
AJK Women and ‘Strategic Peacebuilding’ in Kashmir



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Dr Shaheen Akhtar*

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For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.

— Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General,
24 October 2000.

In war torn societies, women often keep societies going... We must ensure that women are enabled to play a full part in peace negotiations, in peace processes, in peace missions.

-Kofi Annan

Introduction

The protracted conflict over Kashmir has deeply affected the lives of women on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC), though in varied manners. The women in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) are not living in a conflict zone but have experienced direct and indirect impact of the wider Kashmir conflict. Women from the divided families, those living with their families along the long strip of the LoC and post-1990 refugee women have directly experienced the effects of the Kashmir conflict, ranging from losing lives to coping with displacement, psychological trauma and economic hardships. On the other hand, women living in the conflict zone of Kashmir have borne the brunt of the conflict, and abused invariably due to their vulnerability and powerlessness. Many lost their friends and relatives, got dislocated, rendered widows or ‘half widows’ as their husbands ‘disappeared’ indefinitely. Nonetheless, they have showed resilience and have started making positive contribution to social reconstruction and rehabilitation.

* Dr Shaheen Akhtar is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Regional Studies. She specializes in regional stability, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; human security- water, energy and gender issues in the region.

While women have been profoundly affected by the Kashmir conflict, their narrative, voices and role is missing in any dialogue or peacebuilding processes in Kashmir. There has hardly been any gender-sensitive analysis of the Kashmir conflict as to how it has affected the lives of women, their security, socio-economic development and wellbeing, educational attainments and what are their perspectives on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Kashmir, and what role they can play in building bridges in and across Kashmir. The paper argues that the AJK women are an important civil society actor and a major stakeholder in strategic peacebuilding and can play a critical role in transforming the Kashmir conflict. Hence, their perspectives and potential role should not be ignored in the dialogue and peacebuilding processes in Kashmir. Within this context, there is a strong linkage between socio-legal, economic and political status of women and their role in peacebuilding.

The study explores how gender is located in a protracted conflict like Kashmir; how the Kashmir conflict is affecting the lives of women in AJK and what role they can play in strategic peacebuilding in Kashmir. Using ‘strategic peacebuilding’ framework it looks at the role and capacity of AJK women in conflict transformation and peacebuilding in Kashmir. It addresses questions such as what is the existing legal framework for women rights in AJK? What is the relationship between strengthening gender-sensitive legal framework in terms of socio-legal, economic and political empowerment of AJK women and peacebuilding? How women can bridge divides within and across the LoC? How AJK women view cross-LoC confidence-building measures (CBMs) and how can they be involved in cross-LoC dialogue processes? What steps can be taken to strengthen X-LoC women dialogue? What are the constraints on AJK women and what steps can be taken to bring AJK women agency into play in peacebuilding?

Gender and ‘strategic peacebuilding’ approach

Peacebuilding generally encompasses other terms such as conflict resolution, management, mitigation, prevention, or transformation. The debate on peacebuilding focuses on how issues relating to conflict, violence and peace should be approached. Whether conflict is to be managed, mitigated, negotiated, mediated, resolved, prevented or transformed? Whether peace is to be kept, made or built? Whether the objective of peacebuilding should be limited to ending direct violence or addressing structural violence as well? And finally what type of activities peacebuilding should include? Some argue it should be democratization, reconstruction, reintegration of soldiers,⁽¹⁾ while others stress the need for long-term development work —

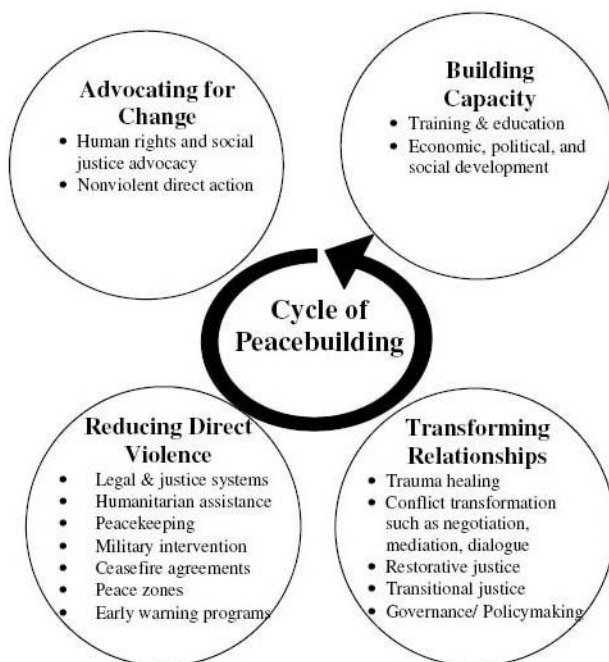
“building up local capacities, strengthening civil society, restoring essential infrastructure and commercial relations.”⁽²⁾ The term peacebuilding is now increasingly used to cover many different activities that “non-violently prevent, limit, resolve, or transform conflict, and create peaceful and just societies.”⁽³⁾

Compared to generic peacebuilding, Lisa Schirch advocates “strategic peacebuilding” that “seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time it empowers people to foster relationships that sustain people and environment.”⁽⁴⁾ She argues peacebuilding is “strategic when resources, actors, and approaches are coordinated to accomplish multiple goals and address multiple issues for the long term.”⁽⁵⁾ Strategic peacebuilding requires a range of approaches involving several actors that are engaged in multiple categories of peacebuilding that create a cycle of peacebuilding. The objective is to initiate a process of building relationships and institutions that support the peaceful transformation of conflict. The four categories of peacebuilding cycle comprise advocating change, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships and building capacity.

- a) **Advocating change:** Seeking support for change by increasing a group’s power to address issues such as human rights and social justice through non-violent action. This would ripen conditions needed to transform relationships.
- b) **Reducing direct violence:** Interveners seeking to reduce direct violence by restraining perpetrators of violence, relieving the immediate suffering of victims of violence, and creating a safe space for peacebuilding activities in other categories that address the root causes of the violence. This can be achieved through multiple actions involving legal and justice systems; humanitarian assistance; peacekeeping; military intervention; ceasefire agreements; peace zones and early warning programmes.
- c) **Transforming relationships:** Interveners aim to transform destructive relationships with an array of processes that address trauma, transform conflict through dialogue, negotiations and mediation and restore a sense of justice by providing restorative and transitional justice. These processes give people opportunities to create long-term, sustainable solutions to address their needs.
- d) **Building capacity:** Longer-term peacebuilding efforts to enhance existing capacities to meet the needs and rights and

prevent violence. This can be done through economic, political and social development plus preventing violence through peace education and training. These activities aim to build just structures that support a sustainable culture of peace.⁽⁶⁾

A peacebuilding map



Source: Lisa Schirch, "Strategic Peacebuilding: State of the field", *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2008. p.9, available at <<http://www.wiscomp.org/peaceprints.html>>

Mainstreaming gender into peacebuilding

Why is it so important to bring women agency into peacebuilding processes in Kashmir? There is a strong logic in support of integrating women's perspectives, concerns and role in peacebuilding. Women are most vulnerable in a conflict situation and they suffer the most. While they are victim of conflict they are also agent for peace and are often considered 'natural peacemakers'. Women are an important civil society actor and generally constitute half the population; thereby their voices cannot be ignored. With expertise in grassroots activism, they bring a bottom-up approach in contrast to a top-down approach that is far more effective in archiving sustainable peace. They also bring

different perspectives on peace and security which tend to approach peace from human rights angle with emphasis on fairness, tolerance and respect for difference in society. Being secluded and excluded, their experiences have added value in acting as catalyst for change. They are better communicators and adept at mobilizing diverse groups for a common cause. They often work across ethnic, religious, political, and cultural divides to promote peace. They can work for changing the conflictual relationships through education and civil society action and by bridging the divides. Swanee Hunt, who is founder of 'Women Waging Peace', strongly advocates women's inclusion on several grounds, a) women are adept at bridging ethnic, political and cultural divides; b) women have their fingers on the pulse of the community, c) women are innovative community leaders with or without formal authority; and, d) women are highly invested in preventing and stopping conflict.⁽⁷⁾ All of them add value to women's role in strategic peacebuilding. This is proved by the proactive role that women are today playing in building peace in various conflict-hit areas across the globe.

