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DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH (DRG-LER) II ACTIVITY WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PAKISTAN: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prepared under Contract No.: GS-10F-0033M / 7200AA18M00016, Tasking N035

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DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY II

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Final Report

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ACRONYMS

BTEVTA	Balochistan Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
GII	Gender Inequality Index
HIES	Household Integrated Economic Survey
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LFS	Labor Force Survey
NGO	Non-government organization
PEA	Political economy analysis
PSIC	Punjab Small Industries Corporation
PSLM	Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SMEDA	Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority
SSICSindh	Small Industries Corporation
SSIDB	Sarhad Small Industries Development Board
TDAP	Trade Development Authority of Pakistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review on women’s entrepreneurship is to inform the design of an activity to support women’s economic empowerment in Pakistan. It presents the existing research regarding the major political economy issues facing women-led businesses, and provides an overview of the relevant socio-cultural, ethnic, and regional influences. It further introduces the major public and private stakeholder organisations involved in this sector.

The following discussion is divided into a review of the literature addressing the foundational factors, rules of the game, the “here and now” realities, and dynamics shaping the entrepreneurial landscape for women (per the Applied PEA field guide). The existing research is far from comprehensive, although it reflects a growing interest in exploring issues and possible avenues to improve the landscape for women in Pakistan.

Two main types of literature were useful to this review. The first comprises the findings of quantitative surveys and reports that provide insight into the women’s employment and gender statistics. These support an analysis of the foundational factors, such as poverty, geographic location, and human development indicators that contribute to the current situation. The second body of literature is academic research, which provides analytic insight into why women face on-going barriers and limited opportunities as entrepreneurs and how best they may be overcome. Over one hundred different research items were collected, with approximately 70 closely reviewed for this analysis. The reviewed work mostly relies on qualitative research methodologies, which permit identification of issues and patterns in findings but are not necessarily generalizable to the broader population of entrepreneurs under discussion.

2. FOUNDATIONAL FACTORS

Foundational factors refer to the “deeply embedded, longer-term national, subnational and international structures that shape the character and legitimacy of the state, the political system and socio-economic structures” (Menocal et al., 2018, p. 7). They are more impervious to change, such as on-going conflicts or class structures, or geography. In the case of Pakistan, it is also useful to draw attention to the instability and insecurity that has remained constant since its creation as a post-colonial independent state in 1947 (Javed & Nabi, 2018).

POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Pakistan is classified as a hybrid state, one in which the power of democratic institutions is limited by reserved domains of power which rests with the military establishment (Adeney, 2017). Direct military rule in the form of martial law, most recently from 1999-2007 has been replaced with electoral democracy and national elections held every five years. Elected governments are weakened by allegations of corruption, which have resulted in frequent replacement of prime ministers even within an elected government’s tenure (Z. Ali, 2018). Those in power are accused of misusing state institutions to prosecute and persecute opposition politicians, which undermines the credibility of bodies intended to address the corruption endemic in government practices (Sayeed, 2010).

The rights of women and religious minorities is a core issue in Pakistani politics. In the 1980s, the military government policy of Islamization pursued an exclusionary policy-making agenda that discouraged women from public life in the name of imposing Sunni majoritarianism on the population

(Iqtidar, 2012). Over the past twenty years, militant religious groups, most notably the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP), anti-Shia sectarian groups, and Baloch nationalist insurgents played a significant role in violent political conflict in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. The TTP and sectarian groups directly target working women in some of their attacks, forcing some communities (such as the Hazara ethnic minority community in Balochistan) to withdraw women from educational and employment opportunities (A. Khan et al., 2021). On-going cycles of violence justify repeated military operations to reduce terrorist attacks, and their direct interventions with governance institutions at the local level.

LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

National development across the country is unequal, affecting socio-economic outcomes geographically and ethnically, and deepening women's inequality in the business sector (A. Ali et al., 2010). The human development index is a composite index to measure achievement in a population in terms of standard of living, education and learning, and living a long and healthy life. It measures adult literacy (above age 15), life expectancy at birth, and per capita income. Rural areas have lower human development status than urban areas. (See Table I below). The same pattern holds true within the provinces, with the exception of Balochistan which has low levels in both urban and rural areas. Amongst the provinces, both KP and Balochistan overall have lower status than Punjab and Sindh (Pasha, 2020).

Table I: Human Development Status National/Provincial and Urban/Rural (2018-19)

REGIONS	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STATUS
Pakistan	0.570	Medium
Urban	0.641	Medium
Rural	0.527	Low
Punjab	0.572	Medium
Urban	0.631	Medium
Rural	0.539	Low
Sindh	0.574	Medium
Urban	0.645	Medium
Rural	0.485	Low
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	0.546	Low
Urban	0.612	Medium
Rural	0.532	Low
Balochistan	0.473	Low
Urban	0.548	Low
Rural	0.440	Low
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	0.632	Medium
Gilgit-Baltistan	NA	Low

Source: Pasha 2020, p. 242.

The working age population in Pakistan (approximately 79 million women and 81 million men) is calculated by including the age group 10-14 years, although the legal age of maturity is 18 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022, p. 11). The gender discrepancy in employment status is striking, with over 62 million women out of the labor force, more than twice the number of men (2022, p. 12). Women's exclusion from the labor force is a waste of the country's major asset, its large population (World Bank 2019, as cited in Muhammad et al. 2022a).

GENDER INEQUALITY

The gender development index (GDI) shown in Table 2 below is based on HDI indicators. Female inequality is most starkly evident through disadvantages in literacy rates and per capital incomes.

Table 2: Gender Development Index Indicator Values and its trends at the national level, 2018-2019

GENDER	EDUCATION		HEALTH INDEX	INCOME INDEX
	Adult Literacy Rate (%)	Net Enrollment Rate (%)	Life Expectancy At birth (years)	Per-capita Income (Rs.)
Female	45.8	36.0	68.1	1,673
Male	69.6	37.9	66.2	9,335

Source: Pasha, 2020, p. 257

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranks Pakistan amongst the lowest in the world. (See Table 3 below). It reflects three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market. The Human Development report relies on micro-data sets and estimates from multiple national surveys, such as the Labor Force Survey (LFS), the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM), the Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES).

Table 3: Gender Inequality Index Indicator values, at the national and provincial levels, 2018-2019

REGIONS	REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH		EMPOWERMENT		LABOR MARKET
	Population without access to prenatal and postnatal care (%)	Share of ever married women 15-19 years of age (%)	Share of seats in parliament (%)	Population with primary or higher education (%)	Labor Force Participation rate (%)
Pakistan	41.5	20.0	20.2	44	20.1
Punjab	36.5	17.0	20.1	52	26.5
Sindh	40.0	18.5	18.1	40	12.1

REGIONS	REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH		EMPOWERMENT		LABOR MARKET
	Population without access to prenatal and postnatal care (%)	Share of ever married women 15-19 years of age (%)	Share of seats in parliament (%)	Population with primary or higher education (%)	Labor Force Participation rate (%)
KP	51.0	31.8	17.6	30	11.3
Balochistan	61.5	23.9	16.9	19	7.9

Source: Pasha, 2020, p. 259

Table 3 shows that less than half of the country's women have access to education or prenatal and postnatal care. The education figures refer to females aged 10 and older who have completed Class 5 or higher, as a percentage of the total population in this age group. The access to pre-natal and post-natal care figures refer to currently married women (ages 15-49) who gave birth in the last three years without attending a consultation, as a percentage of all women in this age group. The empowerment indicator (share of seats in parliament) is deceptive because although women were inducted into elected bodies on a 17% quota, there is a large gender gap amongst voters (12 million at the time of the 2018 national elections). Evidence from the city of Lahore shows that even in urban settings, women's right to engage with the political process as voters is mediated by male relatives at home who act as 'gatekeepers' to refuse or grant permission to leave home and vote (Cheema et al., 2019).

Women's overall labor force participation rate (25%) is amongst the lowest globally and the lowest in South Asia. Women comprise 49% of the total population but only 21.4% of its labor force only (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022, pp. 13, 23). Low female labor force participation restricts economic growth, represents untapped human resources in a nation, and deepens gender equality. Still, the twin goals of women's empowerment and economic participation are not policy priorities, possibly due to patriarchal and religious context prevailing in the country (Safdar & Yasmin, 2020).

