



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Status of Women and Girls in Kurram District

Gender Profile of Merged District



Document: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Status of Women and Girls in Kurram District
Merged District Gender Profile

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Abbreviations/ Acronyms

AIP	Accelerated Implementation Plan
BHU	Basic Health Unit
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
CD	Civil Dispensary
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHUs	Comprehensive Health Units
CHC	Community Health Centre
CRVS	Civil Registration of Vital Statistics
CRC	Convention on Rights of Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
C&W	Communication and Works (Department)
DDA	Drawing and Disbursement Authority
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DHQ	District Headquarter Hospital
DHIS	District Health Information Systems
DRC	Dispute Resolution Council
DPO	District Police Officer
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EmONC	Emergency Obstetric and New-born Care
EVAWG	End of Violence Against Women and Girls
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations)
FR	Frontier Regions
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Area
FCR	Frontier Crimes Regulations
FDIHS	FATA Development Indicators Household Survey
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GE	Gender Equality
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GRAP	Gender Reform Action Plan
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
HeRAMS	Health Resource Availability and Mapping System
HMIS	Health Management Information System
ICERD	International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil & Political Rights
ICESER	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPD	International Conference on Population Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Population/Person
IDS	Integrated Development Strategy
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
JJSO	Juvenile Justice System Ordinance KP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Practices
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KPCSW	KP Commission on the Status of Women
KPMD	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Merged Districts (Support Programme)
LG	Local Government
LHV	Lady Health Visitor

LRC	Legal Reform Committee
MA(s)	Merged Areas(s)
MCFC	Mobile Citizen Facilitation Centre
MDs	Merged Districts
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
MNA	Member of National Assembly
MNCH	Mother and Child Health
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMDs	Newly Merged Districts
P&DD	Planning and Development Department
PLC	Police Liaison Council
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
PPP	Public Private Partnership
QIP	Prime Minister's Quick Impact Programme
RHC	Rural Health Centre
SMEDA	Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority
SoPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SW&WDD	Social Welfare and Women Development Department
TDPs	Temporary Displaced Population/Persons
TDS	Tribal Decade Strategy
THC	Tehsil Headquarter Hospital/Tertiary Health Care
UC(s)	Union Council(s)
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UNCAT	United Nation Convention Against Torture
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VCNC(s)	Village Council and Neighbourhood Council(s)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment

Preface

UN women proposed to develop an analytical report, based on primary and secondary data, highlighting the present-day situation of women and girls in the five Newly Merged Districts – Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan and South Waziristan – of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The analysis and data provided will facilitate the federal Government and provincial Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; UN Agencies, particularly the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Merged Districts (KPMD) project partners; and other associates in the development and planning, and implementation, of policies and programs that will effectively serve the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the underserved Merged Districts (MDs), particularly women and girls.

A comprehensive analytical report, representing the situation of women and children in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's five MDs, was prepared in collaboration with government ministries, non- governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and in consultation with other semi-government entities. The complete report (separately available) provides a comparative account off all five MDs; it also provides sectoral recommendations for immediate interventions, in light of the Government's proposed Tribal Decade Strategy (TDS), and the Accelerated Implementation Plan (AIP), to accelerate the social, economic and political development of the MDs.

The subsequent report is a gender profile of Kurram District, one of the five MDs. It highlights the current status of women and girls, and the disparities that exist between women and men, boys and girls, in the district. The indicators used for the study were aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Human Development Indices' (HDIs) and the Gender Equality Ranking (GER). Combining multiple primary and secondary data sets, the situational analysis explores gender disparities, vulnerabilities, and social exclusion, as a result of poverty, social and cultural constraints, governance and security situations. The secondary data was collected from public sources, private and development sectors, through surveys, publications, guidelines, directives, research papers and reports. The reviewed material highlighted the salient features of the Kurram District in terms of demography, administration, social services and infrastructure, cultural barriers preventing women and girls' access to, and control over, various resources. Primary data was collected through consultative meetings, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs); the reports incorporate stakeholder voices from the district, providing an insight into the challenges that women and girls face, and their current status with regard to education, health, economic participation and empowerment, gender-based violence, and leadership and political participation.

May 2020

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Project Lead

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Section 1 Gender Profile Kurram District

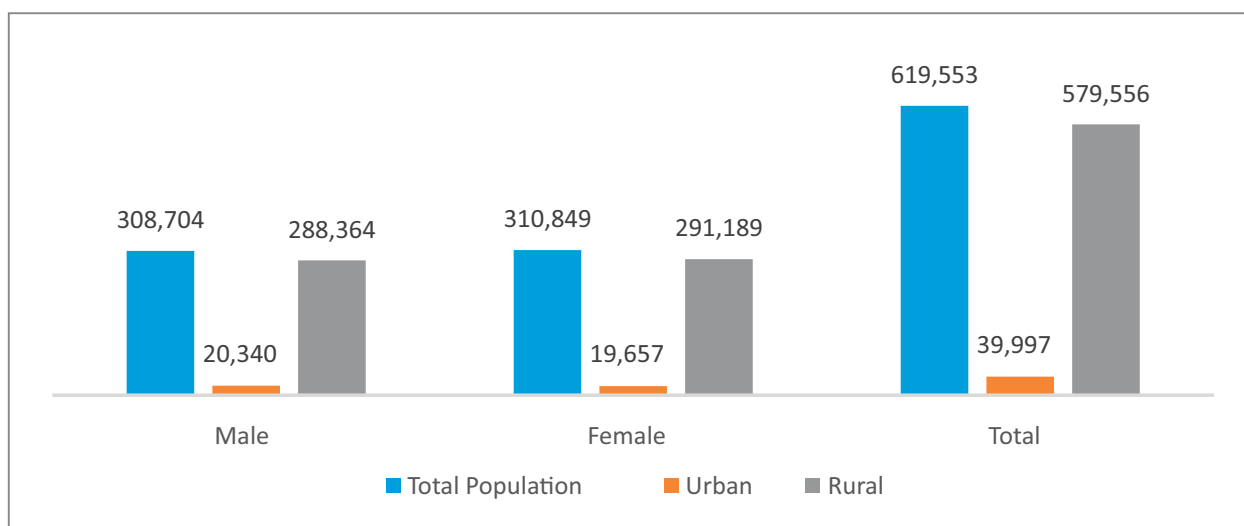
Demographics

Kurram is the mostly hilly, mountainous and scenic district amongst all the Merged Districts in KP. Administratively, it is subdivided into Upper Kurram, Central Kurram and Lower Kurram and comprises of 4 Tehsils namely Parachinar, Sadda, Dogar and Tari Mangal.

1.1 District at a Glance

After merger, the Kurram district is now annexed to Kohat Division. It shares its border with three provinces of Afghanistan i.e. Khost, Paktiya and Nangarhar and three districts of KP i.e. Khyber Orakzai and Hungu. Geographically it covers the Kurram valley region in the north-western part of Pakistan. Total area of this district is 3,380 sq. km.





Graph 1: Proportion of total population in urban and rural areas in Kurram

Population Density	183 persons/sq. km
Major Tribes	Turi, Bangash, Mamizai, Muqbal, Orakzai, Mangal, Zazai, Ghilzai Para Chamkani, Hazara and Khoshi
Languages Spoken	98% speak Pashto, Khushi Tribe speaks Persian

Status of Women and Girls in North Waziristan Though the land is mostly hilly, the district is greener than many other merged areas. Around 26,000 hectares of land is cultivated, and less than 4% is reported to be forest area¹. The primary sources of livelihood in Kurram are daily labour, crop production, livestock rearing, while other sources include shop keeping, trading and small businesses.

For women, livelihood sources are limited, such as employment in government and non-governmental education and health sectors as teachers and health care providers. By and large, women are involved in homebased agriculture and livestock rearing.