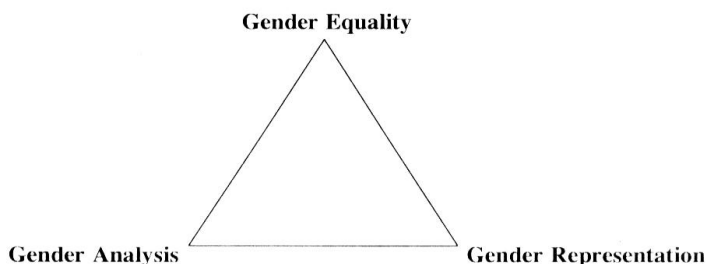
Women have always been playing a vital yet unrecognized role in preventing, mitigating conflict and promoting peacebuilding in their communities. However, during the last two decades, increased emphasis on inclusion of women's rights in national and global policies and legislation and mainstreaming of gender in peacebuilding has added importance to the role of women in peacebuilding processes. This was reflected in the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 which underscored that "equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflict are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security"⁽⁸⁾ In 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution '1325' on "Women, Peace and Security" that recognized and addressed the different impacts of conflict on women, and stressed the need for increased participation of women in conflict resolution, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace negotiations.⁽⁹⁾ This was the result of a strong campaign by civil society organizations which were emphasizing inclusion of women in decision-making processes regarding peace, security and development.

As a vital part of civil society women are playing an important role in a peacebuilding process. They are "largely active in the informal spheres, at community and civil society levels, beneath the radar of the international community and the traditional peace and security framework."⁽¹⁰⁾ Women peace initiatives include activities ranging from peace marches, prayers, rallies and vigils, holding debates and peace conferences, leading condemnation of militaristic approaches, raising

awareness acting as mediators between conflict parties, leading reconciliation initiatives, participating in negotiations and monitoring implementation.⁽¹¹⁾ Women have played an active role in peacebuilding processes in Sierra Leone, Ache, Bougainville, Rwanda, El Salvador, Nigeria, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland. In South Asia, women in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and Pakistan have been trying to make their voices heard and play their role in mitigating and resolving conflict. Women on both sides of the border are also trying to build peace between India and Pakistan.

There are three major challenges that confront mainstreaming gender in peacebuilding at both civil society and government levels. It includes a gender analysis, the goal of gender equality, and women who represent the concerns of other women in all peacebuilding planning and processes.⁽¹²⁾

Three Key Steps to Mainstreaming Gender in Peacebuilding



Source: Lisa Schirch and Manjirika Sewak, "The Role of Women in Peacebuilding", <http://www.gppac.net/uploads/File/Resources/GPPAC%20Issue%20papers/The%20Role%20of%20Women%20in%20Peacebuilding.pdf> > p.14.

There are some major challenges involved in including gender analysis in all peacebuilding planning and processes. First "peacebuilding analysis often leaves out the significant differences between male and female experiences and roles."⁽¹³⁾ Second, the goal of gender equality must be incorporated as a "central value for all peacebuilding actors." Gender equality implies 'equal opportunities, resources, and respect for men and women'⁽¹⁴⁾ and should factor in different cultures. Peacebuilding programmes contribute to gender equality when this goal becomes integral to every aspect of peacebuilding and not confined to one or two programmes for women alone. Donna Pankhurst, in *Mainstreaming Gender: A Framework for Action*, brings in the notion of "positive peace" originally introduced by Johan Galtung which includes "social justice, gender equity, economic equality and ecological balance, with an emphasis on human relationships and how people act to fulfil their human needs. This

requires that not only all types of violence (overt, structural and cultural) are minimal or nonexistent, but also that the major potential causes of future conflict are removed.”⁽¹⁵⁾ A discourse that foregrounds the equally valued experiences of women and men contributes to processes of coexistence, diversity and inclusivity.

The third dimension of gender mainstreaming is involving women and women’s organizations in the entire process of peacebuilding. Women leaders and organizations need to have “access to and active relationships with all peacebuilding actors so that their analysis and ideas can be communicated and their energies can be coordinated with other peacebuilding activities.”⁽¹⁶⁾ Since patriarchal context of the conflict discriminates against women’s experiences with violence, it is all the more important that women articulate the forms of violence that they experience in each particular context. “Creating a ‘just’ or positive peace depends greatly on the perceptions, attitudes and motivation of human beings to transform a particular conflict. This involves a transformation of relationships — inter-personal, inter-community, et al — and of systems that perpetuate conflict and discontent.”⁽¹⁷⁾

The Context: Kashmir conflict & women in AJK

How the AJK women are located in the Kashmir conflict and strategic peacebuilding and what are the challenges they are facing in terms of gender-sensitive peacebuilding? The Kashmir conflict has largely been viewed from the state perspective and traditional security paradigm where the interests of the two contending states were given much more importance than the ‘people’ of the disputed territory or the human dimension of the conflict. It is despite the fact that the conflict has affected the lives of the people profoundly, and more so of women. With primacy of the state paradigm, there were more ‘wars’ and hostility generated by the conflict than efforts made to understand the people’s perspectives and their inclusion in the dialogue process for resolving Kashmir. There has never been any attempt to analyze the conflict from a gender perspective. The changing international and regional context of the conflict has opened up some space to look at the conflict from the human dimension where aspirations and role of the people becomes vital not only in humanizing the conflict but also in transforming the relationship within Kashmir and between the two countries. This also provides an opportunity to conduct gender analysis of the conflict as to how it has impacted the lives of women of Kashmir and what can be done to bring women agency into peacebuilding.

Women in AJK are uniquely positioned in the Kashmir conflict. They are not located in the conflict zone or involved in combat operations,⁽¹⁸⁾ but their lives are directly or indirectly impacted by the larger conflict of Kashmir. Living in a very conservative society shaped by patriarchal values and attitudes that determine their status and role, the narrative of women of Kashmir in general and AJK in particular does not find much space in the political discourse on Kashmir and their voices remain marginalized on issues relating to war-making or peacebuilding. Since AJK women are living under the shadow of the conflict zone and have borne the cost of the conflict disproportionately, they must be treated as pivot stakeholders in strategic peacebuilding in Kashmir.

Understanding women narrative: Experience of living with a conflict zone

The impact of the Kashmir conflict on women has varied from region to region. For the past 66 years, women in the AJK have been experiencing direct or indirect effects of living with a conflict zone. Constituting half of the AJK population, they are major stakeholders in informal or formal peace processes as being women their experiences of conflict are different which makes it essential that they should bring their perspective in gender-sensitive peacebuilding in the divided Kashmir. Proximity to the conflict zone has left its imprints on AJK women as well. Broadly speaking, there are three groups of women in AJK who are being directly affected by the larger Kashmir conflict. The first group belongs to the families divided by the conflict in 1947-48 and thereafter in the 1965 and 1971 wars and the 1990 uprising in the Indian-held Kashmir. The second group comprises of women who along with their families are living on this side of the LoC which becomes frequently volatile especially in times of high tension between the two countries. The third group consist of women who have fled the conflict zone due to insecurity and repression, especially in the post-1990 period. All these women have experienced conflict directly and should be involved in the peace process on Kashmir.

