

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Women Empowerment in the Post-Earthquake Recovery Effort in Northern Pakistan

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Empowerment is a popular approach concerning women and development. Empowerment considers gender needs from practical and strategic perspectives. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) emphasizes that for eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women requires that women be appropriately empowered to make decisions relating to their interests. Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996. CEDAW's article 14 caters to the empowerment of rural women by ending discriminatory practices and tendencies and strengthening their societal roles and meeting their needs. Concerning the Pakistan earthquake recovery effort, it was claimed that women were provided with social and economic opportunities so as to empower them in the long-run in terms of inclusion in decision-making processes. This paper explores and discusses adherence to CEDAW's article on women empowerment as part of the recovery effort in general in the Earth Quake Affected Areas (EQAAs). This study adopted a desktop based thematic review of the issues affecting the role of women during the recovery effort by relying on policy documents as well as CEDAW shadow reports and case studies undertaken in the EQAAs. A careful analysis reveals that concerning strengthening the role of women and their empowerment, the recovery effort produced successes and failures. The achievements in terms of socio-economic opportunities concerning women empowerment outweigh the weaknesses. The paper concludes that rural women belonging to the earthquake affected areas will achieve socio-economic outcomes in terms of social emancipation, which will bring them closer to women residing in urban areas.

Keywords: women empowerment, CEDAW, rehabilitation, earthquake-affected areas

The South Asian earthquake (also referred to as Pakistan/Kashmir quake) affected Pakistan and Indian administered Kashmir. It caused massive destruction, the extent of which was comparable to the Asian Tsunami (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Most of the damage occurred in Pakistan administered Kashmir and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The rebuilding and recovery efforts have been ongoing since early 2006.¹ As part of the earthquake response, a gender-based response was formulated, which has remained a hallmark of the Government of Pakistan's (GOP) reconstruction and recovery policy. It is noteworthy that the bulk of the earthquake-affected population (i.e. almost 85%) belonged to rural areas.

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Contribution of Authors

1. The paper is based on Dr. Kashif Saeed Khan's original work, from conceptualization to writing the paper.
2. The second author has contributed towards methodology and literature review sections and general improvement and editing of the paper.

¹ The earthquake recovery effort consisted of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. The relief phase lasted until June 2006, while rehabilitation phase lasted till Mid-2007, and the long-term reconstruction phase started July 2007 onwards (Source: Khan *et al.*, 2015).

This paper explores gender empowerment with a focus on the post-quake recovery and reconstruction responses. The study carries out an analysis of the earthquake response in relation to CEDAW's guidelines² on rural women empowerment (Article 14). ERRA³ claimed that gender-based programming has been a key pillar of its long-term recovery and reconstruction strategy (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996 (UN, 2007). While analyzing the role of women empowerment, the study focuses on the observations of the shadow reports presented to CEDAW committee on gender empowerment as well as related literature and case studies.



Map 1: 8th October 2005 earthquake affected area (Source: Pakistanquake.com)

The South Asian earthquake, which is also known as the Pakistan earthquake, struck on the morning of 8th October 2005 at 03:50 universal standard time (Refer to Map. 1). It was the strongest earthquake that affected the region since the "Great Kashmir quake" of the 16th century. The earthquake caused extensive damage and the Earth Quake Affected Area spanned large sections in Pakistan administered Kashmir and North-Eastern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Khan *et al.*, 2015). The quake led to around 82,000 fatalities, over a hundred thousand people were injured, and almost 2.8 Million people were made homeless (WB, 2005).

Research Questions

Concerning rural women empowerment the paper explores gendered dimensions of the earthquake response, and aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) Firstly, it assesses the role of women in the EQAAs by examining efforts undertaken for women empowerment during the recovery effort.
- 2) Secondly, it examines shadow reports on challenges faced by women in the EQAAs.
- 3) Thirdly, it explores case studies associated with women empowerment projects in the EQAAs.

² United Nations General Assembly adopted CEDAW in 1979. As an international treaty, CEDAW is ratified by more than 189 states. Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

³ The Government of Pakistan established the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) to take up recovery and reconstruction in the earthquake affected regions. Source: <http://www.erra.pk/aboutus/erra.asp#EA>

Methods

This study also assesses objections raised over gender considerations by the CEDAW committee and shadow reports. The study carried out a desktop based thematic review of the issues affecting the role of women during the recovery effort. Policy documents including CEDAW shadow reports⁴ and case studies undertaken in the EQAAs were thoroughly reviewed. Furthermore, case studies conducted on the effectiveness of women empowerment interventions in the EQAAs were reviewed, in order to assess whether gendered considerations remained a key pillar of the earthquake reconstruction effort. The case study approach as a unit of analysis is deemed useful in gauging the opinions and perceptions of respondents and key informants affected by natural and man-made disasters (Turton, 2001).