Some of the major issues of the district include:

- Law and order situation because of age-old sectarian rift and inter-tribal rivalries and internecine wars
- Inadequate development in the area resulting in low socio-economic status
- Tribal patriarchal culture and traditions resulting in significant gender discrimination and inequality
- Wide gender gap in almost all development indicators

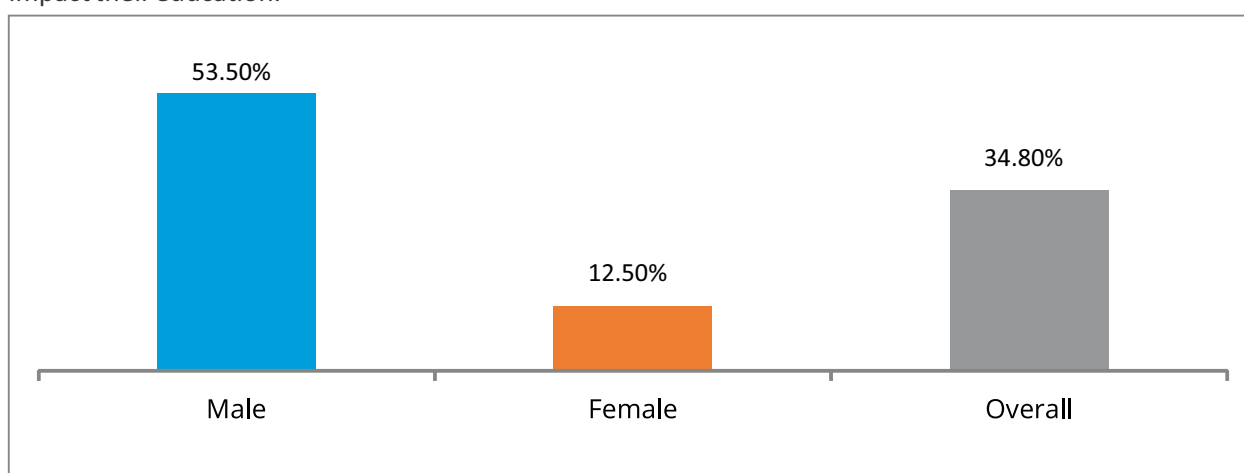
¹ Socio-economic Indicators of KP, Bureau of Statistics, P&D Govt. of KP report 2019

Section 2 Secondary Data for Khyber District

2.1 Education

The present socio-economic situation, and the condition of social infrastructure in Kurram, portrays a grim representation for all human development indicators. Presented below is situational analysis of the Education sector in the Kurram district:

Among the Merged Districts, Kurram is comparatively more accessible and stands second in terms of access to education in the erstwhile FATA, with 34.8% literacy rate among 10 years and above population. Female literacy is 12.5% and the male literacy is around 53% in Kurram district². The figures indicate that government has paid little attention to bring educational reforms in this district. Because of a lack of updated curriculum and lack of basic educational facilities, many enrolled children do not complete a full course of study. Those who do, suffer from poor facilities and constant security threats that negatively impact their education.



Graph 2: Literacy rates in Kurram

Source: FATA Development Indicators Household Survey 2013-14

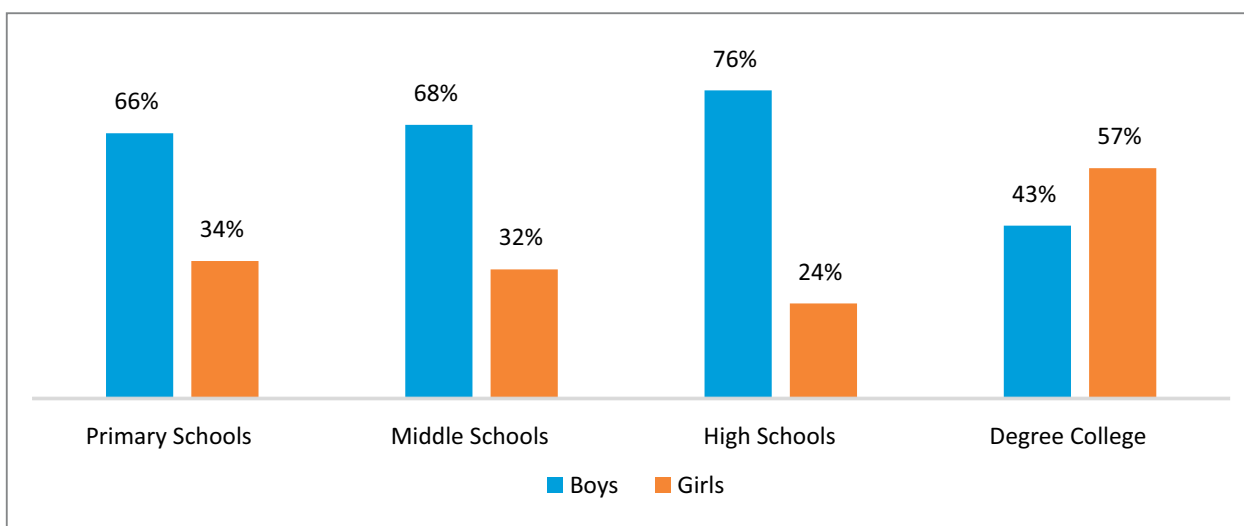
According to available data in EMIS of KP 2017-18, there are around 504 primary schools in the district out of which 34% are for girls and 66% are for boys, 53 schools at the middle level (32% female and 68% male), 51 schools at the higher secondary level (24% female and 76% male). Irrespective of the fact, that the female population is more than the male population in the district, a gender disparity exists concerning the availability of school facilities. In total, there are around 160 fewer schools for girls at the primary level, 19 schools are less at the middle level, and 27 less at higher secondary level than the boys' schools. The below graph exhibits the functional institutions in the district.

Level	Primary School	Middle School	High School	Higher Secondary	Degree College	
Kurram	Boys	332	36	39	-	3
	Girls	172	17	12	-	4
	Total	504	53	51	0	7

Table 1: Gender disparity at all school levels in Kurram

Source: District wise education statistics 2017-18

² FATA Development Indicators Household Survey – FDIHS< 2013-14



Graph 3: The proportion of educational institutions for boys and girls in Kurram District



A public school in Kurram District

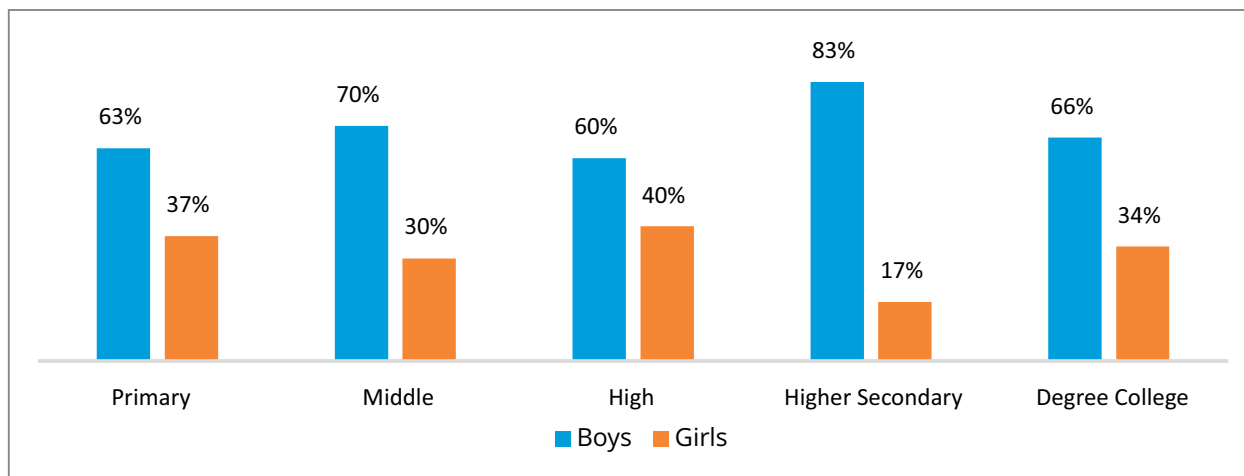
Source: Peshawar Today

It is encouraging to note that there are more colleges available for females than males in the district, though the overall number of colleges is insufficient to cater to the total demand in the district. The collective enrolment in girls' colleges is around 50% less than that in boys' colleges. A significant reason may be that most girls from rural vicinities are unable to travel to the urban centres where these colleges are located.