On the other hand, women in the conflict zone of Kashmir⁽¹⁹⁾ have not been active combatant but have experienced varied forms of insecurity ranging from loss of life, becoming target of systematic gendered violence at the hands of Indian security forces; made widows and 'half widows,' — the latter category consisting of women whose husbands have 'disappeared' but not yet been declared dead. 'Half widow' is a new frame of reference, first time ever employed in any conflict zone. By conservative estimates, there are 1,500 half widows in

Kashmir as more than 8,000 people have ‘disappeared’ in the last over two decades of ongoing insurgency in Kashmir.⁽²⁰⁾ These women are psychologically traumatized, besides facing socio-economic hardships that multiplied their miseries. Their insecurities are compounded as most of them are from the rural areas where women generally enjoy less economic and social independence. The conflict has badly affected the social and economic attainments of the women who constantly live in an environment of fear, insecurity and marginalization. The impact of the conflict on women has largely been ignored, marginalizing their needs and aspirations.⁽²¹⁾

Women belonging to divided families

The conflict has not only divided the territory but the people as well, restricting the free movement of the divided families who cut across the LoC. Women from the divided families who have relatives across are the worst sufferer of the continued conflict. The wars have generated waves of migration, displacement and separation of the families, especially those living closer to the LoC. In 1947-48 about 150,000 Kashmiris crossed into AJK and Pakistan,⁽²²⁾ another 50,000 crossed over due to the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan wars⁽²³⁾ while another 59,574 persons streamed into AJK in the post-1990 situation that include 24,574 registered and 35,000 unregistered persons.⁽²⁴⁾ As a corollary, of the 3.89 million total population of the AJK region, more than 259,574 persons or about 8 per cent — not taking into account the natural growth,⁽²⁵⁾ are directly affected by the conflict as they got displaced over the last six decades and half of them happen to be women that have suffered the conflict in different ways.

Each migration and displacement has added women to the divided families. These women have suffered emotionally as the LoC was shut off and the permit system that allowed travel across fell into disuse. With communication links snapped and mail service suspended especially after 1990, their miseries got multiplied. After the ceasefire on the LoC, in 2003, these women thronged the Neelum River along the LoC to have a glimpse of their relatives across. Many emotional scenes depicting the sufferings of these women were recorded by the media.

These women found some ray of hope when in 2005. The LoC was thrown open for travel through an entry permit system that allows them visits to their relatives across the LoC. But clearance procedures continue to impede free flow of the women from the divided families, majority of whom lives along the dividing line. Consequently, in June 2012, about 600 men and women from the divided families gathered by the Neelum River in Keran village to register their miseries and bring

down the divide. On the Pakistani side, “tearful relatives waved across the gushing Neelum which separates them, to their family” on the other side, using loudspeakers to try to speak to them. “But the deafening roar of the river, about 200 feet wide at the village of Keran, was too loud for the cries to get across.”⁽²⁶⁾ Indian police and military did not allow Kashmiris on the other side to come near the river bank and they were left to wave from a distance. There was yet another emotional story of a woman from divided families that came to the fore. *The Express Tribune* reported: “For Ashraf Jan, who left her mother and father to come to Muzaffarabad with her aunt in 1947, it was almost too much. Overwhelmed with emotion, the 70-year-old had to be stopped by relatives from jumping into the furious river to try to reach her ageing parents on the Indian side. ‘Let me go. I just want to see my parents and after that if I die, I will be in peace,’ she said.”⁽²⁷⁾

Women living along the LoC

AJK is very vulnerable to conflict situation between India and Pakistan or in Indian-held Kashmir as eight of its ten districts are located on the LoC.⁽²⁸⁾ As a corollary, people including woman living along the LoC, especially in the Neelum Valley area are extremely vulnerable to direct impact of the conflict as these women invariably face the ebbs and flows of the conflict. During exchange of shelling along the LoC, their homes come under fire, physically exposing their lives and that of their near and dears ones and displacing them internally. Over the last two decades or so a large number of people including women were displaced while many were killed, injured and disabled due to shelling. AJK official data states that from 1990 to 2002 a large number of 199,188 people living along the LoC were displaced owing to Indian shelling. These included 21,686 from district Muzaffarabad; 25,231 from Bagh; 28,192 from Poonch; 13,793 from Kotli and 110,286 from Bhimber. As such nearly 6 per cent of the total estimated population of over 3.9 million (2010)⁽²⁹⁾ got displaced which included a large number of women and children. Besides, 1,314 were killed and 4,705 were injured.⁽³⁰⁾

Shelling has enormous impact on the livelihood of the affected people as their houses, fields and livestock are exposed to fire. Their crops get destroyed while many got killed while working in the fields. The landmines planted on both sides of the LoC in war and crises times, especially in 2002, have not yet been removed and continue to threaten civilian lives. The frequent disruptions have made the region unviable for conventional means of livelihood like tourism, damaging the road infrastructure and scaring away the potential investors. This has contributed to severe levels of poverty in the communities living along

the LoC, affecting women more due to their inherent vulnerabilities in the socio-economic structures. The psychological impact on women is even worse as living in constant threat to their own life and that of their near and dear ones and uncertainty around sources of livelihood causes severe stress and anxiety disorders. Further, living in the camps without much civic amenities and largely gender-blind relief policy of the AJK government has added to the miseries of the displaced women.

The 2003 ceasefire on the LoC did provide relief from shelling and firing and they returned to their homes. The ceasefire itself is, however, under constant threat and there have been numerous violations, especially in 2008, 2012 and very recently in January 2013. After every incident, each side accuses the other of failing to honour it. In fact, the recent firing incident was a culmination of spiral of tension apparently sparked off by a grandmother crossing into AJK to be with her children. *The Hindu* in its report quoting military sources stated that in early “September, the 70-year old Reshma Bibi, left the village of Charonda, near Uri, to live with her sons and grandchildren across the LoC. Reshma and her husband Ibrahim Lohar had remained in Charonda after their sons crossed into AJK “several years ago, to escape police investigations of their alleged role in cross-border trafficking.” Police sources said that “Reshma appeared to have left in the hope of living out her last years with her family.”⁽³¹⁾ Reshma symbolizes misery of many women who are suffering the divide and militarization of the LoC.

Frequent incidents of firing have created fear along the LoC and disrupted life of the people who had started rebuilding their houses and expected some economic opportunities through cross-LoC trade and tourism with restoration of the infrastructure along the LoC. The landmines also obstruct free movement of the locals especially women who work in the fields and gather fuel wood.

Displaced women from the conflict zone living in AJK

Since 1990, women in the conflict zone of Kashmir have suffered all kinds of violence shattering their bodies, souls and social and economic attainments. The conflict situation drove many civilians including a large number of women to cross over to AJK for safety and security. Many of them have directly experienced the conflict and were forced to cross into AJK for their survival. A large number of them belong to very poor families residing in the bordering areas. They are currently living either with their relatives or in the camps set up by the AJK government. About 34,142 of them are presently living in about 25 camps across AJK in Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Kotli, Mirpur, and Rawalakot,⁽³²⁾ and around 12,525 are staying with their relatives. The

2005 earthquake hit many camps adding to their miseries. These internally displaced people (IDPs) are not being provided any relief by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or any other international organization except Islamic Relief and International Committee of the Red Crescent (ICRC). Thus, the AJK government with its Refugee Rehabilitation Department is mainly providing them relief which is meagre by all standards. Half the IDPs happen to be women and those living in the camps are facing hardships of displacement relating to health, social relations, culture and education of their children.⁽³³⁾ Most of them have suffered from psychological trauma and post-traumatic disorders. Healthcare facilities available in the camps are very poor. The AJK government's policies are largely gender-blind and there is no significant NGO, whether local or international, focusing especially on the rehabilitation of these affected women. Further, since 1990 the IDPs are not entitled to travel across the LoC by the Muzaffarabad or Rawalakot bus services and remain cut off from their families living there.