Case studies⁵ pertaining to social constructions and societal problems are viewed as central tools in developing understanding of contested issues and processes associated with the role of power and human agency. Case studies, according to Gerring (2004: 342), are defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of generalizing across a larger class of similar units e.g. a nation state, revolution...at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time.” The justification for using a case-study approach is to be better placed in investigating several phenomena associated with social science research. These include the complexity of contested development narratives that revolve around interests of different actors; the interests of the communities affected by disasters; as well as, government, community, aid and reconstruction workers and policy makers. Many famed causal relationship studies in disciplines like political science and sociology amongst others have successfully applied the case study approach (Gerring, 2004: 347).

Moreover, case studies enable researchers to analyse processes going on for extended periods of time (Bryman, 2004). It is for this very reason that this paper reviews existing case studies carried out on the EQAAs in relation to gendered dimensions of the earthquake response. Together with the shadow report assessments and case study reviews of women empowerment projects, the study carries out a rigorous analysis of the dynamics and processes involved in women empowerment and gendered dimensions of the earthquake response.

Gender Empowerment and issues affecting CEDAW’s implementation in Pakistan

Gender empowerment is “conceived as a process by which women can overcome many of the hurdles that they face including education, work status, employment opportunities, health care, social security, position in decision making by virtue of their gender” (GOI, 2007: 193). The Human Development Report (1995) relates *empowerment to participation*. Oxfam (1995) defines empowerment as being able to challenge existing oppressions and inequalities in society.

The rise of the term ‘Gender Empowerment’ can be primarily attributed to its usage and adherence by developmental agencies and organisations. Moreover, development is a growing phenomenon; the term empowerment in development is indicative of recent efforts to question the efficacy of the role of the state, and donor governments and multilateral funding agencies in carrying out interventions through NGOs, who are deemed partners in development (Oxaal & Baden, 1997: 3).

⁴ NGOs working on Gender women empowerment submit country shadow reports to CEDAW Committee, which holds meetings with NGOs and question the efforts of member states in relation to the measures that have been taken for ending discrimination against women. Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/ngo/cedawngo>

⁵ Ragin (1992: 2) defines case studies as: “an analysis of social phenomena specific to time and place”.

Gender empowerment involves actions and initiatives for enhancing the capacities and capabilities of vulnerable and oppressed segments of society. Gender empowerment is “*seen to be promoted through increasing women’s decision making powers, support of income generating activities and provision of skills and education to women*” (Oxaal & Baden, 1997: 11).

CEDAW was adopted as a bill of rights for women in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It defines *what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination*.⁶ Pakistan ratified CEDAW on 12th April 1996. The accession was accompanied with a declaration of reservations to Paragraph 1 of Article 29.⁷ In Pakistan the Ministry of Women Development is the national focal point implementation of CEDAW. Pakistan presented a combined initial, second and third periodic report to the CEDAW committee, at the 38th session in May 2007.⁸ Nationally, the report was examined by the Ministry of Women Development and *Shirkat Gah*, which is a leading women rights NGO in Pakistan.

Article 14 (Status of Rural Women)

CEDAW’s article 14 articulates a detailed position on the empowerment of rural women. It states that “*state parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy.*”

Furthermore, Article 14 presents a detailed set of services whose provision for rural women has to be ensured, in order for them “to participate in and benefit from rural development” (UN, 2007: 1). In generic terms, a majority of the global population, almost two thirds, resides in rural areas. Since independence, Pakistan has experienced rural-urban migration, and it is estimated that almost two-thirds Pakistanis reside in rural areas; as such, rural women constitute two-thirds of the population, which is also the case in the EQAAs. Moreover, CEDAW stipulates that rural women must be sufficiently involved in the *implementation of development planning at all levels*. The provision of “adequate health care facilities, and services in family planning, all types of training and education, adequate living conditions, particularly concerning housing, sanitation, electricity, and access to agricultural credit and loans be ensured” (UN, 2007: 1).