There is a disparity in the enrolment figures at all levels of education. At the primary and middle level, around 40% fewer girls are enrolled as compared to boys. If we look at the conversion figures from higher education to higher secondary level education, the enrolment rate drops for both boys and girls. More in-depth assessment needs to be made to understand why. At the college-level, despite having more colleges for girls than boys, the enrolment of girls is 50% less than that of boys. The overall enrolment at degree level is low for the entire district. Immediate attention and investments are needed at the secondary level of education to equip adolescent boys and girls with the knowledge and skills they require to become productive and engaged citizens of Pakistan.

Level		Primary School	Middle School	High School	Higher Secondary	Degree College
Kurram	Boys	42271	1297	6099	729	1691
	Girls	24815	566	4048	154	866
	Total	67086	1863	10147	883	2557

Table 2: Enrolment for boys and girls in all schools in Kurram
Source: District wise Education statistics of KP 2017-18

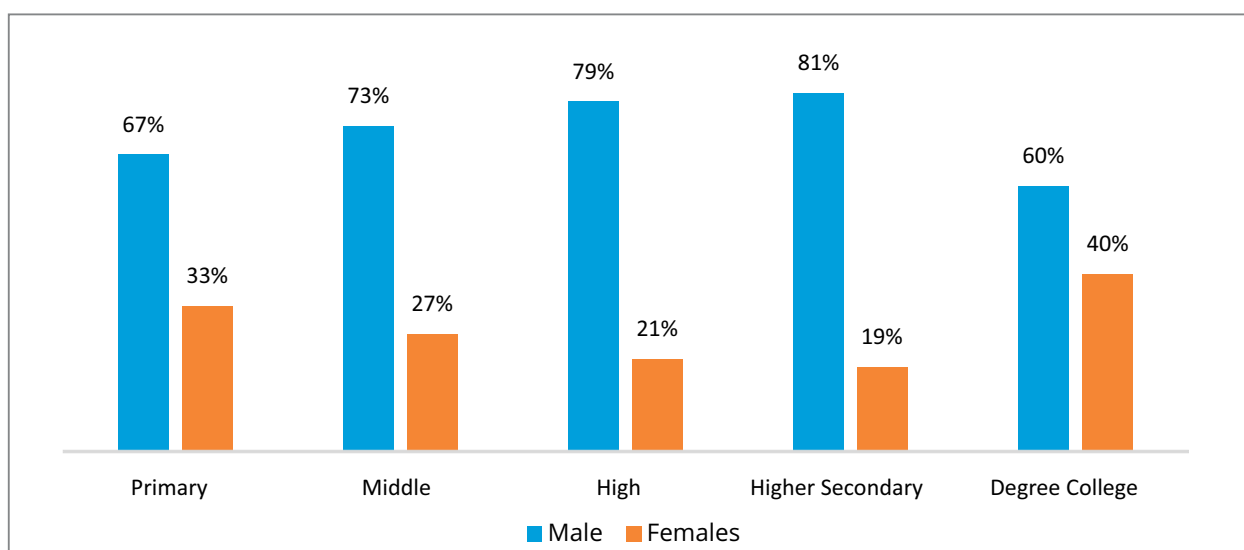


Graph 4: Enrollment figures for boys and girls in various levels of education in Kurram

Likewise, a large gap can be seen regarding the availability of male and female teachers. The below-given graph shows that at almost all levels, with an exception at degree level, there is a gap of more than 50%. The ratio of the number of students per teacher stands at 50:1 (boys) and 60:1 (girls) at the primary level, while at the high school level it is at 14:1 for boys and 38:1 for girls.

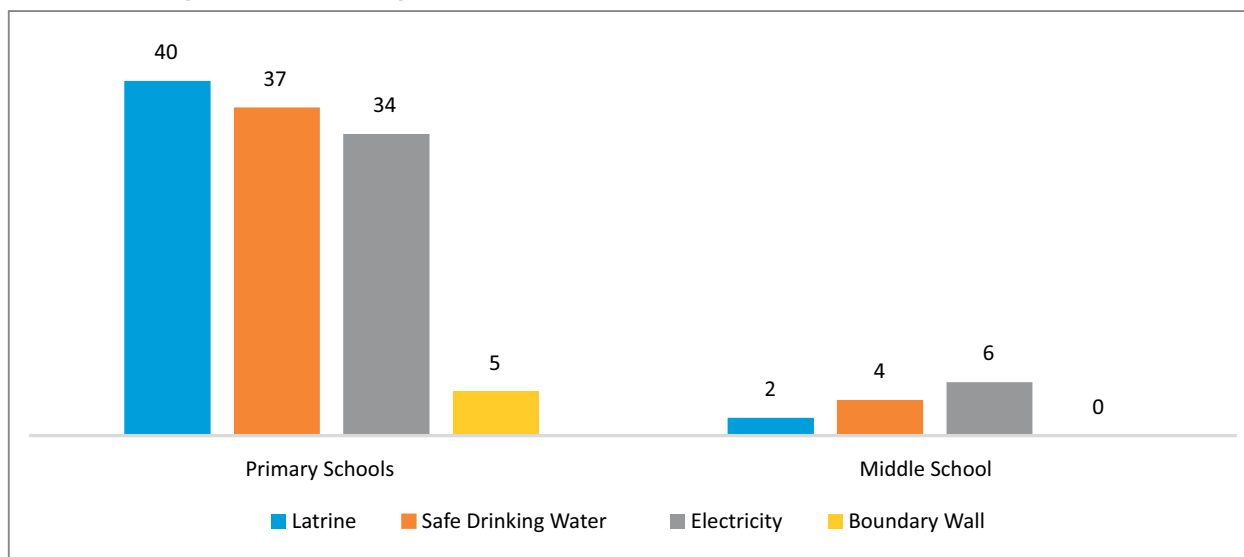
Level		Primary	Middle	High	Higher Secondary	Degree College
Kurram	Male	847	183	454	51	97
	Female	415	66	120	12	65
	Total	1271	237	468	99	162

Table 3: Availability of male and female teachers for all school levels in selected districts
Source: District wise Education Statistics, 2017-18



Graph 5: Proportion of male and female teachers in schools.

Educationists and researchers agree that school attendance is often linked to the availability of school infrastructures such as latrines, safe drinking water, boundary wall, and electricity. The graph below shows the number of girls' schools with missing facilities. When compared, the situation is most desperate at the primary level. As per the available statistics, out of 172 girls' primary schools, 40 are without latrines, 37 do not have clean and safe drinking water, 34 are devoid of electricity, and 5 do not have boundary walls. The situation seems to improve for middle schools, where out of 17 girls' middle schools, 4 are without safe drinking water, 6 are without electricity and 2 are without latrines. The research indicates that there seem to be no missing facilities at the high school level.



Graph 6: Number of girls' schools with infrastructure or facilities that are missing.

Inadequate and/or missing facilities in girls' schools contribute to a poor learning environment. This requires to be addressed at the policy and program levels so that girls' retention and attendance rates in schools can be improved.

2.2 Health

Poor socioeconomic conditions, strict tribal rules of privacy and purdah which women are expected to follow, the dearth of awareness around women and child health needs, deficiency in health institutions, absence of gender responsiveness at the health facility level, all contribute to women's suffering concerning health.