Women outside these three groups do not fall in the category of direct sufferer but are certainly affected by the conflict indirectly. Their economic wellbeing is adversely impacted by uncertainty and the security situation that hampers the growth of the AJK economy especially the tourism sector. Their socio-cultural identity is also stressed due to lack of interaction with larger Kashmir.

Socio-legal and politico-economic status of women in AJK and peacebuilding in Kashmir

Women suffer structural violence which fully exposes their vulnerabilities in a conflict situation, quite visible on the other side of the LoC. Further, reducing existing structural inequalities is essential for enhancing women's capacity for peacebuilding. This is relevant to both sides of the LoC and is not possible unless the social-legal status of women is strengthened through gender-sensitive legal framework and gender mainstreaming of the state's institutions which would enhance the position of women in policymaking and consequently in informal and formal dialogue and peacebuilding processes across Kashmir.

Strengthening gender-sensitive legal framework: Under the AJK Interim Constitution Act, 1974, all state subjects, men and women, are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection before law. However, AJK being a conservative society with patriarchal structures the position of women is weak socially, economically and politically. The spread of patriarchy is however, uneven and the nature and degree of women's subordination vary along class, district and the rural/urban

divide. Women in poor households with limited resources suffer gender-based violence more than those from the upper and middle classes. Broadly speaking, in the last few decades the status of AJK women has improved owing to better access to education, healthcare and skill development but their social position remains largely unchanged and discrimination on the basis of social and cultural traditions remains quite common. The main issues are lack of awareness about their rights and socio-cultural constraints that exist in a male-dominated conservative society.⁽³⁴⁾

Women in AJK do not experience as much violence as those across the LoC or neighbouring societies of the region do. However, domestic violence does exist and is on the rise, especially after the earthquake and there is a severe dearth of support structures to provide relief. There are no institutional arrangements to even bring up issues related to violation of women's rights and violence against them, monitor them and mobilize public opinion and take required action.⁽³⁵⁾ There are no complaint cells where such cases can be reported. Forced marriages is a common phenomenon in Mirpur where Kashmiri expatriates especially those living in the UK tend to marry off their girls to local boys. The difference in culture, education and upbringing create incompatibility that often leads to divorce. Further, children of women who are state subject but married to non-Kashmiri men are not entitled to get domicile on the basis of their mother's citizenship. This is a discriminatory practice as children whose fathers are Kashmiri but mothers non-Kashmiri qualify for state subject status.

The legal framework is based on Muslim Family Laws Act of AJK, 1965, and Family Courts Act 1993 which are quite favourable to women. Besides, laws passed in Pakistan are adopted in AJK through approval of the AJK Assembly and cabinet. In the last few years four major affirmative laws have been passed in Pakistan that include Anti-Harassment Act, 2010; the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011, Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill, 2010, and Women in Distress & Detention Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2010. The Anti-Harassment and Acid Control acts have already been adopted. The other two are in the process of adoption. As these laws are adopted in AJK, they will strengthen the existing socio-legal framework in protecting the rights of women. Legislation against domestic violence is also in the pipeline.

Economic empowerment & gender mainstreaming of the state institutions: Economic empowerment is very important in bringing women agency into peacebuilding. Female literacy is very high in AJK

compared to Pakistan but access of women to quality education and information and training is quite poor. Women in AJK do enjoy legal rights to own and inherit property from their families. The AJK government has also identified gender-sensitive development as one of its key strategies. In reality, however, most sectors of the AJK economy are male dominated. Women lack ownership of sources of production even though they play a crucial role in the agricultural economy. Despite women's legal rights to own and inherit property from their families, there are very few women who have access and control over these resources.

Women's representation in the civil service is quite low, though it is on the rise gradually. Until recently there were only two women secretaries, but many are coming up in the lower level cadre and likely to reach higher level with time. Similarly, there has been only one woman who served at the higher level of the judiciary. However, there is one sessions judge, four civil judges and at least 25-30 women lawyers in the field. In the foreign service also only one woman officer reached a high profile position of a spokesperson in 2005 and served as envoy in Italy and Morocco. Currently, there are 13 career officers which shows an increasing number of women from AJK joining the foreign service.⁽³⁶⁾ On 8 January 2013, the first woman deputy commissioner assumed the charge in the newly-carved Haveli district which lies along the LoC.⁽³⁷⁾ This is another step towards growing critical mass of women from the region reaching the policymaking level.

Labour force participation rate for women in AJK is grossly under reported by the official sources data. Their access to credit is limited as commercial banks do not accept their credit worthiness. Only First Women Bank Ltd is operating in the region but does not provide enough loans to women entrepreneurs or agriculture loans. Women's presence in the public sector is insignificant. Education and skill development facilities for women offer few avenues, restricting employment opportunities to health and education sectors only. Healthcare facilities are also insufficient resulting in high maternal mortality rates.

Gender mainstreaming of AJK policy plans, policy and programmes: According to the United Nations, mainstreaming a gender perspective is the "process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women and men an integral dimension of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and

programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”⁽³⁸⁾ Gender mainstreaming is very important in enhancing women’s position in society and policymaking and strengthening their capacity for peacebuilding.

Over the years the AJK government has taken steps that strengthen gender mainstreaming of its policy and plans. A Social Welfare and Women Development Department (SWD) was set up in 1992 with the mandate to work for the welfare of women and ensure their participation in development. It has been primarily engaged in skill development of women in social welfare activities and vocational training but recently it has prepared a State Policy Framework for the Empowerment of Women in collaboration with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The policy framework provides vision and policy guidelines to address socio-economic, legal and political empowerment of women. It draws on Pakistan’s National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (NPDEW), 2002, National Plan of Action for Women (NPA) 1998 and their subsequent reviews in 2009 and 2010, respectively. The policy framework is also in line with the principles set by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is a big step forward and shows government’s concern about gender equality and empowerment of women in social, economic and political spheres. Implementation of the policy would be the responsibility of the AJK government through all its departments and district offices. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) would act as a coordinating body supported by the Planning and Development Department. The policy framework has suggested an independent Women Development Department equipped with human and financial resources to replace the existing SWD. The institutional mechanism for overseeing policy implementation is the newly created State Commission on Status of Women (SCSW). The creation of SCSW itself is a very big step in ensuring gender-sensitive legislation in AJK and can contribute to enhancing women’s capacities in peacebuilding.

Enhancing political participation: Political participation of women is very important for bringing women agency into peacebuilding. The role of women in the political and public life of AJK has been limited due to conservative nature of the society. Thereby, women’s narrative on the issues of peace and security is either invisible or subordinate to male discourse.⁽³⁹⁾ Broadly, women have been participating in politics and represented in the AJK Assembly and in the cabinet since 1985, but their number is limited, with very little political education. Currently, the

Deputy Speaker of the AJK Assembly and the Minister for Social Welfare and Women Development are women. There are five reserved seats in the 49-member AJK Assembly which are generally filled by nominees of the major political parties and most of them happen to come from political families. Women can also contest on general seats but due to conservative social set-up, woman candidates are generally not fielded as they are not considered winning candidates. There was only one woman candidate among over 400 contestants in the June 2011 elections in AJK. The main political parties have also their women wings. Women are not represented at the grassroots level (Union Council, Tehsil Council and District Council) in the local government system. Moreover, elections to local bodies in AJK have not been held over the last two decades or so. The Local Government (LG) system of 2001 was debated in the AJK Assembly but never adopted.

Broadly speaking, women's perspectives on the Kashmir conflict are shaped by the traditional positions followed by their respective political parties and are subdued by high politics of Kashmir.