When women do hold jobs, they contend with wage discrimination, limited opportunities, lack of benefits and securities, and risks of bonded labor. Combined with the double burden of paid and unpaid work, and hostile work environments, even women with some education and skills find it discouraging to attempt employment (Sarwar & Abbasi, 2013). Only 8.5% of employed women work as professionals, and less than one percent are employed as managers (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022, p. 24). Where female education exists, it is used as a marker of class mobility and marriageability, and female paid employment is discouraged (Masood, 2019).

Ownership of physical capital (land and productive resources) is essential to ensure women's empowerment. Patriarchal norms and marriage outside the family prevent male relatives from granting women the entitlements needed to secure their economic independence (Zaidi et al., 2016). According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13, 89% of ever married women do not own a house, 96% do not own land and only 2% are sole owners of land. The slight improvement in ownership rates with age is indicative of women's inheritance or use of inherited funds to jointly invest in property with family members (Zaidi et al., 2016, p. 47).

Family structures and households, in both urban and rural areas, are predominately extended and multi-generational (Baig et al., 2014). Although joint family households have been found to improve resilience and social adjustment amongst adolescents (Us-Sahar & Muzaffar, 2017), limited research finds quality of life for males within families is higher than that of females regardless of family structure (Lodhi et al., 2021).

Gender-based violence (GBV) within families and communities, and the threat of harassment in public space create real concerns. GBV in Pakistan follows global patterns of harassment in public spaces, but is generally under-reported (Brohi, 2022). Research shows that GBV in urban public spaces has a negative impact on health, education and employment opportunities through restricting women's mobility (Anwar et al. 2016). As a result, it reinforces social norms restricting women and girls to their homes as a way to preserve respectability and family honour (Ali 2011).

New laws to restrict and criminalize domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, honor killings, early and forced marriages, and discriminatory cultural practices began in 2002 and increased in pace after the democratic transition in 2008. National and provincial commissions on the status of women are in place with the purpose of monitoring the government's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the country ratified in 1996. These commissions lack direct budgetary funding and an effective voice in policymaking, although they have played an important convening role within government and with civil society organizations to further gender equality concerns (A. Khan, 2021).

Access to digital technology in Pakistan is deeply gendered. While 17% of young men use a mobile phone, one in three young women is not permitted to use one. Only 9% of young women (compared to 17% of young men) report using a computer/laptop (Zaidi et al. 2020). There is growing evidence that young women are contesting these barriers. Women protestors in urban centres have used WhatsApp and Twitter to organize challenge the threats of violence and harassment in public spaces and the workplace, although not without receiving backlash on these same platforms (Khan et al. 2021).

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS

Pakistani women live in a highly socially stratified context, in which class, caste, linguistic, and regional variations all shape their opportunities (Sathar and Kazi 2000). Gender roles are constructed around division of labor between public (masculine) and private (feminine) domains with institutions designed to reinforce the exclusion and subordination of women (Yunis et al., 2019). Practices of gender segregation, or *purdah*, that confine women and their labor within the home, are considered deeply entrenched social and cultural norms. However, the political economy of this separation ensures both women's subordination as well as the continuation of their unpaid work. Women are most likely to engage in any form of paid work alongside their reproductive labor (A. Khan, 2007).

Research in South Asia shows that geographical region provides us with deeper insights into variations into degrees of autonomy that women are able to exercise. Sathar and Kazi's (2000) study based in Punjab shows that only when women can do paid agricultural work outside the home do they experience greater levels of autonomy. However, measuring specific indicators, such as levels of autonomy, mobility, decision-making, are not sufficient on their own to provide a full picture of local gender systems and opportunities for women (Sathar and Kazi 2000). Patriarchy as an operating model of power is increasingly recognized by researchers as the most effective explanatory framework within

which we can understand gender inequality both globally and within specific geographic contexts (Batliwala, 2019; Goheer, 2003).

Researchers are beginning to document how caste intersects with poverty to shape the opportunities and constraints in Pakistan in terms of education and employment (Gazdar, 2007; Jacoby & Mansuri, 2011). Both men and women who belong to castes associated with certain occupations, for example the leather or bangle-making industry, find their entry into work is eased by this association. Their opportunities for exit from these occupations and entry into others are severely constrained by their caste identity (Collective for Social Science Research, 2004; A. Khan, 2004). Caste intersects with religious minority identity in some of the lowest-paid occupations. For example, waste disposal is associated with the poorest Christian communities in the country (Butt, 2020). Amongst the middle-class, higher caste identity is associated with increased seclusion practices amongst women, limiting their employment opportunities to those deemed more acceptable, such as medicine and teaching (Papanek, 1971).

Household and family structures burden women with more unpaid care work than men. Women's existing care work limits time and opportunities for employment, education and skill development (National Commission on the Status of Women et al., 2020; Masood, 2019). In addition to these limitations, the burden of unpaid care work also impedes women's mobility, access to technology and financial services, and their ability to participate more broadly in social and economic spaces. Women do not have the choice of adequate childcare facilities outside the home and safe transport services. As a result, they face reduced ability to work and exercise occupational choice, thereby pushing them into casual or informal employment (Shaikh, 2018). The double work burden is highly challenging for women to bear without familial, social or state support.

GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Table 4 (below) reveals only 15.34 million women are employed, compared to almost 52 million men. The provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (9.41 million) and Balochistan (3.46 million) represent the worst overall employment figures for the country. Almost four times as many men in KP, and over six times as many men in Balochistan, are employed than women. The rural to urban discrepancies for female employment in KP and Balochistan are lower than in Sindh and Punjab, possibly reflecting the lack of opportunities in urban centres in these provinces and greater socio-cultural barriers to paid work for women in these contexts, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. Further, many pregnant women suffer from malnourishment and inadequate access to family planning and maternal health services, compromising their ability to engage in paid work (Zaidi et al., 2016, pp. 29–31).

Table 4: Employed Population in Pakistan by Provinces 2020-21 (million)

PROVINCE/AREA	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Pakistan	67.25	51.91	15.34
Rural	45.70	32.79	12.90
Urban	21.55	19.12	2.44
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	9.41	6.68	1.73
Rural	7.98	6.40	1.58
Urban	1.43	1.28	0.15

PROVINCE/AREA	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Punjab	39.07	28.41	10.66
Rural	26.84	17.91	8.93
Urban	12.23	10.50	1.74
Sindh	15.31	12.83	2.48
Rural	8.26	6.29	1.97
Urban	7.05	6.54	0.51
Balochistan	3.46	3.00	0.46
Rural	2.63	2.20	0.43
Urban	0.83	0.80	0.03

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2022, p. 13.

Rural women are more likely to be sole owners of a house or land in their name than are their urban counterparts. However urban women have higher rates of joint ownership for both houses and land. Only KP and Gilgit-Baltistan show joint ownership of women at almost 37% and 34% respectively (Zaidi et al., 2016).

3. RULES OF THE GAME

Entrepreneurship is the ability to translate ideas into products and services to market (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). It combines context with opportunity, and the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur which enable the achievement of a successful outcome (Yunis et al., 2019, p. 2). Women entrepreneurs include those who establish new business and participate in running them either formally (as registered ventures) or informally (without being registered) (Anwar & Rashid, 2011). Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship globally, even though entrepreneurship can play a valuable role in social and economic development (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). Entrepreneurship takes place within a context shaped by rules of the game, which are set by both formal and informal institutions. Scholars note that these institutions are not immutable, they interact with one another, and changes in this dynamic can enable or constrain entrepreneurship (Yunis et al., 2019). As Goheer (2003) notes, while the formal regulatory framework treats men and women equally, it interacts with embedded socio-cultural norms and traditions that limit the efficacy of the formal frameworks.

FORMAL CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Article 25 of Pakistan's Constitution guarantees equality of rights to all citizens regardless of their sex, race, and class, while at the same time permitting the state to take special measures to protect and promote the rights of women (A. Khan, 2018). Nonetheless, Pakistan's broader policy context has been identified as both illiberal and exclusionary, resulting in significant restrictions on freedom of speech and association, as well as constitutional provisions that undermine equality of citizenship (Nelson, 2021). The Constitution confers equality of citizenship to all, including women, but also requires that no law or policy in Pakistan run contrary to Islamic law, or Shariah. Scholars argue that Islam does not contain any directives that prevent women from engaging in economic activities (Muhammad et al., 2020). Rules in support of women's business inclusion are mandatory and lead to possible sanctions if they are not

followed. Thus, they have a strong role to play in entrepreneurial practices (Yunis et al., 2019). Nonetheless, under Islamization policies that began in 1979, an interpretation of Islamic law was used that began a process of eroding the citizenship status of women and religious minorities, such as Christians, Ahmadiyyas, and Shia Muslims. The process led to the deepening of their marginalization from the mainstream social, political, and economic life of the nation (Fuchs, 2020; A. Khan, 2018; Saeed, 2007).