In terms of health and survival, there is currently limited statistical data available for the district. Available information indicates a need for more in-depth research. However, the primary research that was undertaken during this study further probed this subject.



Primary health care facility in Kurram District

Source: UN OHCA

Pakistan Demographic and Health Statistics (DHS, 2017-18) highlight wide disparities in the situation of health in erstwhile FATA compared to the national figures. Few examples are:

- The fertility rate in erstwhile FATA is 4.8 as compared to Pakistan's average 3.6, which means that on an average a married woman in Merged Districts has 5 children
- For key MNCH indicators, around 49% of births are attended by skilled health personnel, meaning that 50% of mothers give birth without the support of any trained health worker, midwife or other skilled providers
- Only 32% of the women receive appropriate postnatal care, compared to 78% in Islamabad
- The infant mortality rate is 29 between birth and the first birthday per 1000 live births as compared to the rest of Pakistan which is 6
- Basic immunization coverage is only 30%
- The mean age of women at marriage is 18.2 years as compared to the rest of Pakistan, which is 20.4
- Current use of modern contraceptive by married women is the lowest at 14% with the unmet need of 17%

The limited available data resources, including Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey (MICs), also report that traditionally most of the births take place at home without the assistance of a trained birth attendant. Also, antenatal care is received by only a quarter of pregnant women. According to the World Food Program, the stunting rates in Kurram stand at 57.8%, which is alarmingly high and well above the national and global average (WFP, 2017).

Primary and Secondary Level Health Care Facilities

Health service delivery in the district is through primary and secondary level health care facilities. There are currently no Tertiary Care Hospitals. Patients requiring advanced care are referred to THQs located in the larger cities of KP Province.

Primary level Health Care Facilities	Secondary Level Health Care Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Civil Dispensaries (CDs) · Basic Health Units (BHUs) · Rural Health Centers · Community Health Centers (CHCs) 	Secondary care level referral centers like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tehsil Headquarter Hospitals · District Head Quarter Hospitals.

Table 4: Primary and Secondary Level Health Care Facilities

One of the barriers in responding to the needs of all beneficiaries, especially women and adolescent girls, is the absence of effective health service delivery facilities. There are 78 health facilities in district Kurram, of which 75 reports to the Directorate of Health Services (DHIS) [1].

[1] DG Health Services and the Health Resource Availability & Mapping System (HeRAMS, 2018).

Hospitals	Dispensaries	CHCs	BHUs	MCHCs
5	49	2	19	0

Table 5: Availability of Health Facilities in Kurram

Source: Health Resource Availability and Mapping System (HeRAMS) (2018)

Health facilities are considered hard-to-reach and inaccessible for most people in district Kurram, particularly in rural areas. Such facilities are scarce and insufficient to ensure health services for all. On average, each health facility caters to 8129 patients. The rural population's main healthcare reliance is upon civil dispensaries (CDs), which have minimum quantity and quality of human resources and required equipment.

Availability of Healthcare Professional

Provision of a certain number of quality health care providers (LHVs, nurses, birth attendants, dais, health educators) is essential for satisfactory health service delivery such as mother and child health services, family planning and pre and post-natal services, availability of safe delivery kits, and the routine immunization, etc. There is, however, a huge disparity between the required and available health care staff at all levels.

Even the district headquarters hospital in Kurram lacks necessary professional staff. There are only two general surgeons, 2 gynecologists, and 23 medical officers available, whereas the need for medical officers in DHQ hospitals is 108. The specialists' posts such as physician (2), radiologists (1), pediatricians (2), anesthetists (2) are vacant. There is no psychiatrist available for the entire merged district. In a report in DAWN (2017), it is stated that 60% of the people of Parachinar suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Professor Asma Humayun reported on psychosocial support that 40% of the people who suffer from mental illness can be cured if appropriate facilities are provided.

The table below shows the current strength of available, as compared to the required, staff at various health facilities across the district:

Staff Category	BHU/CHC Level			CD Level		
	Required	Available	Gap	Required	Available	Gap
Male/Female MOs	19	18	1			
LHVs	20	15	5	44	40	4
Health Technicians	40	30	10			
Health Educators	19	0	19			
Dispenser/Medical Technicians				44	32	12
EPI Technicians				44	12	32

Table 6: BHU/CHC Level

In the primary level of health care facilities such as BHUs and the CDs, the necessary staff availability gaps are significant. For instance, around 25% of health technicians are not in place; of the 19 posts available for a health educator, there is not single recruitment. Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) play an important role in women's health; however, both in the BHUs as well as in the CDs, a gap exists between the required and in place numbers to fulfill the basic health care needs of women and children. The health personnel statistics presents a grimmer picture at the CD level, which may be the only health care source available to the majority rural population in Kurram district.

Likewise, the health package should also include the provision of basic mother and child health services, including family planning and pre- and post-natal services, availability of safe delivery kits, and routine immunization. However, most of these health outlets (except the district and tehsil headquarter hospitals) lack the provision of the majority of such services and supplies to properly address women's and children's health issues (HeRAMS, 2018).

The service readiness of the existing health facilities to deliver the health services package is also unreliable due to lack of provision of 24 hours services, lack of basic equipment, and standard precaution for infection prevention, diagnostic capacity, and essential medicines to provide adequate MNCH/SRH services.

Description	BHU		CHC		CD	
	A*	E*	A*	E*	A*	E*
Service Provision						
Routine Immunization	18	19	1	2	24	49
Child Screening & Malnutrition Growth Monitoring	7	19	1	2	3	49
Antenatal Services	11	19	0	2	3	49
Basic EmONC	8	19	1	2		
Postpartum Care	6	19	1	2		
Equipment Availability						
Refrigerator	14	19	0	2	16	49
Safe Delivery Kit	16	19	1	2		
Sterilization Facility	8	19	1	2		
Microscope	1	19	1	2	5	49
Delivery Table	9	19	1	2		

A*: Available E*: Expected

Table 7: Availability of MNCH/SRH Services and Equipment in Kurram

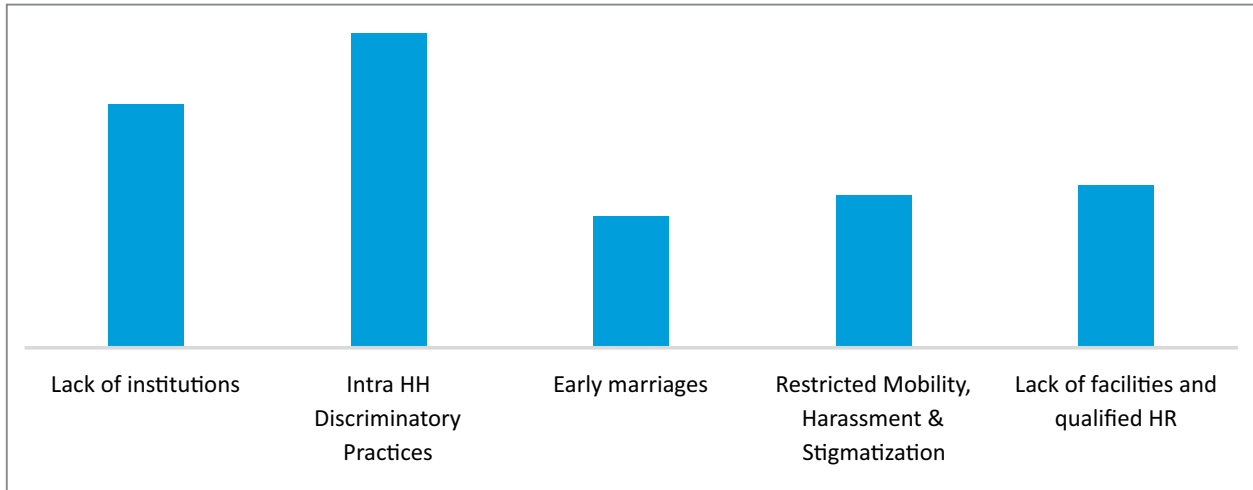
The above table also shows the disparity between the required and available equipment and services to provide satisfactory needed health services. Alarmingly, there are merely 12 health facilities in the district that provide some basic level emergency obstetric and new-born care (EmONC) to address the needs of pregnant women and adolescents. However, only 9 such services are available in BHUs, CHCs, and CDs. Only 14 facilities provide antenatal services. The mentioned two services are considered of significant importance to reduce maternal mortality. Only 43 facilities provide routine immunization for children and women. Furthermore, the availability of basic amenities such as safe water and power supply has also been found to be a prevailing challenge in the district (HeRAMS, 2018). The service readiness of the existing health facilities that ensure the provision of MNCH/SRH services is also unreliable because there are no 24 hours services. required basic equipment is not available, there is no standard precaution for infection prevention and the health facilities do not have the diagnostic capacity and essential medicines.