Bringing AJK women agency in 'Strategic Peacebuilding' in Kashmir

- Advocating Change
- Reducing Direct Violence
- Transforming relationship
- Building capacity of women for peacebuilding
- Sustaining intra-Kashmir women dialogue
- Integrating voices of Kashmiri into wider India-Pakistan Peace process

Women in the AJK along with those across the LoC can make a difference in transforming the Kashmir conflict. This can be done through developing a cycle of strategic peacebuilding at multiple levels and using a multi-track strategy. Women on either side of the LoC can contribute to humanizing the conflict by changing negative perceptions and shedding stereotypes; mitigating direct violence by conducting shared analysis of the conflict and evolving a shared vision for peace. Involving women in peacebuilding in Kashmir would reinforce women's agency as they are not only half of the population but also have suffered the conflict disproportionately. No peace process can be sustained unless it is supported by the civil society. Women being a vital part of the civil society on both sides of the LoC can play a crucial role in informal and formal peace processes by bringing human and gender dimension to conflict resolution processes in and over Kashmir.

Advocating change: Women of Kashmir have been a silent sufferer of the protracted conflict, disempowered and excluded from the policymaking or peacebuilding processes. What they need is to break their silence and develop their own narrative on the Kashmir conflict and peacebuilding. A conflict analysis of Kashmir from gender perspective would de-securitize peace by expanding the definition of notions of peace and security. It would bring in the human security approach from a gendered perspective that is missing in the existing notion of peace and security in the wider Kashmir context and between the two countries.

Another important aspect is the role that women on both sides of the LoC can play in changing the perceptions within and across-LoC. There are negative perceptions rooted in stereotypes that sustain enemy images within different communities across the LoC. Then there are perception gaps that exist between two parts of Kashmir. Women can bridge both through dialogue and evolving a culture of peace.

Linked with this is women's role in developing understanding about the very idea of peace. It is moving away from 'negative peace' to 'positive peace' where end to direct violence is just a stage in peacebuilding and the main objective is to build structures of state and society that provide justice to the marginalized and the victims of the conflict. This would lead to evolving a shared vision for peace within and across divided Kashmir. Further, common grounds need to be found for developing a shared agenda of advocacy to end direct violence, work for transitional justice and bring in human dimension to the conflict. This requires shared analysis of the conflict which may lead to a shared narrative that can bring women of Kashmir together in strategizing interventions for humanizing the conflict and making the peace process inclusive.

Reducing direct violence: The people of Kashmir have been badly affected by direct as well as indirect or structural violence that since 1990 has worsened on the other side of the LoC. Women are the worst sufferer of the direct violence perpetrated by the state's structures that have arranged a massive build-up of security forces, equipped with draconian laws and weapon of immunity. In AJK women have also experienced the heat of the conflict and are trying to explore their role in mitigating the conflict. Given the high politics of the Kashmir conflict, women have been unable to develop synergy in raising their voice against this direct and indirect violence as high politics of Kashmir conflict keep them divided. If women from both parts of Kashmir come together and get over their limitations, they can make their voices heard. In this context, they can engage in multi-track peacebuilding, by working

with other stakeholders and civil society actors like the media, traders, human rights groups and NGOs working at the grassroots level as well as engage with the policymakers with creative ideas.

For this, women need to develop a shared agenda of advocacy which is based on shared conflict analysis and vision for peace. Reducing direct violence inside Kashmir and on the LoC is a shared goal that women can pursue together. There already exists a broad consensus on the other side of the LoC, that there should be withdrawal of military presence starting from towns and villages to complete withdrawal of the security forces; scrapping of various repressive laws and release of political prisoners. Also important is beginning of administering transitional justice especially for women in Kashmir. Transitional justice implies short-term judicial and non-judicial mechanisms and processes that address the legacy of human rights abuses and violence in a conflict and include mechanisms like trauma healing, and truth and reconciliation commission. It is meant to protect the vulnerable and providing justice to the victims of the conflict — widows, half widows and displaced women; rehabilitation of the youth; end to human rights abuses and recovering the disappeared persons. Further, women can join hands in stressing the need for consolidating the ceasefire on the LoC and removing the landmines that litter both sides of the LoC and result in civilian casualties. The recent upsurge of violence on the LoC only accentuates the need that steps should be taken to stabilize the ceasefire by relocating the heavy artillery/mortars and observing the agreed CBMs on the LoC in letter and in spirit that include no new construction works on either side of the LoC.

Transforming relationship: The conflict has widened distrust amongst communities within and between the three regions across the LoC while it has created perception gaps between the two parts of the divided Kashmir. Repairing the fractured inter-community, intra-regional and inter-regional relations and bridging the communication gaps across the disputed territory is a must for a just and sustainable peace in Kashmir. Transforming of relationship is also important in evolving and implementing a solution of Kashmir which enjoys the ownership of the people as major stakeholders. Transformation of relationship is not possible unless there is dialogue and reconciliation process within and across Kashmir that involves trauma healing, transitional justice and bridging of perception gaps. Within this context a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the territory across the LoC can help transform the conflict.

Women in their diverse social roles and capacities as mothers, sisters, wives and daughters can play the bridging role much more effectively. Women across the globe are playing such peacebuilding role in reconciliation processes in various conflict zones. Women of Kashmir can play a similar peacebuilding role within and across Kashmir. Within this context women of AJK are a major actor and stakeholder and better positioned to play a crucial role in repairing relationships and strengthening reconciliation process across Kashmir. Women can evolve strategies to work together to transform conflict through informal and formal dialogue processes. Women from divided families, women IDPs living in AJK and women living along the LoC can develop synergy with women from across the LoC and form a critical mass for bringing change in perceptions, developing shared vision of peace and humanizing the conflict and giving gender dimension to peace and reconciliation process in and across Kashmir.

Building capacity of women for peacebuilding: To ensure that women of Kashmir can play a meaningful and effective role in strategic peacebuilding, there is an urgent need to build their capacity for peacebuilding. It is relevant to both sides of the LoC. This can be done in two ways. First, women on both sides of the LoC need to be empowered socially, economically and politically through gender-sensitive legislation and gender mainstreaming of the existing state institutions. Women on both sides of the LoC strongly feel that there is a strong link between socio-economic, legal and political empowerment of women and their role in peacebuilding. Second, their capacity for peacebuilding can be enhanced by raising among them awareness of their rights and infusing understanding of the conflict and imparting training in skills for peacebuilding.

Gender mainstreaming and sensitization of the AJK economic, legal, political and economic institutions would increase gender equity and gender representation which can enhance women's capacity to actively participate in the peacebuilding processes. Increased representation of women in civil services and economic institutions would strengthen women's voice in decision-making processes on both sides of the LoC. In AJK, a new job market can be created through skills development. There is also need to create awareness about women's rights available under the existing legal framework. To restrain domestic violence, free legal aid and counselling at the district level regarding family matters must be provided. Increased political representation in the AJK Assembly and women's representation at the grassroots levels can help in bringing women's concerns and perspectives in informal and formal peace processes in and across Kashmir. Within this context,

political education of the women parliamentarians is very important, it would enable them to perform their role in gender-sensitive legislation in the assembly and in policymaking. Women in politics and different state institutions have not given sufficient attention to gender-sensitive legislation or concerns of the women victim-survivor of the conflict. Women on both sides of the LoC and more so in the conflict zone see themselves through the prism of victimhood and their agency for peacebuilding remains unexplored.

Secondly, there is a great need to enhance women's skills in peacebuilding by increasing their understanding of the Kashmir conflict through training workshops in peacebuilding and a sustained intra-Kashmir women dialogue within and between both parts of Kashmir. A shared gender analysis of the conflict; an understanding of gender role in peacebuilding; developing of a shared vision of peace and a shared agenda for advocacy and building synergy with other stakeholders through networking and interaction with the policymakers and officials on both sides of the LoC and with Islamabad and Delhi would articulate women's narrative on Kashmir and strengthen peace constituencies across the divide.