The regulatory environment for labor may not directly discriminate against women, but often neglects to provide female labor with the flexibility and benefits they need to remain in the labor force (Goheer, 2003). The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan (Articles 26, 27) states that all citizens should have equal access to public space and there should be equality of employment in both public and private sectors. Under the 2010 18th Amendment, basic education was made free and compulsory for both sexes up to age 16. A series of laws against sexual harassment in the workplace required employers to establish a code of conduct and complaint mechanism to protect women. While these measures guarantee, on the face of it, a more open playing field for women workers, they do not undercut gender inequality.

The government has developed policies and institutional mechanisms to support women who wish to start businesses, mainly through the provision of finance and training opportunities (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022a). Unnecessary government interference and regulations in the marketplace has inhibited business activity (A. Ali et al., 2010). Even though formal institutions do not deny women equality, researchers find that in practice formal institutions re-enact patriarchy’s informal rules that subordinate women and exclude them from equal access to opportunities, particularly in KP and Balochistan (Yunis et al., 2019; Adeel Anjum & Khan, 2012).

Specific budgetary measures to support entry into entrepreneurship are few. (See Table 5).

Table 5: Budgetary allocations to support women entrepreneurs

GOVERNMENT ALLOCATION	YEAR	PURPOSE
Covid-19 Aid Measure	2020	Prime Minister’s package of Rs 100 billion to support SMEs, agricultural sector and small industrial zones.
Punjab Provincial Budget	2022	Rs. 750 million has been allocated for Women Income-Growth and Self-Reliance (WINGS)
Sindh Provincial Budget	2022	Under women development, an amount of Rs. 30.478 million has been included for new expenditure. Rs. 500 million has been allocated to “Benazir Women Agricultural Workers Programme.” The government will provide markup subsidy loans to women own SMEs, particularly in rural areas.
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Budget	2022	A 25% quota has been designated in <i>Akhuwat</i> for women in Rs. 1 billion funds; 20% microloans scheme reserved for women, i.e. Rs. 4.8 billion for female entrepreneurs and SMEs in province; agriculture financing by Bank of KPK to women dairy farmers at concessional rates.
Balochistan Provincial Budget	2022	1.4% of the budget (Rs. 8.23 billion) allocated to social protection and women development; Rs. 150 million allocated to providing sewing machines and washing machines in Ziarat.

The 2022-23 federal budget allowed for interest-free loans up to PKR 500,000 for young people, and an additional loan scheme with a 25% quota for women that offered financing up to PKR 2.5 million SMEDA recommended that government support women-owned SMEs by ensuring the implementation of the “Banking on Equality” policy by the State Bank of Pakistan, simplifying tax procedures and the tax burden on women, developing a one window digital facility and other programs to facilitate women in business (SMEDA, 2021, p. 20).

The government has provided new tax incentives to benefit women entrepreneurs. The Finance Act 2021 reduced by 25% the taxes payable on profit and gains from their businesses, but only applicable to those established from or after July 2021 and not linked to an existing business. The threshold for paying taxes was reportedly raised from PKR 10 million to PKR 100 million in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry has advised the Federal Board of Revenue that women entrepreneurs could use a fixed tax regime and both financial and technical support with filing their taxes. In response the government promised initiatives to support entrepreneurs in remote areas and facilitate tax compliance for those located in urban centres (Hassan, 2022).

The government has established federal and provincial bodies to promote entrepreneurial facilities for both men and women. (See Box 1 below.) The PSIC was evaluated as weak in terms of developing its support for crafts-based and entrepreneurial initiatives. But as late as 2003, neither PSIC nor SSIC had special measures to develop women’s entrepreneurship, while their counterparts in Sindh and Balochistan had very weak programs for women, SMEDA had no projects for women (Goheer, 2003).

Box 1: Government SME Initiatives

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE	YEAR EST.	PURPOSE
Punjab Small Industries Corporation (PSIC)	1972	Promotion and development of small/cottage industries in Punjab. Developed industrial estates, Common Facility Centres, lending facilities, technology transfers.
Sindh Small Industries Corporation (SSIC)	1972	Similar mandate as PSIC. Established industrial estates, artisan colonies, credit schemes.
Sarhad Small Industries Development Board (SSIDB)	1972	Similar to above, as a Board to operate in former NWFP, now KP. Trained some women in traditional crafts.
Director of Small Industries (BTEVTA Balochistan)		Small and cottage industries in handicrafts and textiles.
Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA)	1998	Provide policy for SME in Pakistan, provide and facilitate support services, advocate for government policies and regulatory environment.
SME Bank	2002	Independent bank, merger of Small Business Finance Corporation and Regional Development Finance Corporation
Export Promotion Bureau (EPB)	1963	Promote export of Pakistani products internationally.
‘Women Entrepreneurs Shining through Constraints’ -Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	2021	Programme to identify and train female community leaders who can manage women’s enterprises and increase female entrepreneurship

Source: (Goheer, 2003) and author

Today's BTEVTA's Small Industries program has initiatives designed specifically to develop women in traditional and cottage industries. The SME Bank seeks to provide finance for women entrepreneurs, amongst others. The Export Promotion Bureau has published a directory for women entrepreneurs and conducted exhibitions and trainings for women exporters. The First Women Bank is designed only to support women's entrepreneurship through providing loans, advisory and training services, and assisting them to market their products locally and internationally (Goheer, 2003). It has trained thousands of women and despite its success was almost privatized by the government. Women's movement activists succeeded in winning a stay from the courts on this move, and the Bank remains a public institution to this day (A. Khan, 2018).

Key areas that undermine women entrepreneurs include difficulty dealing with licenses, employing workers, registering property, male-focused credit allocation and limited trade across borders. Another constraint is that not enough women work in the agencies intended to support their businesses, such as SMEDA and TDAP. They are marginalized within professional associations and bodies, partly because male decision-makers and leaders still believe women are mainly involved in home-based enterprises. This notion is further reinforced by lending that is biased towards gendered sectors and initiatives that do not sufficiently build their entrepreneurial skills and networking abilities (Kamal & Woodbury, 2016, p. 25).

Box 2: Finance Schemes for Women's Entrepreneurship

FINANCE SCHEME	DATE	PURPOSE
<u>"Banking on Equality Policy", State Bank of Pakistan</u>	2021	Policy to reduce gender gap in financial inclusion by introducing women friendly business practices. One target is to reach 20 million unique active digital accounts by women entrepreneurs.
<u>"Refinance and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs in Underserved Areas," State Bank of Pakistan</u>	2017	Provide maximum financing amount of up to PKR 1.5 million to women entrepreneurs for a 5-yr tenure to set up new businesses. Scheme had 20% minimum allocation for women entrepreneurs in Balochistan.
Akhuwat*	2001	Islamic microfinance provider w/ disbursements exceeding PKR 13.6 billion, for more than 797,148 families. Operating from within religious settings, provides family enterprise loans for women to start-up businesses.
<u>ASA, Pakistan Ltd.</u>	2008	Small & medium enterprise loans for male and female entrepreneurs to support existing businesses. The 'Small Loan,' is offered to female entrepreneurs only to empower them to expand their businesses.
Damen*	2015	Women-focused non-bank microfinance institution in Punjab with up to 50,000 women borrowers.
First Women Bank Ltd.: The Bank for Women*	1989	Business Loan for Women: Extends loans of up to PKR 2.0 million to businesswomen. Financial Services Division: Assists loan applicants with taxation, marketing, and legal issues.
<u>Ghazi Barotha Taraqiati Idara</u>	1995	Provide micro-credit to male & female entrepreneurs for enterprise development.
Habib Bank Limited's Nisa Program*	2015	Understand women's financial needs & develop services for them.
<u>Jinnah Welfare Society</u>	1990	Provide loans for SME and enterprise development

FINANCE SCHEME	DATE	PURPOSE
Kashf Foundation*	1996	First microfinance provider in Pakistan focusing on women, serving 215,000 clients in 41 districts across the country.
<u>Orangi Pilot Project-Orangi Charitable Trust</u>	1987	Provide micro-credit & interest free loans to existing entrepreneurs to develop their businesses. The disbursement of credit so far has been to 29.7% female enterprises.
Thardeep's E-Appraisal System*	2016	An online appraisal system facilitating women's financial access through loans.

