



**WOMEN BUILDING
PEACE TOGETHER**



TRAINING PROGRAM
FOR WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS IN PAKISTAN



Lead Author:

Sonal Dhanani

Founder, Parindey Wellbeing & Development Foundation

Co-Authors:

The 19 Fellows of Jaari – Women Building Peace Fellowship (Cohort II)

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SONAL DHANANI
CEO & FOUNDER



MARYAM SHAKEEL
RAWALPINDI



NEHA ISHAQ
QUETTA



RUKHSAR KHAN
HYDERABAD



NOOR ZAHRA
MULTAN



HINA HUSSAIN
SWAT



MAHAN ASLAM
TURBAT



AYESHA ASLAM
KARACHI



NASIM WALI
CHITRAL



ROMASA JAVED
HYDERABAD



KANEEZ FATIMA
LAHORE



MADIHA BURIRO
BHAN SAEEDABAD



MARIUM SHEIKH
KARACHI



SEEMAK ABDI KHAN
KARACHI



ANILA YOUSUF
GAWADAR



KANEEZ FATIMA J.
KARACHI



TAYYABA ATIQ
GUJRANWALA



NEHA
HYDERABAD



SHADIA RAZA
GILGIT BALTISTAN



DR. SADYA SALAR
LAHORE

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ENGAGING WOMEN IN SUSTAINING PEACE IN PAKISTAN

1. Executive Summary

Women in Pakistan have always been central to peacebuilding whether through preserving everyday community harmony, mediating neighborhood disputes, responding to natural disasters, or resisting systemic injustices. From the women of Lyari who organized local peace committees during gang wars, to Hazara mothers in Quetta who turned grief into public protest against sectarian killings, to fisherfolk women of Sindh who resist ecological displacement, women have carried the invisible weight of conflict and survival. Yet, their contributions have been systematically overlooked, undervalued, and erased from formal peace processes.

Despite Pakistan's commitments under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, women remain largely absent in official policy spaces such as the National Action Plan (NAP) on Counter-Terrorism, provincial peace committees, or disaster management bodies. Where they do appear, their participation is often tokenistic invited for symbolic visibility rather than empowered to shape policy or redistribute power. This exclusion has resulted in peace processes that are incomplete, unsustainable, and blind to the very communities most impacted by violence.



The Jaari – Women Building Peace Fellowship (Cohort II) responds directly to this gap. Between May and August 2025, 19 women peacebuilders from across Pakistan came together to critically interrogate patriarchy, trauma, and systemic inequities, while co-creating new feminist frameworks for peacebuilding. Through seven virtual sessions, the drafting of a feminist policy paper, and a four-day in-person retreat, they built skills, shared experiences. They produced actionable strategies to center equity in Pakistan's peace landscape.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FELLOWSHIP INCLUDE:

- **Critical Dialogues:** Fellows explored equity in peacebuilding, trauma-informed approaches, inclusive processes, global case studies, and advocacy tools, drawing direct connections to local Pakistani realities such as climate displacement, sectarian violence, and digital harassment.
- **Policy Innovation:** Fellows co-authored a **feminist policy paper** that articulated four guiding principles of equity in peacebuilding: Inclusive, Historically Rooted, Avoid Harm, and Small is Powerful, grounded in case studies from across Pakistan.
- **Cross-Border Solidarity:** A dialogue with Afghan women peacebuilders highlighted shared struggles under extremism and patriarchy, emphasizing the need for regional feminist solidarity.
- **Healing and Visioning:** The four-day retreat at Mera Maan became a living laboratory of equity, where fellows engaged in healing-centered practices, feminist negotiation workshops, cultural evenings, and dialogue with the Women Parliamentary Caucus, bridging grassroots insights with national policymaking.



2. Conflict Resolution through Equity-Centered Dialogues

Jaari Cohort II began with a series of **virtual dialogues** designed to move beyond technical frameworks and toward lived realities of women in conflict.

