



Policy Inaction on Gender Mainstreaming in Infrastructure Projects for Sustainable Development in Pakistan

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The study examines the primary individual and organizational drivers of policy-making on women's development in Pakistani infrastructure development projects. There is general consensus that large-scale projects could be planned and carried out to improve the conditions of communities, especially women, as well as to lessen the project's negative consequences. 33 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with senior Pakistani decision-makers who are active in formulating policy were done for this study. This paper employs McConnell and Hart's (2019) fivefold typology of policy inaction and the results reflect four types of policy responses to gender components in infrastructure projects among our participants: 1) Ideological inaction 2) imposed inaction 3) inadvertent inaction and 4) support for gender policy. Furthermore, mid-career participants with extensive face-to-face interactions with community people in the field showed the highest levels of support for gender policy. Lastly, our research points to the existence of multi-level obstacles to the creation of a national gender policy.



Introduction

Many countries around the world, including Pakistan, have gender disparities. The Government of Pakistan has demonstrated a commitment to improving the status of women in the country through various initiatives for women's empowerment. Large infrastructure projects, such as mining, dams, hydropower, and urban infrastructure, affect millions of people worldwide, including women. Infrastructure projects not only result in displacement, but also in the loss of livelihood and employment, social and cultural capital, employment, health, formal and informal socioeconomic support systems, social identity, and so on (Quy, Phuong and Hang, 2021; Kumar and Chikkala, 2020; Hay, Skinner and Norton, 2019; Asthana, 2018).

The difficulties may be short-term or long-term, and they vary from community to community and individual to individual, but they are typically more severe for certain groups, such as the elderly, indigenous populations, and women (Kahsay, 2021; Kumar and Chikkala, 2020). Large infrastructure projects also allow governments to use such projects, whether state-led or private, to improve the conditions of communities, including women. Large projects enable long-term and sustainable development because they have the resources (human and financial) as well as a long-term presence in the project area to effect positive change through their project and its activities (Sachs et al., 2021; Thiagarajan & Iqbal, 2020; Downing, 2002; Ray, 2000). Until the 1970s, the success of an infrastructure project was measured solely in engineering and economic terms. However, there has been an increase in criticism and debates from human rights organizations and the development community about the devastating effects of many large-scale projects on communities and the environment. Over the last two decades, in response to criticism, many governments and most international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, developed and revised policies and practices for the projected affected population, including women (Vasani, 2020; Lauterbach & Zuckerman, 2013).

Gender work in infrastructure projects may include assessing the status of local women through the collection of gender-disaggregated data and making plans to improve their situation. It also entails actively involving women in all stages of the project, including planning, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Quy et. al., 2021; Asian Development Bank, 1998). In short, policies, institutional setup, and all stages of project operations become more gender-sensitive and effectively address gender concerns.

In Pakistan, however, there is no existing national law or gender policy in this area. In Pakistan, the national and provincial governments use the Land Acquisition Act 1894 to acquire land for development projects that are self-funded. Only compensation for land acquired from legal title holders is provided by this act. There is no consideration for resettlement or rehabilitation under this law. However, for internationally financed projects, the Pakistani government must adhere to the policies and procedures outlined by the funding agencies. This results in different treatment of projects depending on their funding source, leaving many project-affected people without protection.

Historically, gender concerns in large infrastructure projects in Pakistan have not been adequately addressed. Although some initiatives were taken in several projects to benefit



project-affected women, such as providing microcredit, skill development, and health and education services (Ghazi Barotha Taraqiati Idara, 2015). However, it was not a major concern during the project's planning, design, or implementation phases. The recent Dasu Hydropower Project and Diamir-Bhasha Dam projects have a detailed gender aspect in their planning, as they have prepared a Social and Resettlement Management Plan (SRMP) in accordance with the World Bank's requirement(s). Gender has been incorporated as a cross-cutting theme in all plans, as well as an independent component as a Gender Action Plan document, with a large budget allocation, making it Pakistan's largest social and resettlement investment in an infrastructure project.

Literature Review

The policy sciences have struggled in recent decades to understand the significance of inaction in public policy. Inaction occurs when policymakers 'do nothing' about societal issues. This paper investigates key individual and organizational-level drivers of gender policy inaction in large infrastructure development projects among domestic policymakers in Pakistan's infrastructure development field.