*Source: World Bank Group (2018) *State of Financial Inclusion of Women in Pakistan*, pp. 9, 10, 25, 48.

The government has made some effort to address issues of women's financial exclusion by providing schemes to improve their access to credit and loans. The largest of these is the First Women Bank (See Box 2 above). Government also established several micro-credit schemes within the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, National and Provincial Rural Support Programs, and the Khushali Bank (now privatized) to provide loans for women to start small businesses. The non-government and private sectors, in particular the Kashf Foundation, have a substantial track record in supporting women-led businesses.

INFORMAL NORMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Possibly the most critical informal rule which regulates women's paid work is the implicit sanction against working outside the home and preference for engaging in gainful occupations, if at all, from the home instead. "By operating their businesses from home, these women entrepreneurs can support their families within their cultural and Islamic context" (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022a, p. 970). These restrictions nonetheless affect the growth of their businesses and prevent women from engaging in training programs in which men may be present (Roomi & Parrott, 2008).

Related to this are norms to restrict female mobility. These increase as girls enter adolescence, limiting their access to education, health, and family planning services, and only decrease after a woman passes child-bearing age (A. Khan, 1999). Women constantly negotiate the boundaries of gendered space, subject to male surveillance over permissible and transgressive movements (Masood, 2018). Socio-cultural reasons referencing honor and respectability feed into potentially exaggerated safety concerns about public spaces. Additional arguments for work-life balance are also used to restrict women's employment-related mobility. Together, these restrictions are identified as obstacles to entrepreneurs (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022a). Even in Pakistan's largest urban metropolis, Karachi, low female mobility combined with patriarchal norms have been identified as contributing factors to their low labor force participation rates (Sayeed et al., 2019).

Women's burden of domestic work and patriarchal constraints pose a distinct set of challenges to their entrepreneurship opportunities (Nasir et al., 2019). Their social status is derived from unpaid domestic work and related skill set, while men remain the more valued producers and providers in the family (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022a). Further, there is no widespread consensus in Pakistan over how to define women's rights (Roomi & Harrison, 2010). These dynamics apply not only to women in business, but affect their participation in the labor force more broadly as well, resulting in a persistently low labor force participation rate (Goheer, 2003).

GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Table 6: Key Female Labor Market Indicators by Province 2020-21 (Million)

PROVINCES	EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED	LABOR FORCE	OUT OF LABOR FORCE	WORKING AGE POPULATION	LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE
Overall	15.3	1.5	16.8	62.1	78.9	21.4
KP	1.7	0.3	2.1	11.0	13.0	15.8
Punjab	10.7	1.0	11.6	32.7	44.4	26.3
Sindh	2.5	0.2	2.7	14.8	17.4	15.2
Balochistan	0.5	0.0	0.5	3.6	4.1	11.9

Source: *Labour Force Survey of Pakistan*.

Table 6 (above) highlights that the two provinces with the most women out of the labor force are Punjab and Sindh, reflecting that although Karachi is Pakistan's largest city persistent patriarchal norms contribute to its low female labor participation rate (Sayeed et al., 2019).

4. THE HERE AND NOW

This section highlights specific current events and circumstances that may have some bearing on the key actors and stakeholders in the entrepreneurship landscape, and how they may respond to opportunities or obstacles for change (Menocal et al., 2018). It presents emerging literature around the impact of Covid-19 on the landscape for women, as enough time has passed since the lockdown periods began in 2020 for research to have taken place. Other circumstances which are likely to have an impact are introduced, including the economic downturn and 2022 floods, even though scholarly literature is not yet available on their effects on women's entrepreneurship.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Working women are more likely to be in vulnerable employment than men, which makes them more exposed to the economic costs of the Covid-19 pandemic and liable to lose their income. Since most women who work in Pakistan do so in the informal sector, during disasters and emergencies they are expected to be negatively impacted. The most vulnerable women in the work force include domestic workers, home-based workers, daily wage-earners, agricultural workers, and entrepreneurs (National Commission on the Status of Women et al., 2020).

During Covid-19 many women were forced to abandon their paid work in order to take up the increased burden of care work within their homes. The increase in the domestic workload decreased the time they could have given to employment, education, and skill development (National Commission on the Status of Women et al., 2020). A further effect of the pandemic was to reinforce normative roles of a good wife and mother, thus reversing progress towards a more equitable negotiated identity of Muslim women in Pakistan's contemporary context (Safdar & Yasmin, 2020).

Women's businesses are uniquely vulnerable to shocks, such as those caused by the pandemic (Muhammad et al., 2020). Shocks decrease their profit margins and deepen the precarity of informal-sector entrepreneurs in particular (Muhammad et al., 2020; Muhammad, Ximei, Saqib, et al., 2022b). Lockdowns during the pandemic forced men to remain at home, and pushed women into assuming greater financial responsibility through becoming informal entrepreneurs (Muhammad, Ximei, Saqib, et al., 2022b).

However, the Covid-19 pandemic provided some women entrepreneurs with unanticipated opportunities that aided their entrepreneurship skills and development. One study (Afshan et al., 2021) found women learned technical skills, overcame mobility and socio-economic barriers to accessing customers, and enhanced their communications outreach despite lockdown. They developed new digital skills, such as online banking, communicating with vendors on cell phone, and using of social media to advertise products. Digital technology allowed them to sidestep the cultural barriers involved in face-to-face encounters with men and traveling outside the home for business purposes. While this improved their confidence as entrepreneurs, these women nonetheless faced ongoing difficulties in accessing funding to contend with the financial risks to their businesses which they sought to offset through offering product discounts (Afshan et al., 2021). Research amongst a small group of micro-finance borrowers whose businesses faced closure during lockdown found they suffered in four main areas: a decrease in sales, household income, and both decline in lifestyle and mental health during the lockdown period (Mustafa et al., 2021).

A survey of 400 women informal entrepreneurs working with dairy products, cosmetics, and cloth in Mardan district in KP explored the pandemic's impact on their perceived sales volume. Women selling cloth products did the best, while those selling dairy products experienced the greatest drop in sales (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022b). These businesses largely survived the pandemic's disruption, with family support as the most significant predictor of increased sales. Homeownership, and increased age and experience of the entrepreneurs were also significant factors because older women are more resilient and experienced, and have greater access to financial capital and social networks. The effect of household size was also noted, which may be seen as a proxy for great support in striking a work-life balance, as well as the presence of male partners during lockdown who supported their spouse's business ventures. These informal businesses contributed to reducing the potential poverty impact of households in Mardan during Covid-19 (Muhammad, Ximei, Haq, et al., 2022a; Muhammad, Ximei, Saqib, et al., 2022b).

Research on women's entrepreneurial activity during Covid-19 in district Faisalabad in the province of Punjab found that the income from businesses based in rural areas contributed more to household income than those in urban areas. The entrepreneurs' educational level, family size, and time spent on the business had a positive effect on its growth and size (Ge et al., 2022).

ECONOMIC CRISIS

Pakistan's growth rate declined as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, to negative 0.9% in 2020, however it recovered to reach almost 6% in 2022 (Asian Development Bank, 2022). The growth was bolstered by an increase in private consumption increasing alongside robust remittance inflows and cash transfers (World Bank, 2022, p. 3). Political instability and economic mismanagement pushed the economy to a crisis point as a new government took over in 2022 and struggled to negotiate bailout funds from the

International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile, consumer inflation reached the highest level in over a decade (Ibrahim, 2022). In 2022 inflation reached a new peak at 12.2% (World Bank, 2022, p. 4).

In 2023, the GDP rate is projected to decrease to 3.5% and inflation is projected to rise to 18% due to the aftermath of the devastating 2022 floods, fiscal adjustments, and monetary tightening (Bank, 2022). The current account balance of Pakistan has been in deficit for the last three years; reaching 4.6% of GDP in 2022 (Asian Development Bank, 2022). Strong domestic demand for global commodities, led to the currency dramatically depreciating by 23% against the US dollar (World Bank, 2022, p. 1). The floods, currency depreciation, and high inflation decreased the purchasing power of ordinary Pakistanis, thereby placing small and medium businesses, which enjoy little resilience to shocks, into a deeply precarious position (Ibrahim, 2022).

