaining SRH services during the pandemic. Soon, the government developed safety measures to protect healthcare providers and sanitise health facilities.[100] After initial closures, government facilities were mandated to remain open and continue providing family planning counselling, antenatal and postnatal care, and other maternal and child health services. Department of Health facilities were required to ensure a continued supply of contraceptive products and promote the FP2020 POOCHO helpline.[101] All labour rooms were told to have post-partum family planning products and trained providers.[102] Further guidelines for community health workers were developed to ensure their safety and access to contraceptive products for dissemination in their catchment areas.

While the guidelines were indeed comprehensive, the diversion of resources and equipment to Covid-19 patient management undermined effective reproductive health service delivery.[103]

The UNFPA provided technical support to the NDMA on gender and SRH services and worked closely with the population welfare services and health providers to build services and mitigate the risks of GBV.[104] When the first wave of the pandemic began to ease in July, some of the stress on women's access to SRH services also appeared to ease. However, the need for a cohesive and consistent policy response to SRH during disasters was only reinforced when excessive rains led to flooding in many parts of the country during August, and the second wave of the corona pandemic began in earnest in November.

The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women, whose work it is to ensure a rights-based approach to policy and programmes is maintained in keeping with Pakistan's international commitments, worked together with the women's advocacy organisation Shirkat Gah to develop a gender policy framework for managing the impact of Covid-19 on women. It facilitated extensive online consultations with government representatives, non-government organisations, and other experts to share emerging findings from the field and craft an approach that addressed the concerns of women in the areas of education, reproductive health, gender-based violence and economic resilience. A key recommendation was for the government to declare SRH services as 'essential' during any disaster response to ensure that all services, supplies and shelters remain open in any emergency situation. Protection for key health service providers, most of them women based in communities, was also identified as a priority, as was developing guidelines to facilitate safe and effective telehealth services. This recommendation was launched with stakeholders from relevant government and non-government stakeholders together in November, just as hospitals were re-filling to capacity with new Covid-19 patients and new lockdown measures were imminent.[105]

The story of women's sexual and reproductive health in the crosshairs of the new pandemic in Pakistan is still

[99] Ministry of National Health Services Regulations & Coordination, "National Action Plan for Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pakistan" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020). Available at: https://www.nih.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-NAP-V2-13-March-2020.pdf?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=32f912e184a52bdd8311d73552fbbab8298ccb19-1593706212-0-AYRtp-TZ_0odX2dmYw9UBizNgwfhwLKHtCeYqo8-ObvQkALUHfVV58lA_VgPZCTyECaKeJc5csEviWjznz4K3MjHrxln9Amg0haad-extBgTZ0sFPH4ij8bCgjHKjNF7CC7HbqYX6y7KPKUbahPacot4Tdn9WYb9VDu-dVwkQoOEcXHY-7qIhwAPywNvd0kC4I16Po_pJxaI5vBLycljlVEn_85is-JUTVNHAexx8D9Az5xIJFSWV3CZoauK7fIs9L2YFe2APJ12U8_dLGdVuWALDI3Z1Rn1C6FSghV7iYe_52dDASpBZTZ0t33ka-XkC8U2mWHsoxUxiVVEe_C1adarAiA2dR9RjvryTrMbDU4w

[100] Department of Health and Population Welfare Department, "Guidelines on FPRH during COVID-19 in Sindh" (Karachi: Government of Sindh, March 21, 2020). Available at: https://fp2030.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines-FPRH-COVID-19-Sindh-March-2020%5B1%5D.pdf

[101] This helpline was launched in July 2019 in collaboration with the Sindh Department of Health and Greenstar Social Marketing to provide family planning information and counselling to adults and adolescents.

[102] See f.n. 100 (Guidelines on FPRH during COVID-19 in Sindh).

[103] See f.n. 29 (Rahal Saeed); See f.n. 46 (Neha Mankani).

[104] Ibid.

[105] Farida Shaheed, "Rising to the Challenges: Gender-Responsive Policy Options for COVID-19 & Other Emergencies" (Karachi: Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre & Sindh Commission on the Status of Women, 2020).

playing out. This discussion has drawn on reports from around the country to explore how women, as users of services and as healthcare providers used their voices to pressure the government to make rights-based claims during a time of crisis. It has found that activism, from amongst women's groups and Lady Health Workers in particular, led to some level of responsiveness from the government. The pandemic has highlighted the crucial role women play as service providers, yet their employment conditions need significant improvement to ensure job retention, employment security and sufficient protections to carry out their duties safely.

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VISUAL NARRATIVES: THE BESIEGED CITY & WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Rahat Ali Dar