McConnell and Hart (2019) define policy inaction as “an instance and/or pattern of non-intervention by individual policymakers, public organizations, governments or policy networks in relation to an issue within and potentially within their jurisdiction and where other plausible potential policy interventions did not take place.” (p. 648). Since the emergence of policy sciences, scholarly attention has primarily focused on "the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies as purposeful government interventions in social processes" (McConnell and Hart, 2019, p.646), which necessitate careful regulation and fine-tuning prior to their implementation in society (Peters, 2019).

This understanding of policy as "governments doing something" is prevalent in contemporary interpretations of policy as well, and it reflects in the lack of attention in scholarly work on key policy processes such as "abstinence," "delay," "waiting," and various "tools" of intentional policy inaction (Verhoeven and Duyvendak, 2017; Howlett 2019; Peters 2019). McConnell and Hart (2019) have provided a five-tiered typology of policy inaction in this context. Policy inaction is seen as a result of institutional contexts. Policy inaction is viewed as the result of institutional contexts that reproduce specific biases and regard certain critical issues as unworthy of policy attention. As a result, policy inaction is defined in terms of potential drivers (individuals, organizations, networks, and governments) who systematically produce a lack of action on critical issues. The five forms of inaction are defined briefly as follows:

Calculated inaction: tactical inaction that is measured, premeditated and planned.

Ideological inaction: purposeful inaction resulting from ideological convictions of policy makers.

Imposed inaction: Inaction that results from belief in unfeasibility of policy action due to perceived institutional or sociopolitical barriers.

Reluctant inaction: Inaction that occurs due to lack of availability of workable policy choices, apparatuses and assets to tackle a specific issue.



Inadvertent inaction: Inaction that results from cognitive coping mechanisms of policy makers routinely employed for dealing with managing information load.

This study employs this typology to examine the discourse surrounding the challenges that policymakers and development practitioners face when developing gender-related policies in the infrastructure development field. The study investigates the need for a localized gender policy dealing with the development of women in infrastructure projects in order to protect them from the negative effects of the infrastructure projects, while also explaining stakeholders' perspectives on the creation of a policy.

For a variety of reasons, this typology is useful in analyzing policy inaction on gender in the development field in Pakistan. First, it enables us to highlight inaction that is both inadvertent and purposeful, and it is not limited to government organizations. Instead, policy inaction is viewed through the lens of institutional contexts, each with its own network of operations. It also broadens the focus of policy in/action from policymakers' "jurisdiction" to their "sphere of responsibility," as well as the recognition of ambiguity and contestation within the field (McConnell and Hart, 2019). This is significant because development projects in Pakistan are frequently implemented through multiple governments and international financing bodies, each with their own goals for gender mainstreaming.

Research Methods

In this study, policymakers were defined as high-level decision-makers involved in informing or authorizing the prioritization of project settings, resource allocation, and/or policy implementation. The research focused on local development consultants, in-country representatives of financing agencies, and employees of project implementing organizations with experience in large development infrastructure projects in Pakistan to gain a thorough understanding of the policymaking environment and processes of gender mainstreaming within infrastructure development projects in Pakistan.

A purposive approach was used to select the pertinent organizations based on the nature, aim, purpose of the study and the review of the literature. The relevant ministries, departments and organizations included the Ministry of Water and Power, Department of Social Welfare, Special Education, and Women Empowerment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK), and the Environment Protection Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The participant's selection criterion for the purposive sample within the selected organizations was that the persons be associated in any capacity i.e., administrator, project planner, and implementer as a government official or consultant with experience in women's development initiatives in infrastructure development projects.

A qualitative research approach was used to collect contextually meaningful evidence from the field through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders. The participants within selected organizations were approached based on the professional connections of one of the research team members based at the University of Punjab's National Center for Resettlement and Rehabilitation. Following the initial interviews, the other participants were found via snowball searching, in which each policy actor introduced researchers to one or two potential



informants in their network. In total, we conducted 33 in-depth, semi-structured interviews based on the principle of saturation point.