FLOODS

In the summer of 2022, Pakistan experienced record-high rainfall and floods affecting more than 33 million people across 94 districts, and the loss of 1,739 lives (UNDP, 2022). The overall damages of the floods are estimated at PKR 2.3 trillion with the agriculture and industry sector each accounting for one-quarter of the total damages and the service sector incurring for nearly half of the total damages (Ministry of Planning Development & Special Initiatives, 2022, p. 39). An estimated 9.4 million acres of crops of cotton, date, wheat, and rice were impacted and more than million in livestock was lost (World Bank, 2022, p. 13). The floods negatively impacted the textile industry and local food processing and slaughtering industries. Flood also destroyed infrastructure (such as roads and bridges) and severely disrupted the wholesale and transportation services contributing to the decline in the overall economic activity (2022, p. 14).

The floods are expected to affect households through reduced income due to agricultural loss and loss of livelihoods; loss of assets, such as household items and homes, livestock and productive equipment; shortages of food and rising food prices; and the loss of human capital due to school closure, disease spread, and food shortages. Up to nine million people are expected to be pushed into poverty (World Bank, 2022, p. 2). Women have suffered notable losses in livelihood, development, and education. An estimated 640,000 adolescent girls are vulnerable to increased coercions, gender-based violence, and risk of child marriages and 650,000 pregnant women are unable to receive adequate maternal care (2022, pp. 46, 52).

Initial media accounts of the impact on millions of small businesses document the inability of these businesses to bear the cost of repairing damage caused by the rains and flooding, and to recover lost earnings. The government, too, was slow to offer compensation by way of cash support to struggling small businesses (Ibrahim, 2022). By October 2022, reports emerged of the effects on rural women entrepreneurs and their need for government financial support to revive their business and export their products, to build the potential of these businesses to help revive the country's struggling economy (The Express Tribune, 2022).

The government is accused of failing to adequately plan to mitigate the effects of the upcoming climate crisis, given its vulnerability to environmental disasters and the 2010 floods (Ibrahim, 2022). Research on the effects of the 2010 floods on the entrepreneurial sector may be instructive to predict what lies ahead for women-run businesses now. Six months after that disaster, research in nine districts found small businesses were quick to reopen, although most were operating at a loss. A number of factors,

including the extent of damage to their businesses, level of family and social support, and even a minimal amount of government or NGO support, impacted their recovery time (Asgary et al., 2012). The findings were based on a survey of 500 small businesses across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. It found an almost completely male-dominated landscape, with only three percent of surveyed businesses run by women, attributing the imbalance to “environmental and cultural norms and values” that prohibit their entry into the sector (2012, p. 49).

5. DYNAMICS

This section builds upon the three pillars discussed above, the foundational factors, “rules of the game” and the “here and the now”, to explore the dynamics of how they interact with and affect one another (Menocal et al., 2018). Based on the existing literature, it presents any insights that research may offer on how these dynamics shape potential for change, what features and incentives exist, and how resistance to change may be overcome. It begins with an overview of what we know about the number of entrepreneurs, followed by research findings regarding how the dynamics discussed above reproduce an unstable business environment for women entrepreneurs, create weak access to finance, and constrain the survival and growth of their businesses. It highlights how socio-cultural barriers persist throughout their entrepreneurial journey, with some geographical disparities. Research reveals that women entrepreneurs, despite these constraints, exhibit strong personal qualities that are predictors of their success, and experience significant empowerment benefits from their engagement in business activities.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE NUMBER OF ENTREPRENEURS?

Female entrepreneurs use their knowledge and resources to develop or create new business opportunities. They may do so “informally in a home environment without formally registering their business or hiring office premises.” They are “actively involved in managing their businesses, are responsible in some way for the day-to-day running of the business, and have been in operation for longer than a year” (Anwar & Rashid, 2011, p. 6).

Pakistan has a historically low level of entrepreneurial activity, but even within this the gender disparity is striking. In 2018, female business owners accounted for 14.4% of total business owners in Pakistan, while male business owners accounted for 85.6% (World Bank, 2023). The female to male total entrepreneurship ratio reduced to 0.3 in 2019 compared to 0.06 in 2012, revealing a small improvement in female entrepreneurial activity over the years (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2023).

The most comprehensive survey of entrepreneurship is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor for Pakistan, which is a survey of individuals and not registered businesses. The last survey sample, in 2012, comprised 2000 individuals almost equally divided by sex and between rural and urban areas (Qureshi & Mian, 2012, p. 79). The established business ownership rate for male entrepreneurs (5.18%) was three times more than the female established business ownership rate (1.60%), highlighting the existing gender gap in entrepreneurial activities (2012, pp. 42, 44).

Table 6: Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity, Opportunity, and Necessity Entrepreneurial Activity Rates (%) in Pakistani regions by gender

PROVINCIAL	TOTAL TEA RATE		OPPORTUNITY TEA		NECESSITY TEA	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sindh	14.60	3.20	5.40	0.80	8.90	2.40
Punjab	20.50	0.90	8.70	0.20	11.50	0.50
Balochistan	30.50	-	10.20	-	20.30	-
KP	37.50	-	25.80	-	11.70	-
Pakistan	21.27	1.21	24 (both sexes)		53 (both sexes)	

Source: Qureshi & Mian, 2012, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, Pakistan, pp. 46-47.

The total early-stage entrepreneurial activity rate (TEA) refers to the percentage of those ages 18-64 who are either a nascent entrepreneur or owner-manager of a new business. The overall female TEA rate (1.21%) was almost 18 times less than the male rate (21.27%). The greatest gender disparity was in the most popular province of Punjab (Qureshi & Mian, 2012). Figures for female TEA were not available for Balochistan and KP, although the male rates were higher in these provinces than in Sindh and Punjab. Male figures for Balochistan and KP show the opportunity TEA, which refers to those who became entrepreneurs due to opportunities and the wish to become independent earners and/or increase their income, is higher in these two provinces than Sindh and Punjab. In these provinces, more women enter entrepreneurship out of necessity, because they had no other option for work, rather than opportunity.

A study of women owned SMEs¹ that relied on a sample of 506 entrepreneurs, divided equally between registered and non-registered businesses (Zeb et al., 2020, p. 377), found that the total number of women entrepreneurs registered with various women chambers in all the provinces and women running home-based businesses was only 693. Data by location of registered businesses with local women chambers of commerce identified the highest number of active entrepreneurs (121) in Quetta and the lowest number of active entrepreneurs (42) in Bahawalpur, Punjab (2020, p. 385). Karachi, the country's largest urban center, had only 80 active women entrepreneurs, while Islamabad had 72 (2020, p. 385).

UNSTABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

On-going political instability, nepotism, and corruption contributes to an unstable business environment in Pakistan (Ullah & Rehman, 2018). Political instability combined with violence has been noted as an impediment to entrepreneurship, particularly during the period of Talibanization which peaked in 2007 (A. Ali et al., 2010). This instability is shown to negatively impact women entrepreneurs as well (Afza & Rashid, 2009; Nasir et al., 2019; Noor & Isa, 2020). For example, strike, a common method to express political dissent or public protest, often shut down the marketplaces or public transport (Nasir et al., 2019), which negatively affects the operations of women entrepreneurs.

¹ SMEs are defined as businesses with a limit of 250 workers, up to PKR 25 million in capital, and an annual revenue of PKR 250 million.

WEAK ACCESS TO FINANCE

Inability to access finance remains a serious obstacle to women entrepreneurs. Almost half of respondents in one survey of rural and peri-urban women entrepreneurs reported this as the biggest obstacle to business expansion (Afza & Rashid, 2009). According to government figures, only 21% of men and five percent of women above age 15 have bank accounts, with only two percent of both sexes have access to loans from a financial institution. Over a third (34%) borrow instead from friends and family (Zaidi et al., 2016). A World Bank study found that women borrow from family/friends and/or shopkeepers, noting that the lack of information and understanding of formal institutions dissuades them from applying for loans (World Bank Group, 2018, p. 27).

The highest proportion of women borrowers may be found in microfinance institutions (89%), rural support programs (58%) or microfinance banks (25%) (Zaidi et al., 2016, pp. 42-47). However, a small qualitative survey of 37 women in Punjab who received loans from microfinance institutions to start their businesses found the recipients lacked independent decision-making power from their husbands on how to spend the loan. In other indications of unequal gender dynamics, many women who receive microfinance loans belong to low-income households. Some women receive these loans for the use of their husbands, or handed the money over directly to other male heads of the family to spend (S. Mahmood, 2011). Urban-based women report struggling to put together the financial resources to start their businesses, often discouraged by banks because they lacked the requisite references. This pressure forces them to rely on family or personal savings for the initial investment (Nasir et al., 2019).