Building and sustaining intra-Kashmir women dialogue: Women peace movement on both sides of the LoC is presently very weak and needs to be strengthened. There have been some efforts made by women on both sides of the LoC to organize themselves to play their role either in coping with the consequences of the conflict or helping those who are facing the conflict. In 1994, Parveena Ahangar,⁽⁴⁰⁾ mother of a disappeared person and now the chairperson of the APDP, with the help Pervez Imroz, a human rights lawyer who spearheaded the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), formed the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) to struggle for peace and justice. In 2000, the Kashmir University students formed an organization Kashmiri Women in Peace and Disarmament (KWIPD) in Srinagar. The group launched a short-lived monthly newsletter, *Voices Unheard* that captured how women viewed the situation and its possible resolution. The group advocated that "the rights of women cannot be enforced without restoration of peace in the region."⁽⁴¹⁾ It however could not build up its momentum. Another group named Women for Peace (WfP) was formed in Srinagar in 2011 to work for peace and justice for the Kashmiri women but could not take off. On the AJK side, Kashmir Women's Forum (KWF) was set up by Shamim Shawl, an IDP from across the LoC. The group focused more on the larger issue of Kashmir but could not do much for women IDPs who were forced to flee the conflict zone for safety and took refuge in AJK. In March 2012, a group

of women who had participated in cross-LoC dialogue organized by Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation (CDR) in Srinagar, formed a body with the acronym of AJK Women for Peace Organization (AJKfPO). The main objective of the organization is to work for women's empowerment and peacebuilding across divided Kashmir.⁽⁴²⁾

Across the LoC, many women outfits that were originally created to fight for women's rights, after 1990 shifted their focus to support the resistance movement in Kashmir. They did not act as combatants but participated in protests for *azadi* (freedom) from Indian occupation of Kashmir. These included *Dukhtaran-e-Millat*, (DeM — Daughters of the Nation) which was set up in the 1987 as the women wing of the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulba with the objective to fight for the rights of Muslim women. After 1990, the group organized protests to support the *azadi* movement and defend Kashmiri women against violations and transgressions by Indian security forces. Another group, Muslim Khawateen Markaz (MKM — Muslim Women Centre), a constituent of the Hurriyat Conference and affiliate of JKLF, started as a social organization to combat crimes against women but after 1990 adopted political role and took part in organizing protests against the atrocities by the Indian security forces. Currently, Yasmeen Raja and Zamurda Habib head the two factions of the MKM. Both groups have been banned by India and the state government in occupied Kashmir. These groups are supporting the resistance movement in Kashmir but have not been able to play their own role in the movement and their narrative remains marginalized. In November 2011, in an interview in Srinagar, DeM leader Asiya Andrabi said the lingering dispute should be resolved in accordance with the Kashmiris' aspirations keeping in view its historical perspective.⁽⁴³⁾ Both groups have yet to become part of women dialogue within Kashmir or across the LoC. Both groups believe that the conflict needs to be resolved in accord with the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, they are engaged in social and human rights activism. Another women's group headed by Fareeda Dar, commonly known as Fareeda Behenji is the Jammu and Kashmir Mass Movement, (JKMM) which also is a member organization of the Hurriyat. Zamurda Habib has also founded the Association of Families of Kashmiri Prisoners (AFKP). The AFKP provides psycho-social support to the families of Kashmiri prisoners held in Indian jails, as well as tracking and documenting their cases. These women have served multiple years in jail for overt or covert support for the independence movement and are constantly harassed by the Indian security apparatus because of their political involvement. They come from middle class

backgrounds and chose to give up a possible life of comfort for risk and tribulations.⁽⁴⁴⁾

In the 2008 and 2010 mass protests across the LoC an increasing number of women participated alongside men and at times even led all-women protest marches. These protests were compared with the Palestinian *intifada* and were triggered by illegal transfer of Kashmiri land by the local government to Amrnath Board and arbitrary killings of teenagers by the Indian forces.

Women on both sides of the LoC have borne the brunt of the conflict, violence, instability and displacement. They want to move forward and are exploring a role for themselves in dialogue and peacebuilding processes in and across Kashmir. In the last few years some international and national organizations have made some efforts to initiate cross-LoC women interaction so as to understand women's experience with the conflict and explore their agency in peacebuilding. These include the London-based Conciliation Resources (CR), The Hague-based Gender Concerns International (GCI) and the Delhi-based CDR and WISCOMP. These organizations are facilitating a dialogue and reconciliation process within the conflict zone of Kashmir and across the LoC.

The CDR organized two women-specific intra-Kashmir dialogues in collaboration with its local partners in 2007 and 2011 and facilitated another one in Muzaffarabad in 2012. The first intra-Kashmir women's conference under the title "Connecting Women across the LoC," which the CDR co-organized with the Women's Studies Centres of universities Kashmir and Jammu, was held in Srinagar from 16 -18 November 2007. The meeting was attended by over 30 women delegates including 14 from AJK. This was the first ever conference that brought women from both sides of the divided Kashmir together. They met and shared their sentiments and perspectives on the Kashmir conflict that is affecting their lives directly or indirectly. In a statement issued after the meeting, the women condemned violence in "all forms and manifestations" resulting in "loss of lives and property, enforced disappearances, custodial killings, torture, unjustified arrests, rapes and molestations."⁽⁴⁵⁾ It called for withdrawal of military forces from civilian areas, reduction of forces on both sides of the LoC, disbanding of 'Special Operations Group' and pro-government militants as well as de-commissioning of militant groups to create an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The women supported India-Pakistan peace process and urged an early resolution of the Kashmir issue through the involvement of the people of Kashmir including women. They

demanding opening of communication lines, easing of procedures relating to cross-LoC travel and trade and issuing of visas to all irrespective of religious and political affiliations. In particular they underscored that “women's sacrifices and struggles during the years of conflict have not been acknowledged. The mental health consequences need to be recognized and urgently addressed.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ They called for the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri youth that ‘crossed border’ and the displaced families including Kashmiri Pandits. They asked the media to play a constructive role in the peace process and stressed the need for exchange of students and teachers, research collaborations media and cultural exchanges, extension of medical facilities and trade and tourism across the LoC.

The second intra-Kashmir women’s dialogue took place after a gap of four years, from 27-29 September 2011 at Gulmarg near Srinagar. It was facilitated by the CDR and co-hosted by the newly formed Srinagar-based Women for Peace (WfP) group. The focus was on “Women's role in Peace-building and Policy-making”. In all, 45 women including 13 from AJK and GB, representing a cross-section of civil society from both sides of the LoC and comprising doctors, educationists, social workers, lawyers, public representatives, entrepreneurs and students took part in the dialogue. In a statement after the meeting the participants observed: “We, the women of entire Jammu and Kashmir, from both sides of the LoC desire peace, security, and economic stability to prevail throughout the region and an immediate end to the protracted conflict. We demand the inclusion of women in all peace-building and peace negotiations/dialogue on Kashmir.” It stressed that the “resolution of the Kashmir issue must reflect the aspirations of all regions and communities of all parts of undivided Jammu and Kashmir.” It urged both countries to simplify procedures for trade, communication and travel across the LoC and open other trade and travel routes, like Kargil-Skardu, Chhamb-Bhimber, and Leh-Khaplu; respect the ceasefire, address the landmine problem, initiate phased demilitarization in all civilian areas, and repeal all ‘draconian’ laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA), and an end to human rights abuses and violations of all kinds – arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, crackdowns, searches, displacement of all kinds, rehabilitation of displaced communities without discrimination — by all sides.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The participants decided to set up a joint forum for peace comprising women from both sides of the LoC.