To ensure broad representation, we interviewed high-level policy actors involved in planning or implementation in a range of development areas and contexts to explore common and contrasting experiences. These policy actors worked in government agencies and nongovernmental organizations agencies in senior positions as national policy advisors, civil servants, program directors/managers and providers of technical expertise. The organizational break-up of the sample is shown in Table 1. Our topic guide aimed to: (1) elicit policy actors' perceptions about critical issues in the development field (2) challenges to policy action on gender and 3) potential solutions for policy making on gender in development projects

Interviews were conducted in either English or the local language, depending on the interviewee's preference. Interviews were audio-recorded if consent was obtained. Handwritten notes were taken during and after each interview, which lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews conducted in languages other than English were translated into English, and the translated transcripts were reviewed by the interviewer to ensure accuracy. Although no contacts refused to participate, three participants requested to be not recorded.

Table No 1: Organizational Distribution of participants.

S.no.	Organization	Total N=33
1.	Transnational organization	2
	The World Bank	2
2.	National/Federal Level	12
	WAPDA	6
	Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms	3
	National Commission on the Status of Women	3
3.	Provincial Level	8
	Commission on the Status of Women, KPK	3
	Department of Social Welfare, Special Education, and Women Empowerment, KPK	5
4.	Dasu Hydropower Project Team	5
	Social Team including gender experts	5
5.	Consultants	6
	Field Data collectors	3

Findings

This section explores the key drivers behind policymakers' decisions for inaction or for choosing not to change pre-existing policies to include dimension of gender in large infrastructure development projects. The preliminary coding of interview data revealed four types of policy responses to gender among our participants: 1) Ideological inaction 2) imposed inaction 3) inadvertent inaction and 4) support for gender policy. This was followed by open coding which allowed identification of sub themes within each main theme.

Individual level drivers for ideological inaction included three sub-themes: Limited definition of "development", criticism of the international safeguard policies and attitude of denial.



Individual level drivers for imposed inaction included two sub-themes: Lack of support from top leadership and Fear of opposition from local communities. Key drivers for inadvertent inaction included three sub-themes: Lack of systematic opinion formation on gender, limited interactions with women in the field and Structural issues. Individual level drivers for support for gender policy included three sub-themes: comprehensive knowledge of gender related issues, experience in development projects on women, and long-term interaction with women in field.

Ideological inaction

The findings of this study reveal that policy inaction among policymakers and development practitioners was largely determined by their convictions regarding relevance of gender based issues in the infrastructure development field. Three important drivers were identified in the discourse of the participants; Limited definition of “development”, criticism of the international safeguard policies, and attitude of denial.

Limited definition of “development”

In the responses of majority of the participants of this study, “development” and “success” of a project were predominantly defined in economic terms and other important dimensions including gender were excluded or marginalized. For example:

“Our work here is to build projects like dams and roads. This is what is needed for the progress of the country. Our success is that we complete our projects in time and within the budget. This is what we should be answerable for.”

Many of the study's development practitioners had academic and professional training in engineering, which was reflected in how they defined "development" and the success of these projects. As a result, technical aspects and engineering-related issues and outcomes were highlighted in the definition of development. As a result, the majority of these participants either did not believe that a separate gender policy was necessary or described gender as a sub-dimension that was not a primary priority in these projects. For example, the following responses were common among participants with engineering backgrounds:

“I fail to understand why we need to link everything with gender. It is just a buzz word forced down our throats by the financing agencies. I am in this field since almost over thirty years. I have completed many projects successfully. If you ask me, I will say that this is just nuisance.”

Although senior professionals do not say it aloud, It was observed that a large number of officials, particularly those in engineering, do not believe in the need for a gender component in infrastructure projects.

Criticism of the international safeguard policies



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“These institutions (financing institutions) have so many policies. We are a Muslim country and we respect our women. No one needs to tell us as if in their countries women’s have all the rights. Our women are better off than those women. Trust me. Their real agenda is to detract us from the real goal and keep us busy in these unnecessary endeavors. Whatever they say, it is business and business alone for them.”

Female policymakers also shared this viewpoint. According to a mid-career bureaucrat, focusing on the project's effects on communities and women was a technical annoyance that diverted attention away from technical project issues:

“Bringing in females in project teams in many project areas, especially in conservative communities, can be a big challenge for projects. For example, we can send them everywhere at any time, need to provide them appropriate transportation, and constantly worry about their security.”