Still, there have been some improvements in women's access to loans. A World Bank report on women's financial inclusion assessed the growth in adult usage of formal and informal financial services. The overall access to formal financial services increased (from 12% to 23%) between 2008 to 2015, with the percentage of female users also increasing (from 5% to 17%) (World Bank Group, 2018, p. 11). During the same period the number of women with bank accounts increased from 4% to 11% (2018, p. 12). There were some further positive changes, such as a decrease in the proportion of financially excluded women (from 66% to 57%) and a dramatic rise in women's use of branchless banking, from zero to 2.3 million users in the same period. Women continue to use informal financial services, with the number of women saving in committees more than doubling to 13.3 million (2018, p. 13).

Table 7: Change in Financial Access Among Adult Females (%), 2008-2015

SOURCES OF FINANCE	YEARS		CHANGE (%)
	2008	2015	
Banked	4	11	+7
Other Formal	1	6	+5
Informal	28	26	-2
Excluded	66	57	-9

Source: World Bank Group, 2018, p. 12.

There are geographic variations in financial inclusion as well. Out of the 12% overall increase of financially included women, 7% was attributed to women in rural areas (World Bank Group, 2018, p.

14). Eighteen percent of women in Pakistan borrow credit from informal services, with the credit culture being the strongest in Sindh, followed by Punjab and Balochistan (2018, p. 26). Awareness of financial literacy for women is slightly over half, with Punjab having the highest levels (59%), followed by Sindh (56%), KP (49%), and Balochistan (13%) (2018, p. 29).

CONSTRAINED SURVIVAL AND GROWTH OF BUSINESSES

The structural barriers in place prior to women's entry into the world of business limit their survival and growth as entrepreneurs. Women-owned SMEs in Pakistan underperform (Nasir et al., 2019). In rural and peri-urban locations, lack of education negatively impacted women's ability to understand business, placing uneducated entrepreneurs at a distinct disadvantage to more educated entrepreneurs in urban settings, and isolating them from the broader social and business environment (Afza & Rashid, 2009). The additional poverty burden in rural areas pushes women to spend their limited income on family expenses and necessitates a great amount of time spent on unpaid work within a joint family household structure (Afza & Rashid, 2009).

Thirty-two percent of women in the labor force possess at least a college degree, while approximately the same number of women report no formal education. This trend suggests that most women in the workforce can either be categorized as very poor and often illiterate, or as those with access to higher education (Zaidi et al., 2016, p. 57). Only 11% of all women entrepreneurs received technical or vocational education, with the majority receiving training in skills such as embroidery, knitting, tailoring, or sewing. In contrast, 32% of men have training in skills such as driving and assorted trades. This is reflected in the wage gaps as well. The average earning for women with skills training is PKR 5,000 per month, whereas men can earn PKR 12,000 (2016, pp. 23–27).

One qualitative study in Islamabad and Rawalpindi found women lacked entrepreneurial knowledge, ability to bargain in the marketplace, negotiate with vendors, and know-how to select raw materials (Noor & Isa, 2020). Another qualitative study of entrepreneurs running small businesses, such as beauty salons and bakeries, found those with even limited work experience before starting their businesses found it helped to compensate for the lack of knowledge and training (Nasir et al., 2019).

Women are able to register a business in the same way as men (World Bank, 2023), but the difficulties only grow after that. While most women who start their own businesses do so without adequate finance, skills, and training, those who come from an educated and corporate professional background face what has been termed a 'second glass ceiling' in their new businesses (Salahuddin et al., 2022). A study with five entrepreneurs associated with the Lahore Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry found they had encountered a glass ceiling in their professional jobs and left the corporate sector as a result, only to encounter patriarchal constraints as entrepreneurs. This second glass ceiling constrained their ability to succeed in several ways. For example, their families' dislike of their independence led to doubts in their personal capacity and self-worth, they had difficulty accessing financial resources and vendors to the same extent as men, and they struggled to maintain a work-life balance (2022). A quantitative survey in 2003 also found that women struggled to balance their business and family responsibilities (Goheer, 2003).

Qualitative studies in Islamabad and Rawalpindi found utility bills and taxes exceeded more than the income generated by women's businesses (Nasir et al., 2019; Noor & Isa, 2020). These costs incentivize corruption at multiple levels of the business process. Weak infrastructure provision limits the

profitability of businesses (Taib, 2014). Women note in particular the erratic and costly supply of electricity is a serious impediment to the smooth running of their operations (Nasir et al., 2019).

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Much of the research around women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan focuses on the socio-cultural impediments they negotiate. Women's low status and weak bargaining position limit their entry into entrepreneurship in the first place (Goheer, 2003). Informal rules and expectations also constrain a woman as she strives to conform to social norms, thus restricting her entrepreneurship behavior. She may fear repercussions to her reputation and social ostracization if she exhibits non-conforming behavior while working (Yunis et al., 2019). A survey of women entrepreneurs cited socio-cultural factors such as negative perceptions of working women, mobility restrictions, family restrictions and responsibilities, and male domination and disapproval as impediments to their functioning (Goheer, 2003).

The joint family household structure also mitigates against women's success. One study of rural women entrepreneurs found that even though the social environment was not favorable for their business success, living in a separate household helped to increase their confidence. Fourteen percent of the 872 women surveyed identified male dominance in their context as an impediment to operating their businesses and making independent decisions (Afza & Rashid, 2009). For example, a survey of 37 low-income women in Punjab who were recipients of micro-finance credit found they lacked independent financial decision-making power regarding these funds (S. Mahmood, 2011).²

In urban contexts as well, women report low levels of family support for their enterprise, the strain of a double burden of work, and mobility constraints as ongoing challenges (Nasir et al., 2019; Noor & Isa, 2020). There is a negative impact of this burden on their mental health, marital relations, and intra-household dynamics (Noor & Isa, 2021). In contrast to these findings, a survey of women running micro and small businesses found significant family involvement (over 60%), with women in manufacturing more likely not to seek family help (Goheer, 2003, p. 40).

Political instability fueled by religious extremism contributes to the strengthening of socio-cultural barriers to women's entrepreneurship. Militant Islamic groups, such as the Taliban, are opposed to women and girls engaging in education or employment outside the home. One study of KP women entrepreneurs identified security issues related to the Taliban as a direct impediment to their businesses. Religious extremism has heightened the gendered barriers to entrepreneurs and informal institutions that reproduce gender inequality (Yunis et al., 2019).

GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Women's labor force participation has been increasing while levels among men has remained relatively stable. Punjab and Sindh have shown the highest rates of increase in women's economic participation, with the highest rates reported in rural areas (27% and 44% respectively). Participation in KP declined by 10% possibly linked to disasters in the area. The gap between urban and rural participation by women is

² However, the study reported increases in women's decision-making power within the household regarding daily expenses, purchasing assets and livestock, and use of family planning methods.

highest in Punjab (28%), followed by Sindh (20%), which may be due to the fact that both provinces have a largely agriculture-based economy (Zaidi et al., 2016, pp. 55–58).

Rural women comprise a marginalized segment of the entrepreneurial population because of the barriers to entry and success based on their poverty and socio-economic factors discussed above. They find themselves unable to penetrate the market due to these limitations, their relative isolation as individual entrepreneurs in rural settings, and dependence on middlemen to access customers locally and abroad (Afza & Rashid, 2009). Amongst women in Punjab who received microfinance loans, rural recipients were more likely to use the loans to support their household consumption while those who did invest in business used the funds for animal or livestock breeding, and embroidery or tailoring businesses. Urban women, in contrast, were more likely to use the loans for businesses and report growing profits (S. Mahmood, 2011).

Women's entrepreneurial activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is only 0.1% of the total, reflecting their unique level of disempowerment and mobility constraints, even within Pakistan, in which their literacy levels are almost half those of men. Researchers argue its culture and values are obstacles to female enterprise. KP entrepreneurs interviewed for one small study mentioned the provincial NGOs have been invaluable support to them through providing training (Yunis et al., 2019).