Another critical gap is the lack of any evidence on recent capacity building of the health care staff and presence of treatment protocols and referral guidelines including services for victims of gender-based violence, stated by the KP Ombudsperson on harassment in an interview with the research team.

Section 3 Primary Data for Kurram District

3.1 Education

The graph below shows the frequency of responses the FGDs and KIIs respondents made on priority educational challenges in Kurram district.



Graph 7: Response frequency regarding girls' educational challenges and barriers

Intra-household and intra-community discriminatory practices hindering girls' enrolment and retention was reported to be the top critical barrier by majority men and women (28%) in Kurram. In support, many participants said that boys are preferred over girls because of their role as future bread earners and spending on them is a future investment. Whereas girls are considered homemakers with no tangible economic contribution and are only useful for reproductive and homecare tasks. Though education up to a high level is free for all, the general low socioeconomic condition of people of Kurram, girls' education is a challenge.

24% of the participants mentioned a lack of government educational institutions in closer proximity is a concern. The factors such as insecurity, poverty, cultural restrictions, mobility restrictions hinder girls to travel farther to reach schools. Because of the access issues and high costs associated with education, girls are engaged in domestic chores helping their mother or sent to Madrasah for free religious education. However, participants also mentioned that comparatively, girls living in urban areas are more privileged for having better access to educational institutions.



A school destroyed after a military operation in Kurram District

Source: Tribal News Network

There are 4 female colleges in Kurram district, but all of them are located in the urban areas. The population of the urban area is negligible as compared to that of rural areas. Hence higher education institutions, or its outreach, do not exist in rural areas, restricting access to higher education for girls in rural areas. The religious and sectarian divide of Kurram also limits the movement of communities from their respective areas. Furthermore, sending adult girls to stay with relatives so that she may access higher education may be considered against the tribal norms, as per comments by a woman during the FGD, who said: “it brings stigma to the family”. According to a female key informant from the district:

“Access to higher and technical education is still a challenge for the rural girls who want to pursue higher education.”
Female key informant from Kurram

Participants (19%) mentioned that with the growing age of females their requirement for safety, health, and hygiene also increases. It was highlighted several times that in conservative purdah-observing tribal society of Kurram, lack of required facilities, and qualified human resource restricts girl's education. Participants suggested that the provision of secure and safe schools with traditionally and religiously accepted learning environments under the supervision of qualified local female staff will help get an increased number of female enrolment and retention in schools.

As in many other parts of the MDs, girls in Kurram district are also subject to early marriages, which is a significant reason for low enrolment and retention in schools. Besides the cultural reason for early marriage, it is still considered normal to offer girls in marriage to end family feuds, or for an economic reason (i.e. to receive bride money). The normal age for girls' marriage is 15 to 18 years. The majority of the respondents considered below the age of 15 years as “early marriage”. However, most said that among the educated urban families, 18 years was considered an appropriate age for marriage.

Advancing the education of girls is one of the most transformative development strategies that Kurram district can invest in. More education brings significant benefits to girls and societies – from increased lifetime earnings to reduction in adolescent childbearing, child marriage, stunting, and maternal and child mortality.

Qualified teaching staff along with the availability of basic physical facilities, such as latrines, boundary walls, drinking water, and electricity are essential for the provision of a safe and enabling environment for girls learning in particular.

3.2 Health

Besides using the secondary data to analyse the service availability and readiness of health care system within the district, KIIs and FGDs were also held with men, women, and girls at the community level in various parts of the district to directly document the concerns, challenges, and barriers faced by the females in accessing the MNCH/SRH services. The discussions mainly revolved around:

- Insufficient health facilities
- Lack of services and qualified health care providers in the available health facilities
- Cost and quality of the treatment received
- Issues that they face at home and the community levels concerning physical access to the facilities, i.e. mobility



Primary healthcare unit in Kurram District

Source: Médecins Sans Frontières

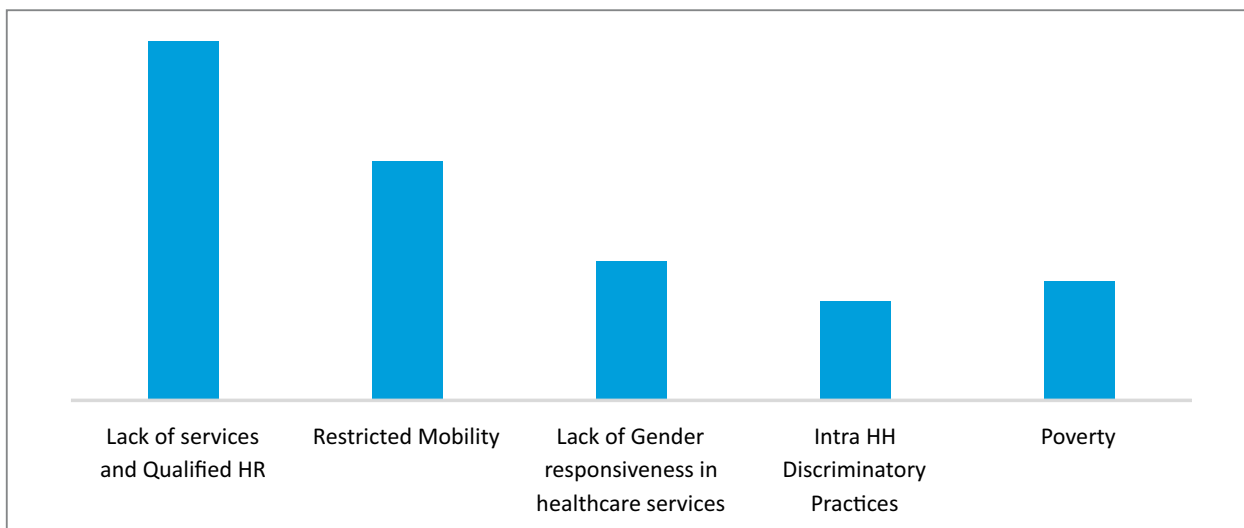
It was observed that women were more vocal and concerned with health issues than men. The concerns shown by the participants during the FGDs and KIIs corroborated the aforementioned statistics. The responses were:

- Health institutions do not provide satisfactory services to fulfill health care needs
- There is a severe shortage of qualified, technical and professional staff to cater to women and children health needs
- Primary health care facilities lack female doctors
- LHVs/female nurses are not available in most BHUs, CHCs, and CDs
- Since most female health staff commute from outside the district, their attendance is irregular
- Culturally women are not allowed to get treatment from a male health provider, which makes the availability of female care providers essential

The most weighted challenge was the respondents concern related to the lack of basic women related services, the non-availability of female staff, and staff absenteeism. A female key informant from Kurram shared:

“First, we do not have enough health facilities. Where such facilities are available, there are no staff. And if staff is available, then they do not perform to effectively address the needs of the people. We don't have female doctors and LHVs attending to their services, especially in far-flung areas of the district.”