Denial

Another key argument advanced by participants to justify policy inaction on gender was that there was no problem with current land acquisition and infrastructure project development law and practices. They stated that the projects were being carried out properly and that no social problems were arising in relation to the rehabilitation or resettlement of women and their communities. This outright denial of consequences for specific communities and women was found to be most common among male senior-level development practitioners and bureaucrats who had limited direct interaction with development project affectees. Such views were also conflated with the belief that no changes were required in Pakistan's existing policies and laws governing the resettlement and rehabilitation of affected communities. As one participant opined:

“I believe that the projects are working fine under the existing laws. There will always be criticism on the government, whether it is opposition parties, media, or non-government organizations. When the opposition comes in power they do the same things.”

Similarly, another participant was of the view:

“I work closely with projects. Gender and women are now just buzz words to be put anywhere we want whether it makes sense or not. When we develop projects we always think of communities and women are naturally a part of the communities. A separate policy just doesn’t make sense to me.”



In conclusion, a limited definition of "development" in economic and technical terms, criticism of international safeguard policies and donor agencies, as well as outright denial of women-related issues resulting from development projects, were found to drive and justify policy inaction on gender mainstreaming in resettlement and rehabilitation of affected communities of large infrastructure development projects.

Imposed inaction

According to the findings of this study, many participants supported the development of a gender policy and the inclusion of a gender dimension in large infrastructure development projects. The majority of these participants were mid-career bureaucrats or development consultants with firsthand knowledge of the communities. However, policy inaction resulted from a reluctant acceptance that appropriate tools and resources for developing and implementing a gender policy in large infrastructure development projects in Pakistan were not available. As a result, responsibility was shifted from policymakers to top leadership and/or local community cultural norms.

Lack of support from top leadership

Mid-career development practitioners and bureaucrats in the study blamed a lack of support from their top leadership as the main barrier to the development of gender policy in Pakistan. Many of them expressed their dissatisfaction with policymakers for not allowing them to do what they believed should be done in these projects in terms of gender. As one participant shared:

"I have been involved in planning of many projects and I know the issues inside out. When we plan projects, they have to remain within policy framework. However when the big decisions are made about policy frameworks, we are never consulted. We keep sharing on various platforms but nobody seems to care. Gender is least on their priority."

Another participant shared:

"The seniors are not willing to change their old ways. They want to keep the system going as long as it works."

Some participants also shared their experiences with external pressures from political parties in power to complete projects within their tenure. Pressure on project teams to meet unrealistic deadlines shifts attention away from social aspects of these projects and toward technical issues related to large-scale infrastructure engineering and execution. According to one senior bureaucrat, external pressure tends to introduce gender-related challenges and outcomes that are not the result of originally planned projects:

"Many times the politicians give us (project executing agencies) a deadline for inauguration of a project or just announce it in a political rally for point scoring. ...Many times, they themselves know it is not possible to finish the project in the given time, but if anyone dares points out, he is considered incompetent and removed from the position. Thus we usually rush through the projects. However, it is easier to rush through the physical side of the projects"



through double shifts but then the social aspects becomes problematic. For example, instead of negotiations for evacuation of houses, it is easier to use force.”

Fear of opposition from local communities

The participants' stereotypical view of local communities was an important justification for policy inaction on gender. Bureaucrat responses revealed that local communities were frequently stereotyped as uncooperative, traditional in their values, and uninterested or opposed to gender-related reform. This was frequently used to justify a lack of adequate gender policy action in ongoing development projects.

Many participants, for example, expressed concern that a gender policy would conflict with the community norms of groups that would be directly impacted by large-scale infrastructure projects. As a result, the inclusion of a gender policy or gender dimension in the project was framed as a strategy that could potentially jeopardize local community norms as well as the project. Fear of opposition from local communities was cited as a reason for the avoidance of gender-related conversations during the conception and implementation of many development-related projects. For example, a senior level bureaucrat shared:

“These are projects with huge costs and strict timelines that have to be followed. We work very hard to bring local communities on the same page with us. So we cannot risk offending them or losing their support by stressing too much on their women. It’s not their culture to discuss their women in public.”