- **Foundations of Equity in Peacebuilding** sessions unpacked how systemic barriers—patriarchy, feudalism, class, and geography create unequal access to decision-making. Fellows reflected on contexts like **Balochistan**, where women peace activists face compounded marginalization, and **Karachi's Lyari**, where women often mediate gang-related tensions without recognition.
- In **Trauma-Informed Approaches**, participants shared experiences of climate-induced displacement in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, recognizing that healing is a precondition for sustainable peace. Fellows emphasized that self-care practices and community wellbeing circles must be integrated into all forms of peacebuilding.
- **Cross-Border Solidarity** dialogues with Afghan women underscored the shared costs of war and extremism. Fellows drew parallels between Afghan women's struggles under Taliban restrictions and Pakistani women's daily negotiations with conservative power structures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and South Punjab.



3. Deconstructing Power and Patriarchy

Building equity in peacebuilding demands a direct confrontation with Pakistan's entrenched patriarchal structures. For centuries, women's roles have been minimized or erased from official histories. From the trauma of Partition in 1947, where women bore violence, displacement, and survival, to the "War on Terror," where they emerged as silent caregivers in conflict zones like FATA, women's contributions have been acknowledged only in private, never in policy.

Jaari's Cohort II discussions revealed how patriarchy operates not only in formal institutions but within homes, communities, and even activist spaces.

"We cannot talk of peace while ignoring the structural violence in our own homes." — Jaari Fellow, Quetta

This reflection shaped their approach to policy recommendations. Fellows emphasized that equity cannot be symbolic—it requires redistributing power in ways that challenge who gets to define "peace" and whose experiences are silenced.



Case Study: Hazara Women in Quetta

Hazara women, living under the constant threat of sectarian violence, often act as first responders during crises organizing funerals, arranging security for schools, or negotiating safe passage for community members. Yet they are absent from policy tables on security. Fellows argued that this invisibility is not accidental but the product of patriarchal and ethnic exclusion, where their resilience is commodified but not recognized.

Patriarchy in Peacebuilding (Pakistan)

- Erasure in History (Partition, 1971 War, War on Terror)⁷
- Absence in Policy (NAP, DDR processes)
- Everyday Violence (Domestic abuse, harassment, mobility restrictions)
- Resistance (Grassroots women-led mediations, cultural resilience)

4. Inclusive Peace Processes and Marginalized Voices

Sessions on inclusive peace processes emphasized the urgent need to expand representation. Fellows studied the absence of women in Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) on countering terrorism, and critiqued how policies on extremism or climate often exclude the voices of women, youth, and sexual minorities.

They envisioned more inclusive processes where fisherfolk women from Sindh, Hazara women from Quetta, and Christian sanitation workers from Punjab could sit at the table—not as token participants but as shapers of national strategy.



Case Studies

- **Fisherfolk Women in Sindh:** Facing forced migration due to rising sea levels, fisherfolk women often negotiate daily survival. Yet they remain excluded from water governance decisions dominated by bureaucrats and landlords.
- **Christian Sanitation Workers in Punjab:** As frontline responders in public health crises, Christian women workers sustain communities under conditions of deep caste and religious discrimination. Fellows argued that peace cannot be imagined without acknowledging their dignity and agency.
- **Hazara Women of Quetta:** Repeatedly excluded from provincial security dialogues, they represent the stark contradiction of Pakistani policy—where the most vulnerable are left unheard.

“Inclusive peace means building a table where marginalized voices set the agenda, not just fill the seats.” — Jaari Fellow, Karachi

5. Principles of Equity in Peacebuilding

Equity is not a vague ideal in peacebuilding; it is a necessary condition for sustainable transformation. In Pakistan, inequities are layered—across gender, class, ethnicity, geography, and religion—and women's experiences of conflict are shaped by these overlapping structures. Peacebuilding initiatives have often relied on the rhetoric of “inclusion,” but inclusion without equity risks tokenism. **Jaari Cohort II reframed the conversation by articulating a feminist understanding of equity that is practical, historical, and transformative.**



The Limitations of Current Peacebuilding Frameworks in Pakistan

Although Pakistan has been part of global conversations on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), there is little translation into national or provincial policy. Women are mostly absent from:

- **Counter-terrorism frameworks** such as the National Action Plan.
- **Disaster management strategies**, despite their frontline role during floods and displacement.
- **Conflict mediation forums**, dominated by tribal elders and male elites.