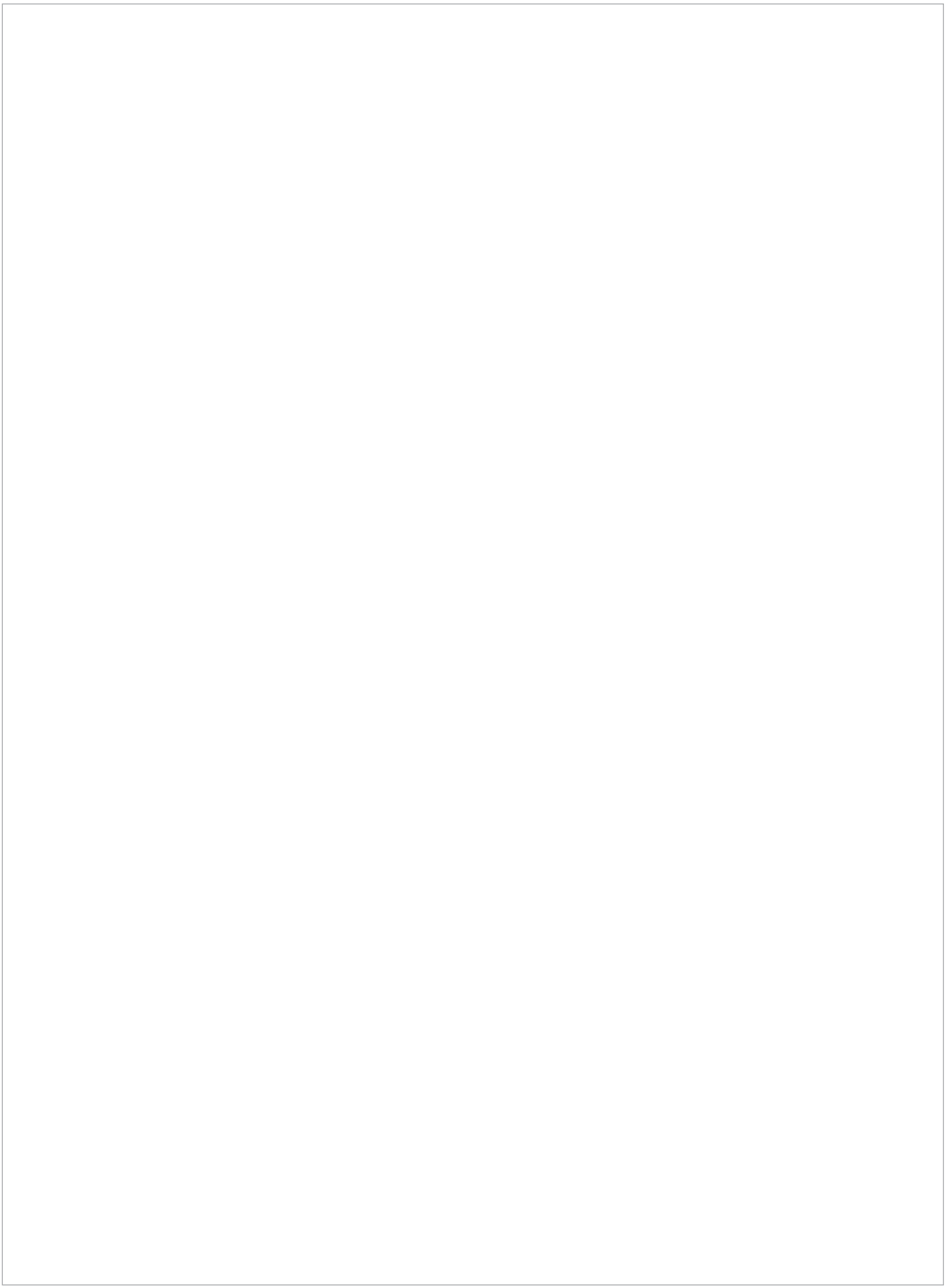
ABSTRACT

One of the primary challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic was the unprecedented economic and employment crisis, particularly pervasive within lower-income marginalized communities where loss of income and livelihood, coupled with the lack of resource access led to communities being subject to abject poverty, health risks and malnutrition. Amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic were domestic workers, who faced a myriad of challenges and vulnerabilities in the face of the pandemic. Overall, the pandemic, and the resultant lockdowns led to job losses, reduced working hours, and wage cuts, and brought to light the impact of ineffective resource allocation, organizational outreach, and gaps in policy making interventions.

Rahat Dar's visual narratives, titled "The Besieged City" and "Women in the Informal Economy" portray empty streets, women and children confined to their homes, and daily wage workers grappling with unemployment; offering an insight into the overlooked, undercompensated, and often perilous labour performed by women, which not only supports their families but also contributes to the nation's economy.

BACKGROUND

A photojournalist, Rahat Ali Dar uses his camera instead of words to tell his tale. Dar began his career as a photojournalist with the daily Siyaasat where he soon made a name for himself. Since then he has worked with some of Pakistan's major newspapers which include Nawa-e-Waqt, The Frontier Post, The Nation and currently, with The News. Other than these he has worked for weeklies such as Viewpoint and Newsline including BBC Urdu. His sense of the newsworthy and ability to be at the right place at the right time has resulted in photographs that capture significant moments of Pakistan's lived history. These include scenes from Benazir Bhutto's processions, police violence at a Women's Action Forum protest and a serial of the Saima Waheed marriage by choice case that resulted in the Supreme Court judgement on the adult woman's right to marriage of choice. Dar's work has been displayed in international art galleries including in India




طیبہ نو
پرنٹرز، پبلشر
پیکجنگ
Dost


STARLET
SHOE PALACE
Style


WAY OUT
5
LAHORE


Sorry for the inconvenience!!!
We request to all of our relatives and neighbours that we are "Isolated" because of "Corona" virus. So don't bother to knock the door it will not be opened.
Note:-
For emergency and important info. contact us on our Phone.#
Thank you!!!


LEO 2467

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK

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