Some participants working with international financing agencies alluded to the prevalence of belief in conspiracy theories about international financing agencies' foreign agendas among members of the local community. This was given as an explanation for the project's lack of focus on the gender dimension during the conception, negotiation, and execution phases. Local residents of target communities were portrayed as intolerant, as well as lacking knowledge and awareness of both technical and social issues. For example, one participant stated that open discussions about gender issues with communities frequently created suspicion among community members about the motivations of these projects. As a result, policymakers and development practitioners were discouraged from emphasizing the project's gender dimension.

“Unfortunately most of our hydropower projects sites are in less developed and conservative part of the country. In those communities interacting with local women even by women staff members pose a challenge. In many areas the locals do not like women as project staff as they fear it might had negative impact on their women. Convincing the community takes efforts and energy of our teams.”

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Inadvertent inaction

Findings of this study suggest that policy inaction related to gender is a product of organizational culture, institutional constraints and blind spots.

Lack of conversation and systematic opinion formation on gender

“Many study participants mentioned a male-dominated workplace culture in government offices, particularly those dealing with infrastructure development projects. Both male and female study participants noted a lack of opinion formation on gender and gender-related issues in general training of Pakistani bureaucrats and policymakers. This was thought to reflect in the gender policies of many policymakers. Bureaucrats and policy makers feel comfortable in their own area of specialty and we are not trained on gender as such. We only talk about it as a possible outcome in a project or in terms of victims or affectees. So many bureaucrats feel ill equipped to take an open and direct stance on gender as such. And we think it's the job of NGOs and activists to take up gender.”

Some study participants expressed concern about the lack of institutional support for gender. There was a lack of integration of gender perspectives in institutional goals and missions, and it was instead considered a matter of personal preference. Gender studies were also thought to be the domain of female bureaucrats and development practitioners in male-dominated workplaces. This was thought to be reflected in the lack of gender conversations in all types of policymaking. As a result, taking gender issues into account during project development and execution was more of an exception than the norm. Many men believe that discussing gender issues should be limited to women. This is still a common perception among senior male bureaucrats. According to another federal government male development practitioner:

“When the projects teams are mostly comprised of men, there is often limited or no conversation on gender. Unless there is some direct incentive involved or objective to be met related to gender dimension.”

Limited interactions with women in the field

Many study participants stated that organizational culture in federal and provincial government organizations was dominated by men. The majority of the work was done within and between offices, with only a few field interactions with community members. One significant implication was the lack of interaction between mostly male bureaucrats and development practitioners and women in the field. For instance, according to a male junior level officer:



“I have been part of many senior level policy meetings. The whole group is usually all men. Their understanding of the gender and gender mainstreaming is very limited compared to us who have studied it and have actually work in the field. Many of the seniors have worked in the field previously but during those days gender was not a consideration”.

Some participants also mentioned that as officers rose in rank, their interaction with community members steadily declined. Those in charge of making decisions and having the most authority to develop gender-related policies had the least amount of direct interaction with women in the field. As a result, top management was less sensitive to gender issues and frequently inadvertently failed to incorporate gender perspectives in policy making or project development. For instance, response of a senior Provincial level bureaucrat reflects this lack of gender sensitivity:

“I work in head office and I joined this department just eight months ago. The people who work in the field would know better and I am sure they are doing what needs to be done. There is a whole unit assigned to a project and it is their job. Sometimes in meetings we are asked for advice. We give advice accordingly. I think it should be left to them to decide (implementing agency).”

Many participants' responses, particularly those of senior bureaucrats, revealed a general lack of awareness and knowledge of the negative effects of development projects on women and other vulnerable groups. This was frequently reflected in attitudes that trivialized the effects of development projects on women or demonstrated a general ignorance of the project's impacts on vulnerable groups. For example, a participant working in a National organization said:

“Well. Hmmm. What kind of impacts on women are you talking about? Of course there would be effects but I don't think they would be very serious and short term but I have never worked on a project myself.”

Structural issue

The findings of this study suggest that the organization dealing with large infrastructure development projects also produce policy inaction on gender. Many participants working in government organizations (National, Provincial, and Federal) for example, expressed a lack of personal involvement with development projects under their jurisdiction. This was frequently the result of frequent transfers of government employees from one office to another. Some participants also mentioned how officers' frequent postings forced them to work in areas and on projects where they lacked professional training or personal interests. As a result, they were uninterested in the gender impact of projects.