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AS PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS

Entry to entrepreneurship has been identified as a pathway for women to empower themselves and improve the status of women more generally in society (B. Mahmood, 2012; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Yunis et al., 2019). There is a strong body of evidence from Pakistan that links women's engagement in paid work with empowerment outcomes (A. Khan, 2007; Zaidi et al., 2016). With particular reference to women in SMEs, one study found even slight increases in self-confidence, decisiveness, and motivation had a high impact on the success rate of their businesses, although this would be offset by fluctuations in the external political, environmental or financial context (R. U. Khan et al., 2021).

Perhaps due to the severity of contextual constraints, the literature draws attention to the role of personal qualities, emotional intelligence, and social networking capabilities in building women's entrepreneurial success. Studies on entrepreneurs in Quetta (Khan and Ahmed, 2022; Adeel Anjum and Khan, 2012; Ashfaq et al., 2021) highlight these personal attributes and skills, as do others drawing on data from other parts of the country. Although the 2012 GEM survey found that women had a greater fear of failure than men (Qureshi & Mian, 2012), recent qualitative research finds that women entrepreneurs nonetheless exhibit strong personal qualities that are predictors of entrepreneurial success (R. U. Khan et al., 2021; Roomi et al., 2018; Salahuddin et al., 2022). A small survey of 181 women running registered SMEs in three urban centers (Lahore, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi) found distinct personal characteristics and qualities that have a significant correlation with their successes. These were internal factors, including high motivation and intention to succeed, risk-taking, decisiveness, and high self-confidence (R. U. Khan et al., 2021). When some Lahore-based women were interviewed about their personal entrepreneurial journeys, they described needing to develop personal skills. They learned how to assert themselves as leaders, manage their time effectively, establish clear goal-oriented management guidelines, and maintain their competitiveness. As a result, many contended with undermining behaviors from their male staff and colleagues who were uncomfortable with women in leadership positions (Salahuddin et al., 2022). A survey of 752 registered women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, running SMEs with under 35 employees, sought to understand the impact of innovation on

entrepreneurial traits and performance (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). Traits such as risk taking and need for achievement had a significant impact on innovation and entrepreneurial success.

Personal qualities such as resilience and agility of entrepreneurs appear to increase with their age. These empower them to more effectively negotiate the socio-cultural and institutional barriers to building a successful business and contend with shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Muhammad, Ximei, Saqib, et al., 2022b). A qualitative study with ten educated women social entrepreneurs in KP working in sectors traditionally more open to women (textile, education, beauty, vocational training, food) found although the gendered context shaped their entrepreneurial choices, they nonetheless retained a strong desire to achieve self-actualization, financial independence, and improve the status of women through their work (Yunis et al., 2019).

6. IMPLICATIONS

The final section of this review calls attention to gaps in the literature, and findings from research that offer insights into how the political economy context may be changing and concrete suggestions by scholars regarding ways forward.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

There are key gaps in the literature that will need to be filled through collecting new data. These are itemized below:

- Most of the literature reviewed is based on small qualitative samples of women entrepreneurs. The key findings which repeatedly emerge from these studies relate to the socio-cultural gendered barriers to their entrepreneurship.
- A complete dataset of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan is required to fully understand this demographic, in the form of a quantitative survey. It should collect details of their registered/non-registered status, sectors of business, and issues related to production, value chains and market access, as well as socio-economic profiles of entrepreneurs.
- The literature does not include a policy review of institutional and stakeholder incentives and interactions that shape the entrepreneurial landscape in the country.
- Access to finance, training, and capacity-building remains a key issue, however findings suggest research and interventions are needed to build greater social support for women to engage in business.

Due to the gaps in the literature, extensive fieldwork and some primary data analysis if available from relevant institutions would be needed to complete our analysis. This would entail preliminary interviews with stakeholders from the institutions and associations listed in this review, donor agencies investing in this sector, as well as male entrepreneurs who potentially act as barriers to female entry. The interview findings will identify the main stakeholders active on the ground with whom partnerships may be built in future programmes to promote women's entrepreneurship. An analysis of emerging data, currently not available, on the impact of an unstable political and business environment and the consequences of the 2022 floods on this sector is required. Socio-cultural constraints to engaging women in entrepreneurship, unfortunately, remain the constant factor in the landscape in Pakistan.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPING THE SECTOR

Evidence suggests that public attitudes towards women in business is gradually improving (Goheer, 2003). A qualitative research study with 872 women entrepreneurs in remote areas of Pakistan found a generational shift. Most respondents were first-generation businesswomen who came from a background of employment as domestic workers, indicating a generational shift towards entrepreneurship due to lack of alternative satisfactory opportunities in their communities (Afza & Rashid, 2009).

Educated women in KP who become entrepreneurs are possibly struggling the most in the country against discriminatory social norms and laws and ongoing gender inequality. They experience difficulty to access jobs outside the home and win financial independence (Yunis et al., 2019). Although there is limited research on women entrepreneurs in Balochistan, findings from studies with women entrepreneurs in rural and urban settings suggest they contend with similar socio-cultural barriers to their acceptance (Khan and Ahmed 2022; SMEDA, 2019; Ashfaq et al., 2021; Adeel Anjum and Khan, 2012). Women's struggle in KP has been heightened by the growth of religious groups and discourse that aggressively promotes discriminatory gender norms (Yunis et al., 2019).

Women appear to be exercising considerable agency to successfully negotiate the cultural and institutional barriers to their development as entrepreneurs. Gendered familial and social expectations remain in place, even if they run their own businesses, and qualitative research indicates they are constantly finding creative ways to negotiate with these norms. With increased levels of education and experience, and some key personality traits as discussed above, it appears they are more able to successfully negotiate discriminatory norms. Nonetheless, they struggle with feelings of guilt, and thereby reduce their networking outside the home as part of this negotiation. This can have a negative effect on their business development (Roomi et al., 2018).

Improved access to information and communications technology has been identified as one way to contend with gendered barriers to inclusion in entrepreneurship in Asia, including in Pakistan. Access to mobile phones, computers and the internet can improve the competitiveness of a businesses, as well as overcome cost, mobility and time constraints for women. Improved access will enable women to access financial services, improve their business networking, and participate in skills training (Martinez and Nguyen, 2014). Women are already using digital technologies to overcome these barriers by establishing innovative businesses in Pakistan. These include Women's Digital League and Codematics, two small businesses operating in KP run by women to facilitate operating from a home environment (Quresh, 2018).

The literature does not provide strong systematic evidence on which factors or conditions are required to increase women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan, beyond an emphasis on the removal of socio-cultural barriers, increased financial inclusion, and support government policies. (See Noor et al., 2022; Shakeel et al., 2020.) A study by the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi to test the effectiveness of the "We Plus" model, designed to reinforce and leverage women's sense of self using existing social norms found this approach helpful to strengthening women's entrepreneurial mindset (Qureshi et al., 2022). More extensive research is required to arrive at evidence-based conclusions.

Researchers have drawn attention to the need for the government to design policies considering the distinct gender systems which operate in different parts of Pakistan (Sathar & Kazi, 1997, 2000). The political openings provided by greater electoral democracy have already shown that the government is

capable of legislating towards reducing discrimination against women, banning harmful cultural practices, and addressing gender-based violence (A. Khan, 2018). This focus on punitive laws is only part of what is required to bring social change. As in other countries, functioning democratic institutions that are inclusive and participatory, along with an open civil society, are also essential (Loney-Howes, 2020; Miller et al., 2006). This is the broader context which will create a more level playing field for women as economic actors.

WAYS FORWARD

This literature review has not identified any national-level surveys of women entrepreneurs, or even comprehensive up to date provincial data that permits an overview of this sector. One indicative survey in KP found further research is needed to identify barriers to women's employment in the private sector, with research into entrepreneurial initiatives and how to better integrate women's businesses into competitive markets (Kamal & Woodbury, 2016). Detailed quantitative data to identify distinct barriers, training and capacity-building needs, and aspirations of women in business would be useful to inform the activities of the multiple government bodies and professional associations that already exist.

Despite the limitations of the literature available, patterns have emerged in the recommendations and findings across small-scale studies. These are briefly summarized below:

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Revitalizing the business sector in Pakistan will require providing tax incentives to those industries operating domestically, including allowances for delays in tax deposits and reduction in tax rates for small entrepreneurs (Pasha, 2020). Support to women entrepreneurs needs to be part of a broader approach that includes special facilities for their businesses and interest-free small and medium-term loans, policies to ensure equal pay for men and women, the protection of the rights in the workplace and a safe work environment for women (Pasha, 2020).