This exclusion results in peacebuilding that often reinforces inequities rather than dismantling them. For instance, after the 2009 Swat operation, women's concerns on displacement, trauma, and livelihood were not represented in rehabilitation plans. Similarly, fisherfolk women in Sindh rarely appear in consultations around river and delta governance, despite carrying the brunt of water scarcity and forced migration.

Jaari's Principles of Equity

During Cohort II, fellows co-authored a **feminist policy paper** in which they identified **four guiding principles of equity in peacebuilding**.

1. Inclusive: Equity requires meaningful engagement with perspectives that differ from dominant voices. In Pakistan, this means ensuring that Hazara women from Quetta, Christian domestic workers in Punjab, and fisherfolk women from Sindh are not merely “consulted” but recognized as knowledge-bearers. One fellow observed: “Peace is incomplete when only elite women sit at the table.”

2. Historically Rooted: Equity must acknowledge Pakistan's histories of violence and resilience—from Partition to the War on Terror to the 2022 floods. Ignoring these histories produces solutions that are ahistorical and unsustainable. Fellows stressed that intergenerational memory is crucial: mothers who survived sectarian violence in the 1980s carry lessons for daughters negotiating identity today.

3. Avoid Harm: Peace interventions can unintentionally reinforce inequalities. For example, donor-funded livelihood programs in Balochistan often empower men with capital while women's economic labor remains invisible. Equity demands that peace strategies are evaluated not only for what they achieve but also for whose burdens they shift.

4. Small is Powerful: Fellows insisted that small-scale collective action can spark systemic change. One fellow shared the story of women in Lyari who began meeting weekly in their homes to share poetry about violence and resilience. This circle eventually became a local movement against gang violence, proving that peace emerges from small, consistent acts of solidarity.

6. Equity in Practice – Examples from Pakistan

- **Climate Justice:** During the 2022 floods, women in Sindh and South Punjab acted as first responders, creating informal relief networks. Equity requires formalizing and resourcing these women's efforts instead of sidelining them in official planning.
- **Digital Spaces:** Women's safety online has become critical. Fellows linked equity to digital rights, ensuring women peacebuilders are not silenced by harassment. One policy paper recommendation was to integrate feminist digital literacy into peacebuilding toolkits.
- **Cultural Healing:** Fellows argued that equity also means recognizing cultural practices, songs, storytelling, and embroidery as legitimate forms of peace work, not just "soft" or secondary activities.



7. Challenges to Equity

- **Patriarchal Resistance:** Male-dominated spaces often treat women's leadership as threatening.
- **Urban-Rural Divide:** Programs in major cities rarely reach rural districts where conflict is acute.
- **Donor Agendas:** International frameworks often impose priorities that do not reflect local realities.



8. Building Capacity for Women Peacebuilders in Pakistan

- While women have historically contributed to Pakistan's peace and resilience from mediating local disputes to leading humanitarian response they rarely receive recognition, resources, or institutional support. Building capacity for women peacebuilders is not just about training; it is about addressing **structural barriers, redistributing resources, and equipping women with tools to navigate hostile environments.**



Why Capacity-Building is Essential

- **Security Context:** Women activists face harassment, surveillance, and threats, both online and offline. Without safety strategies, their participation is limited.
- **Policy Exclusion:** Women are largely absent in policymaking—whether on counter-extremism, climate governance, or justice reform.
- **Trauma Burdens:** Women peacebuilders often carry personal and collective trauma, with little access to psychosocial support.
- **Resource Gaps:** Grassroots women leaders lack access to funding, networks, and peacebuilding platforms.



Current Gaps in Pakistan

- Women are underrepresented in the **National Commission on Human Rights** and provincial peace committees.
- In local jirgas or panchayats, women rarely have a seat, and when they do, it is symbolic.
- Civil society organizations led by women often struggle to meet donor compliance demands, excluding them from large-scale funding.