Analysing women empowerment initiatives during the recovery effort in EQAAs

Objections by Shadow reports and CEDAW’s Committees on the rehabilitation effort and the plight of women

From a gender-based quake response perspective, the CEDAW committee pointed out the following questions in the Pakistan country report (2005):

“Please indicate whether the Government has assessed the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance given to victims from a gender perspective and whether the Government has developed a framework for delivery of gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance.”⁹

⁶ CEDAW, Overview of the convention, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw>

⁷ CEDAW, 38th Session Pakistan, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN>

⁸ CEDAW, 38th Session Pakistan, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN>

⁹ CEDAW 38th Session, “List of issues and questions concerning the consideration of the initial and periodic report Pakistan”. <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/555/23/PDF/N0655523.pdf?OpenElement>

The Government of Pakistan's (GoP) response to the queries admitted that there had been lapses of gender sensitivity because of the urgency of the response and scale of damage that had taken place because of the earthquake. The GoP also noted that a long-term gendered response focusing on vulnerability and marginalisation of women had been drawn up and implemented. The shadow report identified the lapses that affected GoP response concerning gendered dimensions that stemmed from various issues, including the geographic scope and the massive scale of the response. Moreover, response agencies including line departments in the area had inadequate response capacities before the onset of the disaster.

Furthermore, the second shadow report prepared by Shirkat Gah on the plight of women in the EQAAs explicitly points to the flaws in the response mechanism, based on Article 14. It questions whether the lessons of gender-specific needs identified have been effectively incorporated into government directives, policies etc. (Shirkat Gah, 2007). It also determines the lack of women's mobility as well as their failure to hold National Identity Cards (NICs), which significantly restricted acquiring compensation, relief goods and medical assistance. Moreover, the exclusion of women from the relief camp management process and the lack of land ownership documentation, restricted widows from inheriting their husbands' property (Shirkat Gah, 2007). Likewise, the reports identified societal constraints and restrictions such as limited mobility and failure to register NICs by female guardians and female household heads as critical factors that affected gender considerations and women empowerment during the earthquake response. On the contrary ERRA claimed that its response and recovery strategy sufficiently included gender sensitivity. Moreover, they had made every possible effort to include women in the recovery effort.

Assessing inclusion of rural women in the EQAAs response

The earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction effort was the most significant relief effort carried out in Pakistan's history (Khan *et al.*, 2015). The initial EQAA response lacked "gender sensitivity;" however, a gender policy was formulated as part of the long-term effort with a delay of around two years from the date the disaster occurred (Khan *et al.*, 2015). This delay was unwarranted and considerable since the rehabilitation phase was supposed to last for six months after the onset of the earthquake. The gender policy served as a guidance framework for the EQAA relief agencies, and it incorporated issues about CEDAW's sensitivities on rural women. Other than the delay in formulating a long-term gender policy, unavailability of disaggregated gender wise data relating to sectoral interventions led to a lack of clarity of the gendered needs of the affected population (ERRA, 2007b). Lack of data on gender highlights the fact that in spite of the massive scale of the relief effort, adherence to gender sensitivity has not been practised during the intermediate phases. The relief effort has had a profound impact on most vulnerable communities and segments of the society in the EQAAs. Since women form the most vulnerable group, they were supposed to be the primary beneficiaries of the revival effort that includes livelihoods, vocational training, and provision of credits and cash grants. A social protection strategy was also devised to support the most vulnerable groups. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the roles of women were transformed, since in many instances, because of the loss of the male partners, women became household heads, which was a transition from their earlier positions as homemakers and caregivers (ERRA, 2006).

Table 1*Grants and Credits provision in EQAAs*

	Males	Females	Total
LSCG ERRA	193,400	67,600	260,000
Khushali Bank Loans	27,032	609	27,641

(Source: ERRA)

Out of a total 260,000 livelihood revival grants (5.21 Billion PKR), women beneficiaries received 26% of the total grants (Table 1). Rural credit was provided by Khushali Bank to 22% women, out of a total 27,641 recipients. The livelihood support cash grant (LSCG) program was further extended for an additional six months for extremely vulnerable groups that included women headed families (ERRA, 2007a). Apart from short-term support, the program also sought to rejuvenate economic activity by the revival of small businesses and replacement of livestock and agricultural assets. In all, seventy-eight women-based livelihood projects, seventy-seven education sector and sixty-two health-based initiatives were implemented in the EQAA (Table 2) (ERRA, 2007a).

Table 2*Exclusive Female Based Projects implemented in EQAAs*

Livelihoods	78
Education	77
Health	62

(Source: ERRA Gender policy for Earth Quake Affected Areas)

Case Studies of efficient “women empowerment projects” carried out in the EQAAs

Many "gender empowerment" projects were implemented in the EQAAs. However, we have been unable to get a clearer picture of ERRA's projects database since the Development Assistance Database (DAD) was only accessible to agencies directly involved in the recovery effort. However, some case studies relating to women empowerment in the earthquake affected areas were carried out. These studies outline and identify different issues; these included how in certain instances issues affected access and control over resources and how community roles were augmented through these interventions.