TRAINING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Scholars propose introducing entrepreneurship and business as mandatory subjects in schools and universities (Noor & Isa, 2020). Some researchers argue that since Islam does not formally deny women the opportunity to work, it is important to help inculcate a more accurate, or true, interpretation of religion to overcome these barriers (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Rural women's insufficient education and training has limited their opportunities to be successful entrepreneurs as they do not have the skills to grow their businesses. The government needs to ensure the facilities provide them with vocational and business development training opportunities, along with appropriate credit facilities (Afza & Rashid, 2009; S. Mahmood, 2011). Evidence exists that women possess exceptional personal qualities, such as high levels of motivation and confidence, linked with their success as entrepreneurs even under extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. This suggests innovative programs and policies must include specific training and incentives for women which nurture these traits (R. U. Khan et al., 2021).

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The Pakistan-based research cited in this review finds that to motivate women to establish their own businesses the government should make special schemes available, followed by training sessions when

they do become entrepreneurs. (See Noor & Isa, 2020.) The government should initiate assistance programs by offering special grants and training to women entrepreneurs, and build on their exhibited success with innovation as a way to build the SME sector and make it more internationally competitive (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). Institutions should make it easier for women to access short and medium-term loans, and place fewer financial constraints on entrepreneurs (Noor & Isa, 2020). Government should ensure more fair competition between men and women in the business world (Zeb & Ihsan, 2020). Financial inclusion schemes need to be accompanied with easier access to digital services and a broader policy of supporting women's social and economic empowerment (Roomi, 2013).

Even though the gender systems differ across Pakistan's geographic and provincial contexts, the solutions proposed to support women entrepreneurs are not substantially different. In a study examining the situation in KP, researchers proposed that SMEDA, TDAP, and the Peshawar Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry develop more capacity-building, training and business development programs for women (Kamal & Woodbury, 2016). In every province, not only KP, it is essential for the government to support these policies within a broader framework of achieving gender equality.

SUPPORT TO NEGOTIATE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The structural inequalities, political constraints and socio-cultural barriers to women's empowerment must give way to new structures that enhance women's capabilities and opportunities (Roomi, 2013). Women entrepreneurs need more familial support to reduce the double burden of work (Noor & Isa, 2020). Researchers argue that unless the normative context in Pakistan changes significantly, thereby removing outdated gendered values and practices, it will not be possible for changes in regulatory environment to have the impact desired for women in business (Roomi et al., 2018).

Global research finds that women's paid work itself helps to shift social norms to become more equitable to women (Harper et al., 2020).

Promising approaches to shift the norms that limit women's economic opportunities include community-, school-, and workplace-based education on gender equality, equal care roles and the prevention of violence; the use of mass and social media to build momentum for norm change; and the development of good quality, affordable childcare services. These approaches need to be backed up by policies that can normalise women's participation in the labor force, such as the expansion of decent work opportunities (p. 84).

The approaches above indicate that supporting women entrepreneurship, while constrained by the current context, can also help to change the very constraints that are perceived to be barriers to entry, survival and success for entrepreneurs. A key element of this context that is gaining increasing attention is the recognition, reduction and redistribution of women's burden of unpaid care work in order to achieve their economic empowerment, which will require both shifts in social norms as well as policy intervention (Shaikh 2018).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SME DONOR PROGRAMMING

This literature review has reaffirmed the business case for "She Leads, Pakistan Rises" that asserts the potential of women-led businesses for the economic advancement of the country, made all the more urgent because serious policy and program investment in this area has yet to be made. The existing

literature, however, does not explore the reasons behind the lack of government commitment to this investment. It does suggest, though, that the foundational factors – most importantly the socio-economic constraints on women’s engagement in public life of all forms – lie behind this apathy. This review has reasserted that research also confirms women’s lack of sufficient access to technology, finance, and training which would facilitate their integration into markets and grow their businesses. The strong focus that existing research maintains on the socio-cultural barriers underscores the need for any program to address the drivers of gender inequality, while bearing in mind that persevering with a long-term programmatic investment could potentially play a role in generating a virtuous cycle of norm change.

ANNEX I. KEY ORGANIZATIONS/ASSOCIATIONS IN WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

NAME OF ORGANIZATION	BASE	YEAR EST.	PURPOSE
<u>Association of Business, Professional and Agricultural Women</u>	Karachi	1950s	Promotes engagement among women, support with feasibilities for enterprises
<u>Employers' Federation of Pakistan</u>	Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad	1950	Projects, training to support the development of women's entrepreneurship with support of donor organizations
<u>Institute of Business Administration, Women Entrepreneurship Program-Centre for Entrepreneurial Development</u>	Karachi	2008	Promote involvement of women in businesses by providing training, seminars, and classes as well as facilities such as libraries, computer labs and incubation spaces. Up to 600 women received training.
<u>Karandaaz Innovation-Women Ventures</u>	Islamabad	2017	Funded by the UK government, focuses on empowering female entrepreneurs in Pakistan by providing growth capital and business development support.
<u>Ladies Fund</u>	Karachi	2007	Financial security and training to become entrepreneurs. Offer linkages for women with international/national organisations, 12,000 women engaged with. Work towards incorporating entrepreneurial needs with social and economic aspects of respective communities.
<u>Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Women Entrepreneurs Standing Committee.</u>	Lahore	2013	A secretariat for activities and coordinates w/ governmental agencies. Resolve problems faced by women in business such as acquiring loans, developing governmental contacts. Educate women entrepreneurs about techniques and strategies of international and national marketing. Formulate proposals for a national budget to increase involvement of women entrepreneurs. Orientation programs, lectures, and workshops to guide entrepreneurs. Local exhibitions of products manufactured by women. Coordinate trade delegations visiting abroad.
<u>Pakistan Association of Women Entrepreneurs</u>	Karachi	1985	Affiliated with UN ECOSOC and World Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises. Active in urban centers and international networking.
<u>Pakistan Federation of Business and Professional Women</u>	Karachi	2019	Non-profit educational organization providing assistance to women entrepreneurs. Associated with the Business and Professional Women International.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION	BASE	YEAR EST.	PURPOSE
<u>Pakistan Women Entrepreneurs Network for Trade</u>	Karachi	2017	Provide advocacy for Pakistani women entrepreneurs & recommend policy changes. Provide linkages for women SMEs with regional and international trade networks. Build databases of women led SMEs to be used for trade policy and partnerships.
<u>SheMeansBusiness</u>	Pakistan	2018	Launched by Facebook, supports entrepreneurs working in the digital economy through training & business development. Trained 9000+ women entrepreneurs since 2018 across 51 cities. 1/3 of the community from rural areas. Partnered with nonprofits and entrepreneurs' associations to provide offline & online training. In 2021 introduced 'Business Resiliency Training through Financial Education' to help navigate the economic impact of COVID-19.
<u>Trade Development Authority of Pakistan – Women Entrepreneurship Development Plan</u>	Pakistan	2006	Promote women entrepreneurship by providing training programs, workshops, local/international exhibitions and enable women to contribute to enhancing trade revenue of the country. Policy objective: need based assessment and training of women entrepreneurs; assisting women entrepreneurs in product/brand development; encouraging women entrepreneurs in digital/e-commerce platforms; empowering women belonging to remote areas; preparing women for international & local delegations & exhibitions; capacity building of women chambers; creating new women entrepreneurs' chambers. In 2001, set up WEXNET to organize women entrepreneurs.
<u>Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry</u>	South Punjab	2008	Empowering women entrepreneurs in South Punjab to bring economic development in the country. Facilitate growth of entrepreneurs through training and provision of up-to-date information. Training workshops focus on enhancing women entrepreneurs' business community skills by helping them learn business ethics, norms and behavioral codes, and techniques of increasing profit & sales.
<u>Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry</u>	Karachi South	2015	Help women acquire loans and creating contacts w/ governmental agents. Instruct women about procedures & techniques of national & global advertising. Provide proposals for national budgets to enhance female participation. Conduct workshops, trainings, & seminars. Exhibit products manufactured by women entrepreneurs. Coordinate delegations of entrepreneurs visiting abroad.
<u>Women Entrepreneurship Development System by National Productivity Organization</u>	Multan	n/a	Improve competitiveness of enterprising women. Help them move from home-based business to a fully commercial venture by providing them resources such as furnished offices, exhibition/display facilities, training, marketing, and design services. Counselling & business development services.

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