

Project presentation



The Research Council
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Programme
NORGLOBAL/Women and Gender

Gender and human security in post-conflict Pakistan

'How do women's and men's perceptions of their security and vulnerability differ in a society dominated by war and natural disasters?' This is the question being addressed in a collaborative research project carried out by Pakistani and Norwegian researchers in the Swat Valley in North-Western Pakistan.

'This is very relevant research. As we closely study the lives of the local population who have recently experienced several crises, very interesting and often unexpected findings emerge,' says Ingrid LP Nyborg, the Norwegian head of the project at the Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) in Ås.

Together with her colleague Bahadar Nawab of the Comsats Institute of Information Technology (CIIT) in Abbottabad in Pakistan, she is head of the project *Gender and Human Security in Post-Conflict Pakistan: Policy implications of local, gendered perceptions of security and development*.

Nyborg has worked on topics relating to Pakistan since 1994. She completed her doctorate in 2002 in Northern Pakistan on the topic 'Men and women's negotiations over control and access to natural resources', and she has many years of research experience from both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Nawab completed his doctorate at Noragric, UMB in 2006. The research team also comprises two PhD students and two researchers from Pakistan, and one PhD student from Norway. The project is funded by the Research Council of Norway's NORGLOBAL programme in the amount of NOK 5 million. Sixty per cent of the budget is at the disposal of CIIT while the rest is at UMB's disposal. The project started in 2011 and will conclude in 2014.

Bordering Afghanistan

The Swat Valley in North-Western Pakistan is not far from the border with Afghanistan. The area is dominated by Pashtuns, who are also the biggest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

'The same ethnic group and the same culture are found in the Swat Valley and in large areas of Afghanistan. After the 11 September attacks in 2001, the political and religious situation has become very polarised in this area,' says Bahadar Nawab.

In 2007, a Taliban-led insurgency started in the Swat Valley. The government of Pakistan attempted to quell the unrest by permitting the introduction of Sharia law in the region in 2009. Later that year, the Pakistani army took over control of the area and banished the Taliban. The armed conflict led to more than two million



Bahadar Nawab and Ingrid Nyborg

people fleeing south to Peshawar. Three months later, people were able to return to their homes.

After the armed conflict was over, researchers asked the following questions: How do men and women experience the situation immediately after a crisis? How can we understand the complex relationship between the desire for personal security and the need for development? And: What part does the gender dimension play in this context?

'We held a workshop in the area as early as in December 2009, and planned the project on the basis of the situation as we saw it at that time,' says Nyborg.

Flood disaster

In August 2010, the river that runs through the Swat Valley burst its banks following heavy monsoon rains, causing the worst flooding in more than 80 years. More than 1,000 people died and 14 million were affected by the disaster.

'It was no longer just the experience of war that created insecurity but a major natural disaster as well. The Swat Valley became the focus of international attention, and many emergency aid and relief agencies poured in to help. The situation in the area therefore ►►

►►► became more complicated. We had to expand the research project and adapt it to an even more complex reality,' says Nyborg.

Research questions

Is there a difference in how women and men in the Swat Valley tackle emergencies and problems of different kinds, such as food shortages, political instability, natural disasters and personal insecurity? And how do they experience their own insecurity and vulnerability?

The researchers are investigating the project's research questions at both the individual and societal level. They are therefore also interviewing the authorities, the local police and the army, village leaders, religious leaders, and local and international NGOs. They are asked how they perceive their own role in and responsibility for establishing security in the area, for both women and men.

'We are already seeing major differences in how safety and security are perceived by individuals in the villages, on the one hand, and the police and military forces, on the other,' says Nawab.

The team has evidence, for example, of the importance of interviewing different women and men about their views on and experiences of health security. Very different views are given by e.g. male doctors and female health workers. This could have important implications on how humanitarian and organizations conduct assessments and decide what types of interventions are relevant in the affected communities.

The security situation

The Swat Valley is still a conflict area, and many people are wary of strangers. The researchers therefore must consider both their own security and the security of the respondents when collecting data. 'Even I have been frightened in certain situations despite being a Pakistani,' says Nawab.

As a foreigner, Ingrid Nyborg has often had trouble travelling freely in the Swat Valley. 'I was unable to enter the area for a year and a half, then I was suddenly given permission. I had to drop everything and head into the field. Conducting research under these kinds of conditions is challenging,' Nyborg says.

When the security situation prevents foreigners visiting the Swat Valley, the research group has implemented a plan B. Locals can move around more freely in the area. New research assistants have therefore been recruited from Development Studies at CIIT. They have been given training to enable them to conduct interviews, and this has resulted in a substantial competence boost in relation to qualitative methods, which are not used to any great extent in research in Pakistan.

Challenging research methodology

The research project uses qualitative methods. The Pakistani and Norwegian researchers visit villages and talk to people individually and in focus groups using semi-structured interview guides. Participatory observation and workshops are also important methods.

'We have selected six villages that each have a distinctive character. In topographical terms, some villages are situated down by the river and were therefore badly affected by the flooding, while

others are situated higher up the mountainsides. The selected villages differ in terms of their power structures, class differences and gender roles,' explains Nyborg.

'As in many parts of South Asia, households are largely male-headed. Many studies in our research area are thus based on interviews with what is termed the household head. With the advent of crisis, the number of female-headed households has increased. By interviewing both women and men on all of the issues which we are studying, we are discovering that seemingly male-headed households are in fact complex arenas of power not only between men and women, but between men and between women,' says Nyborg.

'Many respondents are afraid to speak freely. They feel unsure about others in the group and are afraid that their opinions will be reported to the authorities and their religious or political opponents,' says Nawab.

'We have been concerned with ensuring transparency in what we do. In order not to throw suspicion on the local population, we inform the authorities about what we are doing. We also include individual interviews whenever possible, to allow people to speak more freely' says Nyborg.

Once the interviews are completed, they are transcribed into English and thoroughly reviewed. The answers are then coded by topic into a joint database, so that the findings can be compared and relevant information retrieved.

'It is important that we understand both the answers and the context in which the answers are given. If we are not satisfied, we have to go back and get more detailed answers,' says Nyborg.

Interest from outside the area

There is widespread interest in both the concrete research results and the experience of using qualitative research methods.

The researchers believe the project is also relevant beyond the local context.

'Through the project, we give a voice to women and men from all of the involved groups, and we gain greater insight into how society is dealing with the problems. The answers we get could make an important contribution to changing policy and programmes, thereby strengthening the position of women in the Swat Valley and improving gender equality. The similarities between the Swat Valley and Afghanistan also mean that the findings have comparative value and may help us to understand the situation in Afghanistan better,' says Nawab.

The NORGLOBAL-program

NORGLOBAL shall strengthen Norwegian research on and with the South. It includes Povpeace, Cgiar, Women- and gender research, Globalisation of the environment-, energy- and Climate research, Econpop, Western Balkan and The networks. New research related to development might be placed under NORGLOBAL

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