Female key informant from Kurram



Graph 8: Key Challenges & Barriers for Females to Access MNCH/SRH Services

The government health care provider's attitude was highlighted as unwelcoming. Many female respondents stated:

“Their (health care providers) behaviour is not good, and they do not cooperate. Even in case of an emergency, they never wake up and attend to patients at night, except if you are rich. We have to take our patients to Peshawar. We pray that nobody gets sick at night.”

Female FGD respondents stated from Kurram

However, another research participant was of the opinion, that:

“The healthcare providers treat patients with whatever resources are available. However, there the problem is that they do not have sufficient resources or facilities. For instance, in case of complicated delivery or a broken leg, they send us to Parachinar, and sometimes from there they send us to Peshawar, because they do not have the proper equipment. This places a severe financial burden on the poor, making it necessary to borrow money from others.”

A Female key informant from Kurram

The second challenge that participants highlighted was that women in Kurram experience gender-based barriers while accessing health care outside their homes e.g. cultural norms, restricted mobility for unaccompanied females, limited interactions with the outside world, etc. Military presence due to law and order situation has further confined the overall movement of people in general, and women in particular. Sectarian animosities amongst the population have also confined men and women's movement. An adolescent girl and several women from the district stated:

“Women and girls' mobility are only permissible when there is a critical health emergency; however, that also needs an adult male or an old lady chaperon to accompany them to the health facilities.”

Female research participants from Kurram

The third concern raised was the lack of gender responsiveness in the health facilities. The majority of the health facilities are either urban-based or sparsely scattered in rural areas making a large segment of rural women's accessibility difficult. A male FGD participant from Kurram said:

“The biggest problem is that the government hospitals are low quality, they don't have quality equipment and maintenance and are deficient in quality technical staff. Moreover, they treat women and men equally. They do not have any special attention to women and their needs.”

Male FGD participant from Kurram

Poverty was mentioned as a major concern. Family's socioeconomic condition restricts women and girls' access to health. Respondents shared that it is difficult for poor families to bear the high health care costs, and women being the most dispensable even within the household is at a greater risk. People resort to local health healers and practitioners till the situation exacerbates to the point where the person's life is at risk.

Intra Household Discrimination

Intra house-hold discrimination plays a negative role in women's and girl's health issues as well. Unfortunately, pregnant women expecting a boy is provided with better care by families than women expecting a girl. Moreover, even women requiring urgent health support from outside have to get prior permission from the male member of his family; if the male is not available, she cannot access the health services on her own. A woman from Kurram informed:

“We must take permission from our men before going to see a doctor. We are not allowed to go alone doesn't matter how serious the situation is.”

A Female FGD participant from Kurram

Besides the above, lack of basic awareness regarding women and child health, restricted use of family planning practices, lack of basic health and hygiene, inadequate clean drinking water, and lack of recreational facilities such as parks, sports grounds, etc. were also some of the prominent factors putting girls, women and children's health at risk.

3.3 Women Economic Empowerment

During the last three decades, natural calamities, war, military operations, and displacement have deteriorated the livelihood structure of the district and created a severe unemployment situation. Even during the settled times, livelihood sources were meager and were confined to subsistence agriculture, livestock rearing, nomadic pastoralism, and local level small business. Breadwinners have proceeded to bigger cities and even abroad to earn their living.

Consistent enforcement of FCR has resulted in issues of land settlements and distribution. The revenue records cannot be relied upon. In some parts of Kurram, the land is undistributed and is considered as “collective tribal lands”, but accessible mainly to the wealthy and Maliks of the area. Access to the market is also difficult for the poor.



*Paid lady healthcare worker in Kurram District
Source: Tribal News Network*

According to a Demographic and Household Survey (2017-18):

- 51% of the household in the MAs (erstwhile FATA) is in the poorest wealth quintile
- 74% live in multidimensional poverty, women among the majority
- 99% of the women are unemployed
- 68% of the HHs receives remittances from emigrant workers in Gulf region
- 13% of the women and 11% of men are Benazir Income Support Program beneficiaries.
- Less than 5% of the women have bank accounts
- 66% of men and 87% of women have no access to any sort of media (TV, Radio, Newspaper).
- 1.5% of the women have ever used Internet

In Kurram District, women's engagement in agriculture, employment, entrepreneurship, and their access to markets and finance was assessed. Though women are involved in agriculture activities, their engagement is limited to working on the family lands only and is therefore unaccounted for. Women's involvement in commercial agriculture activities is almost non-existent. Livestock rearing by women is also restricted to animals kept for personal use. Caring for household herds of livestock is predominantly the responsibility of the women.

Women do not own land, and land distribution is a long pending issue due to discriminatory tribal and cultural unwritten laws. However, when farming is done on communal land, the influential retain larger portions of the produce and the poor merely receive subsistence income.

The urban and rural participants conspicuously highlighted a lack of employment and livelihood opportunities. All the participants showed keen interest in participating in the capacity building possibilities in modern farming and accessing technical and financial support to augment their livelihoods. Rural women

showed interest in participating in on-farm opportunities such as raising cattle for dairy products, lamb fattening, poultry farming, and kitchen gardening. In this post displacement era, women need support to restore farming focusing on enhanced agriculture yield, vertical farming techniques, and also in restoring livestock.

The respondents could not immediately identify commercial ventures that could generate employment opportunities for girls and women in Kurram. It is estimated that around 400 to 500 girls graduate from high schools and colleges per year. A few are able to get paid employment in the education and health sectors. One of the reasons for people's excitement and enthusiasm concerning the recent merger of Kurram in KP province is the belief that the merger will create employment opportunities for men and women in the district. The youth require technical and vocational training to tap emerging opportunities. Many female respondents were hopeful that the government will create opportunities for them, and men, to access vocational and technical training in various sectors.

Besides employment opportunities, the merger is also expected to generate opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs. Currently, in Parachinar, there are a few women-run shops in a particular part of the city which are accessible to women only. These shops sell clothing, grocery, and make-up goods to female clients. Such shops are popular with women buyers who also feel comfortable visiting and buying from these women-run shops. It was shared by the respondents that there are women running small shops and beauty salons within the confines of their homes. Such outlets are common in both urban and rural areas and popular amongst women for whom shops are within easy proximity.

Respondents' willingness to participate in the learning of the marketable skills, shows that there is a potential to increase women's participation in the economic activities by providing them with direction and guidance aligned to their local environment and customs.

Public and private sectors, including the national and international donors and NGOs, can assist in creating awareness, capacity building opportunities and providing required resources for women engagement with the economic sector through the provision of relevant training and develop value chain and establish a new enterprise in the agriculture sector; for instance, processing and packaging of fruit and vegetables, poultry farming, cattle farming, and fattening, etc. For off-farm activities, vocational training may be provided for embroidery, stitching and sewing skills, beauty salon, computer training, English language, nursing, etc.

In a few urban areas such as Parachinar and Sada, a few female shops have been opened, accessible to women only. Women do go to the general market in purdah. However, in the rural setting, where the majority of the population of Kurram resides, women's mobility is severely restricted. They are not allowed to go to markets or hospitals without a male companion. Until recently, females' movement from one house to another was restricted. Women going to markets, even in purdah, were not considered women of good character. This isolation strict purdah tradition has been further exacerbated by the sectarian violence. The only opportunity for women to comfort themselves is by attending daily majlis or going to Imam-dargahs.

Women have no access to finance. The microenterprise that they start is financed through their personal resources. Women are not aware of bank procedures and accessing banks is not even possible for the majority of rural women. There are banks in the urban setting with very little access to rural areas of Kurram. Female respondents were keen to receive more knowledge about access to interest-free loans. They agreed that many women lack basic documents (e.g. CNIC) and the guarantees required by the financial institutions. It is clear that women in Kurram need exposure and enhanced capacities on running a home-based business. Establishing structured women-only markets can be explored to provide economic opportunities to women in the Kurram district.

