

For Pakistan and India, Peace and Gender Equality Should Go Together <https://thewire.in/gender/for-pakistan-and-india-peace-and-gender-equality-should-go-together>

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Given that peace and gender equality generally go hand-in-hand, promoting the role of women could be key to breaking the deadlock in South Asia.

Cricketing legend Imran Khan's swearing-in as Pakistan's prime minister has opened the way for a positive shift in Indo-Pak relations but such a shift will happen only if both sides think differently about the relationship and go beyond the tried and tested approaches of the past.

Looking beyond the obvious political differences that have kept the two sides apart, what both countries share is a common failure to involve women in the relationship-building process. The two countries also have an equally dismal record when it comes to gender justice. Given that peace and gender equality generally go hand-in-hand, promoting the role of women could be key to breaking the deadlock in South Asia.

Since the hostilities that accompanied the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, there have been occasional bursts of peace efforts and then long periods of tension, diplomatic standoffs, three wars and various skirmishes along the border and Line of Control. All through, women have been affected the most. There are horrific stories of men raping and abducting women during Partition, and now, 71 years on, India and Pakistan are [considered among the most dangerous countries](#) in the world for women. India and Pakistan also rank 131 and 147 respectively on the Gender Inequality Index because women lag behind in education, work and political participation. Patriarchal structures ensure that women who defy social norms are punished and sometimes lose their life, just like [Qandeel Baloch](#) in Pakistan and [Jyoti Singh](#) in India. Gender inequality has also resulted in a skewed sex ratio in India, where, due to femicide, there are [37 million more men](#) than women.

Pakistan and India's lack of peace and neglect of gender equality are connected. Indeed, [gender and peace are closely linked](#): peace is vital to promoting gender equality, while gender inequality can undermine peace and drive conflict and violence. No wonder then that the ten countries that are at the bottom of the [gender inequality index](#) also experienced conflict in the past two decades.

But there is positive news too. A study of [40 peace processes](#) in 35 countries over the past three decades has shown that when women's groups were able to effectively influence a peace process, an agreement was almost always reached; only one case presented an exception.

One of the most positive examples is [Rwanda](#), where, after the 1994 [genocide](#), women took the lead in envisioning peace by putting aside their own suffering and experiences of violence to ensure their families were protected and safe. Now, with 64% women in office, the Rwandan parliament has the

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largest number of women in any government in the world and is a success story of keeping and sustaining peace.

In [Liberia](#), Leymah Gbowee and others organised Christian and Muslim women, who collectively pressured the warring parties into the 2002 negotiations that ultimately ended years of horrific war. Women's significant participation in the transition in [South Africa](#) led to the enshrinement of gender equality in the country's new constitution.

With Imran Khan's win and his subsequent statement that both governments should [meet for peace talks](#), we hope that gender equality will be part of those talks. To head in that direction, the following measures can be taken:

- Create spaces for dialogue between the two countries and across different sectors, such as women in business, women in politics, women in media, women in the development sector, etc. This will help women form coalitions but also serve to create support systems. Exchanging best practices and ideas can help strengthen efforts on both sides. But first, people should be allowed to visit each other and the stringent visa rules lifted.
- Invite representatives from these groups into the peace discussions. It is essential to bring them to the table so that a holistic perspective can be taken into consideration. [Negotiators](#) involved in peace processes in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Somalia report that even when female participants initially met with hostility from their male counterparts, they ultimately developed a reputation for building trust, engaging all sides and fostering dialogue in otherwise acrimonious settings.
- Train women to be on-ground implementers of peace, and address the trauma associated with hate and violence to start the healing process. In Burundi and Bosnia, women have been at the forefront of community-based conflict resolution and reconciliation projects. In Northern Ireland, women collaborated on cross-community programmes relating to child care, health and micro-enterprise instrumental in fostering positive peace.
- Invest in women – and not just through financial allocation but also through other resources like education and the creation of an ecosystem that can raise the status of women to exercise their rights with freedom and safety through increased political and economic participation. Currently, the status of women is so de-valued that they are often seen as 'property' and not human beings. This results in violence of unimaginable scale – gangrapes, honour killings, atrocious sex ratios, dowry deaths and femicide among others.
- Go beyond religion and work together as people. If designed well, the peace programme will help heal the trauma of the divide between the two countries by involving leaders who will spread the message of peace.

With India's own national elections around the corner and [escalating crimes](#) against women, addressing peace needs to be an important part of the electoral process. If women are fully included, they will become stabilisers in the region.

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