One such project titled “Negotiating Cultural Roles, Power Patterns through an Incentive Approach” was implemented by Sungi, a reputed Pakistani NGO (ISDR, 2007). It was funded by NORAD and implemented in the districts of Mansehra and Battagram. This initiative achieved considerable success in terms of women participation, and it was one of the success stories, duly highlighted in the annual report of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).¹⁰ The project sought women participation as a prerequisite for development-oriented support from relief agencies. As part of the initiative, female “field coordinators” belonging to the area established village committees comprising of women and men, who identified post-disaster needs, as well as vulnerabilities and risks. The assumptions behind this intervention include that it involves local community members in policy dialogues and empowers them in relation to

¹⁰ Ismaili Mail 2006, “PAKISTAN: Quake offers a window of opportunity for women empowerment”. Accessed: 30/01/2016

taking responsibility for encouraging women to participate in community affairs (ISDR, 2007). This eased gender relations frictions that prevailed in these conservative areas. Thus, men no longer opposed women's participation, which is a mandatory requirement for this program. The central assumption behind the program included negotiating cultural roles and power patterns, so that women empowerment is achieved in male-dominated cultures, through participatory processes. The project by Sungi also took into account local cultural sensitivities through the involvement of local people as project focal persons. These individuals were well versed with local norms and cultures. The outcomes of the initiative were judged by women participation in each village and their relative empowerment as compared to areas where there had been no participation. The results were quite favourable since the program operated successfully in two districts. It is a good example of how women can address their practical gender needs by working to improve their strategic gender needs in a relatively short period.

It needs to be noted that, projects run by the other national NGOs and semi-government organizations addressed immediate concerns of communities without incorporating gender mainstreaming strategies (Christian Michelsen Institute - CMI, 2006). A project that largely applied conventional gender empowerment approaches without influencing strategic gender needs and gendered relations was the Rapid Income Support through Employment (RISE) implemented by ILO in Balakot. The project injected cash flows into the rural economy by paying workers each day and providing work opportunities (ILO-RISE, 2007). It employed 869 women, out of 6,342 individuals. Hence, while the project was quite successful, it did not actively empower women by enabling them to have a greater say in community initiatives. Thus, even though it met practical gender needs of communities, the project did not adequately focus upon community roles and strategic perspectives in the long run.

This shows that there were significant disparities in case of gender-sensitive initiatives across districts in the EQAA. To remove geographical disparities between districts and for scrupulous adherence to CEDAW's guidelines on empowerment of rural women, it would have been desirable to initiate at least one project for economic empowerment of women in each district. Since the relatively remote northern districts i.e. Kohistan and Shangla, were having insignificant social (health and education) services and should have been appropriately covered during the earthquake response. Moreover, no new girls schools were built in these districts, which is a blatant violation of clause 2d (Article 14 CEDAW) that seeks *provision of all types of training and education to women* (ERRA 2007a). During the relief phase, a large number of NGOs were carrying out gender and women service projects. Since the relief and medium-term reconstruction phase was completed, it would have been more suitable to only allow specialised NGOs with proven experience in gender services to be associated with continued revival process, which was not the case.

Conclusion

This study analysed the earthquake response process from the perspective of rural women empowerment (Article 14 CEDAW). Article 14 provides a framework for ending discriminatory tendencies and practices towards rural women by seeking their empowerment through strengthening their roles and meeting socio-economic needs amongst others. The Pakistan earthquake response has been relatively effective considering that Pakistan is a developing country and the affected region was extremely remote. Being the most affected group, women have benefited in many instances from this process; however, there are some exceptions. Having said so, the reconstruction effort has entailed mixed results from a gender sensitive and geographical perspective. Although being the most vulnerable and stressed group, women have benefited

inequitably (ERRA, 2007a). This is in non-conformity with Article 14 clause 2, which stresses upon eliminating discrimination *by equality of men and women*. However, it is worth mentioning that the results are better than the trends for the rest of the country. During this study, we were unable to find quantifiable disaggregated gender wise data for different social sector interventions. This study, therefore, recommends that in future post-disaster responses need to ensure increased efficiency and accountability in terms of meeting gendered needs. Moreover, project efficiency should be gauged in terms of gender-sensitive indicators, spanning across and within ethnic and class-based groups.

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Received: Sept 20, 2018
Revisions Received: April 15, 2019