During the discussions, it came to light that due to the large number of males that died during military operations and sectarian violence, there was a significantly higher number of women-headed households.

Given the existence of gender-based discrimination, the non-availability of agriculture land, restricted mobility, and inaccessibility to private and public sector support, most of these women-headed households are economically vulnerable. Young children from such households are then compelled to become child laborers.

Some of these families get financial support from the Benazir Income Support Program or are dependent on their relatives and/or charities from the neighbours or affluent in the community. A woman heading a household expressed:

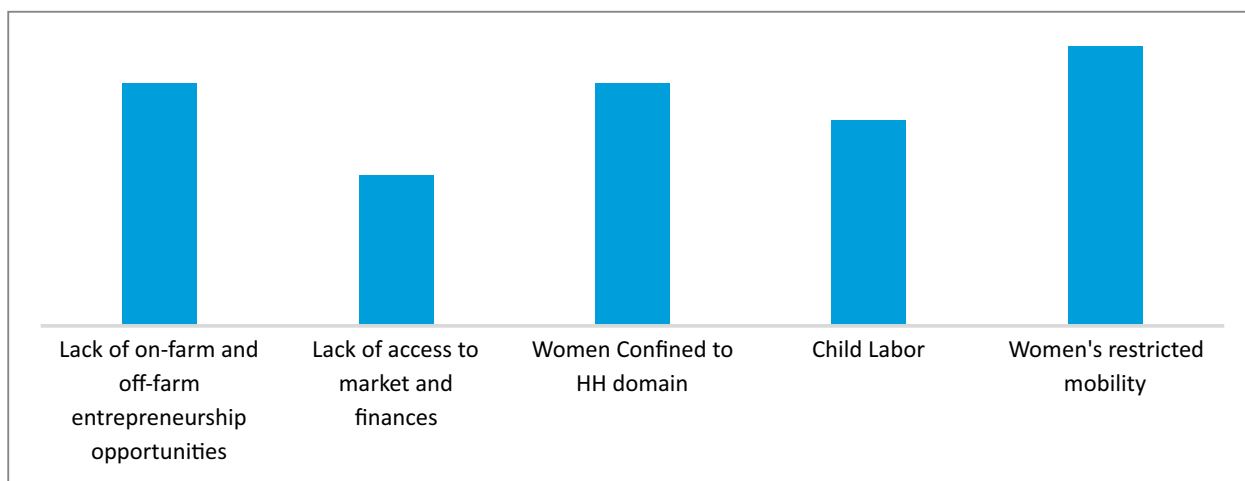
“Life is very difficult without men's support. I lost mine and for the last three years I am faced with hardships of livelihood arrangements of three children and the old mother-in-law. I have to arrange food, clothing, education and health for them. I am grateful to the people who are helping but that's not sufficient. I want that the government should help in arranging some employment or business opportunity for people like me so that we are able to live with dignity.”

A woman heading a household expressed

In Kurram district, a comparatively higher number of child labour is reported. Mostly these working children are between the age of 10 to 16 years and belong to mostly poor women-headed households.

Major challenges faced by women to actively participate in economic opportunities include the following:

- Lack of on-farm and off-farm entrepreneurship opportunities
- Lack of access to market and finances
- Gender-based discrimination
- Lack of paid-employment opportunities
- The traditional mindset of confining women to household chores



Graph 9: Major Economic Challenges

3.4 Gender Based Violence

The war between the Pakistan Army and militants impacted the social structure of Kurram district as well. Militants imposed a parallel government system in the area and the people were made subject to their own so-called justice system and decision-making was in the hands of influential and powerful groups, which disrupted the lives of the common citizen of Kurram. Like in any other area of Merged Districts, women being the suppressed segment of the society became further vulnerable and affected.



*Women in Kurram District champion for an end to violence against women
Source: MENAFN – Tribal News Network*

In multi-waves of conflicts, thousands of families were displaced from Kurram district due to sectarian violence, militancy, and military operations. Their major hosting destinations were Peshawar, Hangu, Kohat, and safer areas within the district³. The displacements did not take place in one go, instead, there were several displacement waves from the area. The war between the Taliban supported by some local Sunnis with Shia tribes in Kurram district started in 2007 and periodically continued until 2011⁴. In 2010, some 130,000 people fled Lower Kurram and took refuge in the districts of Peshawar, Kohat, and Hangu in neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province⁵.

Though the repatriation process started a few years back, according to UNHCR around 52% IDPs indicated that they did not intend to return to their houses because of the following reasons:

- Destroyed/damaged houses, which is the main problem right now. (78% respondents)
- Security and safety concerns (12% respondents)
- Land is destroyed and damaged (3% respondents)
- Better livelihood opportunities here (3% respondents)
- IDPs had no land or livelihood opportunities in Kurram (2% respondents)
- Better health facilities here (1% respondents)
- Assistance is insufficient to return (1% respondents)

The above reasons were also substantiated by our respondents and they told that the majority of the destitute still could not restore their houses because of their poor financial conditions. The support announced by the government either did not reach them or was insufficient to construct the damaged or demolished houses. Moreover, several men, women, and girls voiced safety and security concerns.

³Khan M. A., 2015

⁴Hassan, 2018

⁵Rummery & Khan, 2011

During displacement, IDPs moved to rural and urban areas or ended up in camps, mostly in rural areas of settled districts. Impact on those who settled in rural villages outside the camps was not very significant as the same traditions of Pashtunwali were followed there, e.g. observing purdah and restricted mobility. Women found no opportunities to expand their skills or change their roles. That may be the reason why the majority of these people wanted to return to their own native areas.

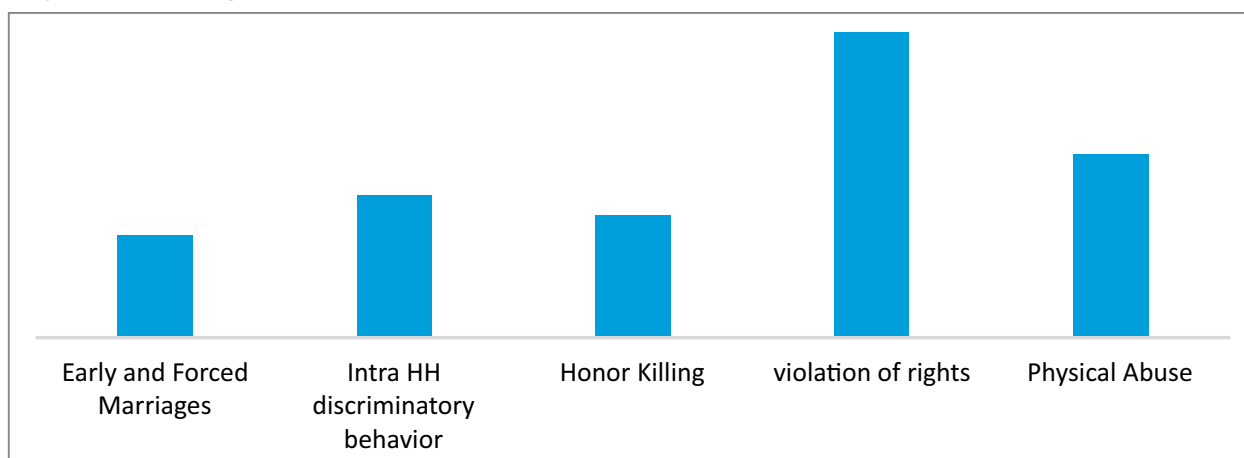
Those poor people who moved to camps established in rural areas were given shelter, food, health, and education facilities by the government and non-government organizations. They too did not experience a major change in their lives. The men remained concerned about women's security, their purdah and privacy, owing to the structure of a camp. In this situation, women remained dependent on men for almost everything.