To do gender based work with communities on project sites means to develop relationships with community members and get a deeper understanding of the local norms and values. This does not happen overnight and one needs time. Unfortunately, the staff turnover is very high in our projects, sometimes by the organization and at times by the staff member themselves move between projects. When a person knows that he or she will be at a project for few weeks or months, they do not dig deeper or get invested in the project.



Some participants also mentioned that the frequent posting of officers meant that many officers joined ongoing projects in the middle and were frequently re-posted before they finished. As a result, frequent officer postings foster a culture of lax accountability and blame shifting among many officers and bureaucrats. This culture makes it easier for bureaucrats and officers to disregard gender issues when carrying out projects. Some participants, on the other hand, claimed that the culture of frequent postings of government officers created a sense of lack of control among officers. This discouraged them from pursuing innovative gender approaches or enacting gender policy. As one participant shared:

“If you see the history of our organization, you will see that the average tenure of most of our heads is from few months to a little over a year. I believe that it takes few months for anyone to settle in and by the time they are they get posted elsewhere. If this is the pattern then what social networking or performance can we expect from them? “

Furthermore, many participants expressed a lack of comprehensive report writing and project record keeping. Because of a lack of in-depth analysis and a greater emphasis on descriptions, project reports frequently failed to capture the true essence of what was happening on the ground with project-affected individuals and groups. As a result, once a project team disbanded, there was no documentation of their experiences and processes for future teams to benefit from. One participant explained:

“When I joined as a young officer, I was very enthusiastic to learn, I used to sit in the library and go over projects document to get understanding of how things worked. One thing I noticed is that most of the reports have the similar text, more like cut and paste. I have worked on some projects myself but the quality of report produced does not do justice to what we had done in the field.”

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that organizational culture and institutional constraints such as a lack of gender integration in organizational goals, the prevalence of a male-dominated culture, frequent postings of government officers, and a lack of comprehensive project documentation lead to gender policy inaction.

Support for Policy-making

The findings of this study show that participants support having a localized gender policy in Pakistan. This group of participants was aware of the concepts and the potential negative consequences for project-affected women. Those who voted in favor had worked on projects dealing with these issues. This group, however, was mostly made up of consultants or officials from the executing agencies and made up the smallest percentage of my participants. One participant opined:

“Yes, there is a serious need of policy-making in this area (Gender). I was part of the group that worked on the proposed resettlement draft in 2012. We worked a lot on it, we also tried to convince the stakeholders about its importance but it did not work out.”

Participants enthusiastically shared story after story about their work on various projects. Many of them also stated that their field experience made them aware of the overlapping dimensions of development projects and their various outcomes for local women and vulnerable groups.



They also stated that spending time with locals in the field fostered empathy and emotional attachment to the people of the area. This bonding with the locals usually results in the need to understand projects from their point of view and to implement gender-related policies. As one participant shared:

"I have been involved in planning of many projects and I know the issues inside out. When we plan projects, they have to remain within policy framework. However when the big decisions are made about policy frameworks, we are never consulted. We keep sharing on various platforms but nobody seems to care. Gender is least on their priority."

Finally, the participants who had more closely worked in the field supported the need for a gender policy the most. Many of these participants were familiar with and had critically examined national laws and international safeguard policies. Many of them, however, were young or mid-career professionals, primarily consultants, hired by implementing agencies or consulting firms. Their work was contract-based and had an open time frame. As a result, they were frequently excluded from decision-making bodies.

Discussion

In Pakistan, infrastructure projects are now planned and carried out variably depending on the source of funding because there is no national policy in place. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a well-intended indigenous policy in the field of women's development within a larger framework of gender within the project's social aspects. A localized policy could be a great opportunity for the government to use these projects to improve the status of women and bring progress and prosperity not only to the country as a whole but also to the communities affected by the projects, as many projects in Pakistan are in the poorer districts of the country. A closer look at these problems might spark debate among interested parties and result in the creation of relevant policies.