How to Build Capacity – A Multi-Level Framework

1. Individual Level
2. Community Level
3. Institutional Level
4. International And Donor Level

1. Individual Level

- **Trauma Healing & Resilience Training:** Fellows emphasized the need for integrating trauma-informed approaches into every peace training. Healing is not secondary it is foundational.
- **Leadership & Negotiation Skills:** Capacity-building should focus on feminist negotiation, adaptive leadership, and systems thinking—skills Jaari fellows practiced in their retreat.
- **Digital Safety & Advocacy:** Equipping women with tools to counter online harassment and leverage digital platforms for advocacy.

2. Community Level

- **Local Women's Peace Circles:** Building small, safe community spaces where women can share experiences, plan collective action, and mentor each other.
- **Interfaith Dialogues:** Encouraging women to lead cross-faith community initiatives, particularly in regions like Quetta and Karachi where religious tension persists.
- **Economic Empowerment Linked to Peace:** Supporting women-led cooperatives, where livelihood and peacebuilding are integrated (e.g., Sindhi craftswomen using Ajrak weaving as both cultural preservation and dialogue).

3. Institutional Level

- **Gender Quotas in Peace Committees:** Mandating meaningful not token representation of women at provincial and national peace forums.
- **Feminist Policy Labs:** Creating spaces where women peacebuilders co-develop policy with parliamentarians and civil servants.
- **Mentorship Networks:** Linking grassroots fellows to established leaders for sustained guidance.

4. International & Donor Level

- **Flexible Funding:** Donors must provide small grants accessible to grassroots groups without heavy compliance barriers.
- **Cross-Border Networks:** Strengthening regional solidarity, as Jaari did by engaging Afghan women peacebuilders.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Encouraging South-South exchanges where Pakistani women learn from peers in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and beyond.



INDIVIDUAL
LEVEL



COMMUNITY
LEVEL



INSTITUTIONAL
LEVEL



INTERNATIONAL
AND DONOR
LEVEL

9. Lessons from Jaari Fellows

- Fellows highlighted that **capacity is not just skills—it is also confidence.** One participant from KP said: *“For the first time, I saw myself as a leader, not just an activist.”*
- The feminist policy paper itself was an act of capacity-building—training fellows to articulate principles, analyze systemic issues, and present them to the Women Parliamentary Caucus.
- The retreat’s cultural solidarity—through poetry, song, and storytelling—reinforced that emotional and cultural capacities are as critical as technical ones.



Practical Roadmap for Pakistan

- Establish **Provincial Women’s Peace Hubs** linked to local government.
- Integrate **trauma healing** modules into all national peace training.
- Expand **mentorship and fellowship programs** beyond elite urban spaces into rural and conflict-affected areas.
- Institutionalize **dialogues between grassroots women and parliamentary caucuses.**
- Encourage **arts and storytelling as peacebuilding tools**, validating non-traditional methods.

10. Recommendations for Equity-Grounded Peacebuilding in Pakistan

Based on the fellowship's outcomes, Jaari offers the following recommendations:

- **Mainstream Feminist Principles into National Peace Policies:**

Incorporate equity principles into frameworks like NAP and disaster response strategies.

- **Create Safe & Healing-Centered Spaces Nationwide:** Establish community wellbeing circles to address trauma as a prerequisite for peace.

- **Invest in Local Women Leaders:** Provide resources for grassroots peacebuilders, especially in conflict-affected or climate-impacted regions.

- **Ensure Intersectional Representation:** Mandate participation of women from minority and marginalized groups in peace and policy dialogues.

- **Strengthen Cross-Border Women's Networks:** Facilitate regional solidarity (Pakistan, Afghanistan, South Asia) to counter shared challenges of extremism and patriarchy.

11. Conclusion

Jaari Cohort II demonstrates that when women lead peacebuilding, they do so not only with strategy but with empathy, memory, and justice. Their principles of equity remind us that peace in Pakistan cannot be imagined without women's voices at its center. As Parindey moves forward, this publication is both a record and a call to embed equity, healing, and feminist leadership into every layer of Pakistan's peacebuilding landscape.



Authorship Note

This publication is the result of collective reflection, dialogue, and policy innovation by the Jaari Cohort II fellows. While the framing and synthesis have been led by Sonal Dhanani, the insights, principles, and case studies emerge from the lived experiences and co-created knowledge of the fellows.

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