The CDR is also engaged in intra-regional and inter-community inter-regional dialogue within the conflict zone of Kashmir. In March

2012, as a follow up to the Gulmarg Dialogue, it organized a two-day dialogue between women from both regions of Jammu and Kashmir, which also included a participant from Kargil/Ladakh who is currently based in Srinagar. The objective of the dialogue was to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the common gendered problems, especially in the social, legal and political fields, of the two regions and better networking between themselves through a plan of action. Eighteen participants from Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh took part in the dialogue.

In November 2012, the Muzaffarabad-based AJK Women for Peace Organization (AJKWfPO) and CDR organized the first ever cross-LoC women dialogue on the soil of AJK. On 5 November, it was a historic moment when for the first time ever a 10-member women's peace delegation crossed the LoC through the Kaman Bridge at the Chakothi crossing point to participate in the dialogue titled "Building bridges: Bringing women's voice into peacebuilding in Kashmir" in Muzaffarabad. Fifty-two women comprising a cross-section of civil society from both sides of the LoC, i.e., the academia, educationists, entrepreneurs, medical doctors, lawyers, political representatives and social activists took part in the dialogue. The delegates discussed three broad interlinked themes: "Gender and peacebuilding: Understanding women narratives on Kashmir"; "Empowering women for peacebuilding" and "Women, inclusive security and sustainable peacebuilding in Kashmir." Women's narrative from the other side of the LoC who have borne the brunt of the conflict was diverse and more fractured along the regional and community lines, while women's narrative from AJK was quite emotional and more evolving in nature. There was, however, a broad consensus that the conflict has deeply affected the lives of the women but their voice is missing in the larger discourse on the Kashmir conflict. They urged that women should play a more proactive role in bridging divides and perception gaps in and across the LoC. As primary stakeholders in the conflict they should make their voices heard in dialogue processes in and across Kashmir. The speakers emphasized that through socio-economic and politico-legal empowerment of women on both sides of the LoC and gender mainstreaming of the structures of governance, the capacity of women could be enhanced for coping with the effects of the conflict and for playing an effective role in peacebuilding. The dialogue underscored the importance of women in inclusive security and issues of transitional justice for the victims of the conflict, especially 'half widows', 'disappeared' persons, the displaced and refugees and rehabilitation of the youth. There was strong support for inclusion of women as well as different groups and communities in peacebuilding processes in and across Kashmir.

The conference came out with a consensus statement over several issues having a direct bearing upon the course of peace process as well as on the human rights front. Delegates from both sides sought easing of cross-LoC travel and suggested a 'smart card' system to facilitate free movement of state subjects across the Line of Control. Also, they demanded that the travel facility be extended to post-1990 refugees. They urged liberalizing cross-LoC trade by facilitating communication and monetizing the trade. Other recommendations included: steps to consolidate the ceasefire on the LoC; removing landmines ; gradual demilitarization, including that of the Siachen glacier and turning it into a peace park; providing justice to the victims of the conflict, especially widows, 'half widows,' 'disappeared' persons, the displaced/refugees and rehabilitation of the youth. They called for setting up an independent truth and reconciliation commission in Jammu and Kashmir to address grievances of victims of the conflict, ending human rights violations and scrapping draconian laws. They decided to form a cross-LoC coalition for peace in Kashmir which could act as an advocacy-cum-pressure group to make their voice heard.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The Delhi- based Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) is also engaged in intra-regional and intercommunity dialogue within Kashmir. In 2000, it launched the *Athwas* (handshake)⁽⁴⁹⁾ initiative to bring Kashmiri Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women together to "search for non-violent, creative and inclusive approaches for the conflict transformation" in the conflict zone of Kashmir.⁽⁵⁰⁾ About 30 women from Hindu and Muslim community used the forum to share their pain and suffering. The *Athwas* campaign aims to build safe spaces for women in Kashmir by reconstructing their lives and supporting the creation of self-help community groups.⁽⁵¹⁾ The initiative is so far limited to the other side of the LoC.

Over the past few years international peacebuilding organizations have also expressed interest in initiating cross-LoC women's interactions. In 2009, the London-based Conciliation Resources (CR) launched a "Kashmiri Women's Mapping Initiative" on both sides of the LoC. The main objective of the initiative was to understand the operational context and perspectives of Kashmiri women on peacebuilding in Kashmir. It tried to investigate major issues confronting women in both parts and all regions of Kashmir and discover their perspectives on peace and conflict so that appropriate interventions can be designed to bring them into peacebuilding. The data was collected through central workshops and localized structured conversations conducted across all the regions of wider Kashmir. The conversations sought to include a cross-section of women from varied professional and

ethnic backgrounds. Based on the parallel localized conversations conducted on both sides of the LoC between December 2009 and February 2010, a report, *Kashmiri Woman Across the Divide*, was published in August 2010.⁽⁵²⁾ The major findings of the study are that the impact of the conflict has varied from region to region which makes it essential that there should be dialogue between the different regions of Kashmir which would help in creating a Kashmiri understanding of the conflict. Kashmiri women do recognize their potential for peacebuilding in their regions and want their inclusion in the dialogue processes. The initiative is moving into the next phase which aims at bringing women on both sides of the LoC into peacebuilding process.

As part of the initiative, in March 2012, the CR along with the Cambodia-based Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, facilitated a cross-LoC conflict transformation workshop in Phnom Penh which was attended by a group of 20 members, largely women from a cross-section of society from both parts of Kashmir. An effort was made to study and learn from the Cambodian experience in peacebuilding and undertake a shared analysis of the Kashmir conflict so as to develop a shared vision for peace in and on Kashmir. The participants after intensive discussions developed a broad consensus to envision Kashmir as a first step as a “region of peace with shared diverse identities” and the inclusion of Kashmiris in realizing that vision. They recognized the multiplicity of the perspectives and inclusivity of women in the peacebuilding process. They identified peacebuilding strategies to develop linkages across the regions of divided Kashmir, building trust and pursuing creative processes of reconciliation in which Kashmiris would play a lead role.⁽⁵³⁾

Since 2005, Gender Concerns International (GCI), a forum based in The Hague, has also highlighted the gender dimension of the Kashmir conflict by involving women from both sides of the LoC. Under the umbrella of the Netherlands Women’s Council (NVR), six member organizations of the platform VDV launched a joint project “WCA 1325.” In 2008, the group organized a workshop on Kashmir in The Hague that was attended by women from both sides of the LoC along with many others from other conflict zones. The purpose of the project was to build “a learning community on women’s work for peace, to strengthen functional networks around each case and to give visibility to women’s work in the context of [UN] resolution 1325.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ The Srinagar-based Gender Concerns Kashmir (GCK) and the GCI co-produced a documentary film *List 1325: List Me Now: Women’s Unheard Voices from Kashmir*, which was aimed to give voice to the female victims of the conflict in Kashmir.⁽⁵⁵⁾

While some effort is going on to break the physical barriers between Kashmiri women from different regions and across the LoC, there is an urgent need to develop and eventually formalize increased cross-LoC interactions between women entrepreneurs, academia, lawyers, journalists and conflict resolution experts. This would be helpful in developing shared understanding of the conflict and thereby a shared advocacy agenda which would contribute to mitigating and transforming the conflict. Within this context, networking of women groups working on both sides of the LoC would strengthen women's peace movement in Kashmir. A sustained intra-Kashmir women's dialogue is a must for bringing women agency in peacebuilding. Women need to form a cross-LoC coalition for peace in Kashmir and act as an advocacy-cum-pressure group to make their voices heard. Also important is for them to become part of the cross-LoC multi-track diplomacy that would add weight to their voices and concerns. These may include, in particular, working with other stakeholders engaged in cross-LoC interactions in the area of trade, education, media and human rights which may not be very strong at the moment but can act as a catalyst for efforts to initiate an inclusive peace process on Kashmir. In parallel, they also need to engage policymakers on both sides of the LoC with creative ideas that would help in bridging the distrust and removing the procedural hurdles in the way of effective implementation of the existing cross-LoC CBMs.