Important causes of Pakistan's policy inaction on gender in major infrastructure development projects have been brought to light by this study. First, our study demonstrates that cognition, a topic that is frequently neglected in Pakistani policy sciences, is crucial in determining how gender or any other pressing issue is understood and addressed at the individual and institutional levels. Problem-negating cognitive biases have been demonstrated to affect individual policy makers, companies, and institutional cultures, according to research (Bach and Wegrich 2019; Taarup-Esbensen, 2019). Our findings showed that the target communities, funding organizations, and leadership of policy makers were biased in ways that led to actions on gender at the policy level.

In order to inspire policy action at the institutional level, it is important that the study emphasizes sources of cognitive biases as well as important strategies for minimizing their detrimental effects on individual policy makers. In the case of decision makers among the development field and members of the target community, for example, our study reveals that a lack of sufficient and ongoing face-to-face connection may contribute to the prevalence of



cognitive biases in the former. Furthermore, the top leadership has the least direct contact with the community members yet having the most power to make choices on gender.

Similarly, Wilensky (2015) in his research also found that senior leadership may have less access to information, interest in, or aptitude to comprehend and deal with real-world situations due to organizational hierarchy. This could potentially result in concerns being hidden or portrayed incorrectly. On the other hand, development practitioners who had more in-person contact with local residents demonstrated a stronger concern and increased efforts to include the community's viewpoint in policy-making. Our analysis also shows that it is intentional, both at the individual and institutional levels, to ignore gender-related issues in development programs. According to research, elites rely on "agenda denial," or cultural tactics for avoiding, marginalizing, and redefining important problems (Cobb & Ross, 1997; Lukes 2005). We discovered that the majority of governmental and non-governmental organizations operating in Pakistan are patriarchal and male dominated.

As a result, discussions about gender and the integration of gender-related issues are purposefully de-prioritized by male leadership in order to protect corporate culture (Baumgartner & Jones 2015). Last but not least, our study identifies organizational factors that unintentionally result in gender-related policy inaction in Pakistani development initiatives. Because other issues are prioritized, organizations frequently lose sight of certain issues, according to research in policy science (Stark 2019). According to our study, organizations and people who are concerned about development initiatives often become blind to their social aspects of the project as a result of a greater emphasis on the technical parts of these programs.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the prevalence of fatalist cultural archetypes in governance creates a self-defeating mindset that leads to inactivity and procrastination on crucial issues (Hood, 1998). This was demonstrated by Kayani et al. (2012) in their research of the obstacles to the advancement of road safety in Pakistan. Our findings imply that structural problems including the frequent postings of concerned officials led to complacency and inertia among policy makers on gender-related issues. This method frequently led to feelings of being out of control and being unaccountable for the outcomes of the projects. Research reveals that large projects are complex collaborations that call for networked coordination between a numbers of dependent factors, which lends weight to this idea. They need drive and trust to work together (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Laegreid et al., 2014; Ansell & Gash, 2008). Lack of these favorable conditions can result in policy impasses due to misunderstandings, mistrust, and inter-agency lobbying (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Bach & Wegrich, 2019).

Conclusion

The advancement of women is a crucial metric for determining a nation's success or failure, making it a cross-cutting aim of international development agendas such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. This study advances our knowledge of how gender equality and women's development discourses and policies are established or not in national contexts. Additionally, it provides a better understanding of how



stakeholders implement, construct, or reject discourses and policies promoting women's development while carrying out development projects influencing the success or failure of Pakistan's gender equality agenda.

Thus in this paper, we evaluate the lack of gender policy making in significant infrastructure development projects in Pakistan using McConnell and Hart's (2019) fivefold typology of policy inaction. The study's main finding, while exploratory in nature, provides direct, nuanced evidence of the factors that influence policymakers' inaction in Pakistan's development sector. Thus, our research indicates the existence of multi-level obstacles to the development of a national gender policy. Based on the research and findings the following recommendations are made:

1. Women and infrastructure development should be the subject of national-level study to produce data and deepen awareness of the Pakistani context.
2. Decision-makers should be made aware of the importance and scope of the socioeconomic effects of infrastructure projects on project-affected individuals, particularly women, and the requirement for a localized policy.
3. To lessen the negative consequences of infrastructure projects, localized gender policies must be developed.
4. In order to promote policy-making in this area, active networks of organized groups must be involved.
5. Policies and laws must be put into effect at the provincial and federal levels when they are created.

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