Integrating Kashmiri women's voices in wider India-Pakistan Peace Process: Cross-LoC women efforts to play an effective role in the peace process could be enhanced if they build synergy with Indian and Pakistani civil society actors/groups that are working for a better understanding and resolving conflictual issues between the two countries, in particular that of Kashmir. For this they need to engage in a multi-track diplomacy by working with other civil society actors like the media, business community, human rights groups and NGOs working as connectors between people at the grassroots and the policymakers' levels.

Over the past two decades or so, many peace groups have been formed with the objective to work for easing India-Pakistan tensions by increasing people-to-people interaction and searching for solutions of contentious bilateral issues. Some of the major groups are: the Pakistan-India Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIFPD), Aman ki Aasha (Aka — means Hope for Peace), South Asia Media Association (Safma) and Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency (PilDat). While the PIPFD engages a cross-section of society, the Safma has engaged the media, and PilDat parliamentarians and Aka

involves the business community in both countries. Their common agenda is shedding negative perceptions, trust building, easing the visa regime, enhancing commercial ties, creating awareness about peace dividends and offering innovative ideas for resolving bilateral conflicts. Within this context, each one of them is trying to involve stakeholders from both sides of Kashmir to discuss ideas about resolution of the Kashmir conflict. Women of Kashmir from both sides of the LoC can build connections with these groups which would certainly strengthen their voices in larger India-Pakistan Peace Process.

Women of Kashmir can also build networks with India-Pakistan women peace groups that will synergies their voices from gender and human dimensions. Although the women peace movement between India and Pakistan is not very strong as yet, there is a lot women of Kashmir can learn from their experience with cross-border peacebuilding. Some of the major women groups are: Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), Women Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) and South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers (SANGAT). All of them are working for women empowerment, conflict management and peace in the region. They have been facilitating interaction between women and women groups from India and Pakistan. In 2000 a “Women’s Peace Bus” led by Nirmala Deshpande, involving several women’s groups under the umbrella of the then newly formed WIPSA, came to Pakistan and was greeted by Pakistani women led by Asma Jahangir.⁽⁵⁶⁾ These groups are active in building bridges that contribute to greater understanding and push for peace. Women from both sides of the LoC should expand their interaction with these groups for their shared cause of positive peace between the two countries.

Conclusion

Women are profoundly affected by the Kashmir conflict, but their voices and concerns are often ignored and their value in ‘strategic peacebuilding’ is underestimated. Women in the AJK have also borne the direct and indirect effects of the Kashmir conflict but their narrative is missing in the larger discourse on Kashmir. Women being essential component of civil society on both sides of the LoC can play a key role in informal and formal peace processes by bringing gender and human dimensions into conflict resolution processes in and on Kashmir. AJK women together with women from across the LoC can play a proactive role in transforming the Kashmir conflict. They can help in repairing the inter-community relationships and bridging the divides and perception gaps in and across Kashmir. They can do so by developing a shared advocacy agenda and a people-centric shared vision for peace. Thereby

women's perspectives and their potential should not be ignored in the peacebuilding processes in Kashmir.

There is a crucial need to strengthen the gender-sensitive legal framework on both sides of the LoC which would enhance women's capacity for peacebuilding. While in the AJK there are positive trends in this direction, women on the other side of Kashmir are still coping with the effects of the conflict which has devastated their lives. The issues of transitional justice, relating to victims of the conflict like widows, half widows, disappeared persons and youth remain unaddressed. The Indian state policy is gender-blind and women's concerns and voices are completely ignored. Despite this women are showing resilience and want to move beyond victimhood and play a positive role in social reconstruction. Further, economic empowerment and increased political participation of women through gender mainstreaming of the state institutions on both sides of the LoC would strengthen women's capacity for strategic peacebuilding. In AJK the situation has improved but a lot needs to be done.

Women are, indeed, a major stakeholder in transformation of the Kashmir conflict. Thereby, an intra-Kashmir women's dialogue is a must for bringing women agency in strategic peacebuilding. There should be increased communication linkages and cross-LoC interactions between cross-sections of women on both sides of the civil society. Women should form a cross-LoC coalition for peace in Kashmir and act as a pressure group to make their voice heard. They can become an effective connector between grassroots stakeholders and higher-level policymakers. This however, requires raising their awareness and understanding of the conflict and their skills for peacebuilding. Networking of women's groups working on both sides of the LoC and their networking with India-Pakistan women's peace groups and other civil society actors would certainly strengthen the women peace movement in Kashmir.

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 18. Shaheen Akhtar, "Women and peacebuilding in Azad Jammu and Kashmir", in W.P. Singh Sidhu, Bushra Asif, and Cyrus Samii, eds., *Kashmir: New Voices: New Approaches*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006), p.99.
 19. By conservative estimates, 22 years of strife have seen more than 70,000 dead,
 20. "Half Widow, Half wife?: Responding to Gendered Violence in Kashmir," Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), July 2011, accessed at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/sbhrap/projects/kashmir/Half_Widow_Half_Wife.pdf>, p.2.
 21. UtaZetec and Sabra Bano, "Kashmir and 1325, Conference Report," Women, Peace and Security, The Hague, 14-24 September 2008, Gender Concerns International, October 2008, p.1.

22. Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK Government. Also see, Ghulam Nabi Fai, "Kashmir: Past, Present and Future", *South Asian Journal*, January-March 2004. accessed at <http://www.southasianmedia.net/Magazine/Journal/kashmir_pakistan.htm>. Joseph Korbelt states that some 200,000 Kashmiri refugees crossed into AJK in 1947. See, Joseph Korbelt, *Danger in Kashmir*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954, 1966), p.199.
23. Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK Government. Kashmiri IDPs are scattered all over the world. Some 400,000 live in Britain and about 250,000 are scattered in other parts of the world. See, Ghulam Nabi Fai, "Kashmir...", ref.22.
24. Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK Government.
25. Those affected by are referred to as refugees, migrants and displaced people. The author considers them internally displaced people (IDPs) as they have been forced to leave their homes from one part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to the other part.
26. "Divided families urge India, Pakistan to leave Kashmir", *The Express Tribune*, Islamabad, 10 June 2012, accessed at <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/391642/divided-families-urge-india-pakistan-to-leave-kashmir/>>.
27. Ibid.
28. Barring Mirpur and Sudhnoti, all other districts are located on the LoC.
29. According to the 1998 population census the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir had a population of 2.973 million, which was estimated to have grown to 3.4 million in 2004, to 3.5 million in 2006, and 3.963 million in 2010. See, AJK at a Glance, 2006 and 2010, at <<http://www.pndajk.gov.pk/glance.asp>>, <http://www.ajk.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28&Itemid=11>.
30. Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK Government.
31. Praveen Swami, "Runaway grandmother sparked savage skirmish on LoC," *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 10 January 2013.
32. Details about refugees from 1989 to 2010, available at <<http://www.pmajk.gov.pk/refugees/detailsforrefugees.aspx>>
33. See Khalid Rehman and Ershad Mehmood, *Kashmiri Refugees*:

Facts, Problems and Ways Out, in Urdu (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2003). A photo-book about Kashmiri refugees' life in camps of Azad Jammu and Kashmir was launched by the Mass Welfare Foundation (MWF) and IKV Pax Christi. It depicts the life of 1990s IDPs in the camps in AJK.

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