Those female IDPs that settled in urban centers, and were exposed to urbanity, diverse culture of society, and the markets experienced major change. Their expanded exposure and mobility brought about a mindset change in terms of new roles that they could play within the family. For the first time in their lives they could go to shops, markets, take their children to schools, visit health facilities, etc. During FGDs and KIIs, many women shared how the men in their family found livelihood opportunities in host cities, and continue to run their small businesses there.

In the Taliban regime, and the adverse law and order situation during militancy, there remained a severe restriction on women's mobility. They could not visit markets, doctors, or hospitals without a mahram (or escort). Girls could not go to school. During the military operation, though displacements occurred, many families opted to stay back. During this time, the mobility of both men and women was restrained because of frequent security checks and curfews. Even after the situation was normalized, military presence remained. Sectarian violence has an impact on the mobility of the local people. Some of the areas dominated by a certain sect are no-go areas for other sects. This situation has further impacted women's mobility.

Women's limited exposure and mobility outside their families and villages have deprived them of education, proper health care, and economic engagement. Unavailability of high schools in the area and financial constraints to send their girls to distant locations have left many girls deprived of higher education. Women, though expected to walk for miles to fetch water and firewood, are prevented from walking to school. Their mobility is regulated and supervised. Fear of incidents of violence and harassment prevents parents from sending their daughters to schools. One such incident happened when militants intercepted a van taking male and female students from Kohat University of Science & Technology to Parachinar. Acid was thrown on the female students and shots fired which injured a few of them.

The graph below shows the severity of the various forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) as reported by the respondents during FGDs and KIIs.



Graph 10: Gender Based Violence (GBV)

- There is a common saying in the modern world that women's rights are human rights. Both international covenants and religious codes of Islam protect women's rights. The human rights charter protects women from all kinds of discrimination within the household domain as well as at the state level. Women around the world, including Pakistan nevertheless regularly suffer violations of their human rights throughout their lives (United Nations Human Rights, 2014). Within the context of Pakistan, in remote and isolated areas, like the erstwhile FATA, women have been more vulnerable and deprived of their rights to be educated, to vote according to their choice, to participate in economic opportunities, to own a property and to be free of violence.
- In recent times, some changes have been observed in the lives of women and girls, but gender equality should remain a high concern for the Kurram district. Some of the observations made by the KII and FGD respondents are captured below:
 - 40% of the respondents expressed that “no inheritance and property rights” is a concern and challenge
 - Around 99% of the women don't possess property and land in their name
 - Many women pointed that they are considered second-class citizens, with no rights, whatsoever
 - Preference of males over females, a general phenomenon
 - GBV occurrence is equally common in urban and rural areas
 - Though religiosity and morality claimed by men, women respondents told that they (men) do not follow the Islamic teachings in letter and spirit guaranteeing women inheritance rights

However, some respondents are hopeful that with the commencement of government laws and rules after the merger, women may be able to demand their rights to education, health, and inheritance.

When asked about gender-based violence, researchers found the FGD respondents reluctant to talk about this sensitive subject and share their views. The KII respondents were more willing to discuss this subject.

Girls and women reported widespread occurrence of physical and verbal abuse of women in the whole district. Women are subject to physical abuse normally by their husband, brothers, father, father in law, mother in law, and sisters in law. Discussions through FGDs and KIIs highlighted some of the reasons for physical and verbal abuse, such as disobedience, bad food preparation, arguing with husband or his relatives, demanding a share in the property, refusing to get married, etc. Some of the key informants shared that the severity of physical abuse may be to an extent where women may lose a limb, her eyesight, or even her pregnancy. Kurram district is rated as a district with the highest number of acids throwing incidents⁶. Physical abuse cases are more common in rural areas than urban centres, and more among those families that are uneducated.

Abusing children, e.g. beating and using foul language, is common at the household level. Respondents were of the opinion that boys are more subject to beating because they are comparatively more mischievous than girls. Most respondents considered beating a normal practice. A few mentioned that corporal punishment of children in schools was quite common, particularly in boys' schools and madrasahs. In most cases, parents did not lodge any complaints as beating was considered normal and most people are not aware of any laws prohibiting teachers from beating children in schools.

The concept of the early marriage in the MDs is different than that of other parts of the KP province and the country. People in the MDs get married, comparatively, at an early age. According to a survey, women are married at an earlier age than men, with results indicating an average age of 17 for women and 22 for men⁷.

⁶Aurat Foundation Annual Report, 2012. & Parveen 2013.

⁷Levine, et al, (2019).

Perceptions of Early Marriages

- Appropriate age for girls' marriage was between 16 and 17
- Less than 16 years of age was considered as an 'early marriage'
- Marriages in Kurram district also occur with almost none or very minimal consent from girls
- Prevailing concept is that women should be married soon after they attain the age of puberty
- Participants expressed the need of awareness sessions of uneducated parents regarding the negative impacts of early marriages such as health deterioration, children quality upbringing, etc.

Respondents also added that some forms of forced marriages exist in Kurram. Following are the various types of forced marriages practiced in the region:

Without “formal” or proper consent of girl [and boy] -- girls and boys even cannot/do not oppose. In this research, girls were vocal about not having a say about their marriage decisions. Boys and girls both told that they are informed only when their parents, mainly fathers, finalize the decisions.

Against the will of girls [or boy] – when they oppose the wedding -- they are then forced to marry and parents uphold their decisions. During FGD, a girl expressed as follows:

“Parents do not seek their daughters' opinion before their marriage while mostly boys' opinion is sought to some extent.”

An adolescent girl from Kurram

Marriages also take place under the custom of Ghag or Zhagh – boy's claim over girl. This customary tradition is almost non-existent in other parts of MDs, but in Kurram and Orakzai it is still in practice.

Women are exchanged to settle blood feuds. Traditionally, when a family or tribe wanted to settle blood feud, the family who has killed more members of the opponent family, has to exchange girl(s)⁸ to settle the dispute. This form of forced marriage - giving away girls in marriage for the exchange of feud, is locally called Swara or badala-i-sulh (exchanged to settle feuds).

“A young woman from Kurram district, who had been exchanged through a Jirga decision to settle a feud, while expressing her anger and frustration, said that women in her society are treated worse than dogs (Sethna, 2017). (in Pashtun society, dogs are looked at with disgust)”

Razia, a resident of Kurram Agency, became victim of custom of Ghag when her parents declined the marriage proposal of a man, who was already married. She was not willing to marry him, but the man refused to withdraw his claim. More than three decades later, Razia may possibly have thought that she had no option but to end her life. Thus, she strangled herself to death (Ali, FATA women subjugated by tribal system, 2016).

Widowed women [compulsory] are married to husband's brother. In case a man dies young, his young widow is compelled to marry husband's brother (or any other very close relative if there is no brother). These are some of the worst types of “forced marriage”, which can very easily become cause of gender-based violence.

⁸depends upon the number of killed members.

Child marriages also take place in the tribal society. These types of marriages are mostly contracted between close relatives, mostly first cousins. According to the respondents, although this practice has not completely disappeared from Kurram society, there are parents who now resist this tradition, and there are more girls that are married outside the very close family circle.

According to several FGD participants, honour killing is still a serious issue faced by women in district Kurram. Bangash (2017) warns that doubtful and suspicious behaviour on part of women is never tolerated in the area, and local people restore their lost honour with blood. However, such a killing never leads to revenge (Bangash, 2017). Restoration of honour with blood is considered a customary penalty for those who violate the normative order about the notion of honour. Norms of honour are practiced by all castes and segments of the society without any confusion and exception (2017).

According to Bangash (2017), Kurram district is the only area among the merged districts, which has written customary law called Turizuna. Section 50 of the Turizuna (1944) clearly states that whoever is found committing sexual intercourse with any married women or a widow or a virgin, both the man and woman ought to be killed on the spot (Bangash 2017). Women in this research expressed hope that post-merger, with the introduction and implementation of the Pakistani family and criminal laws, this customary practice will end.

There has always been a lack of attention by the government towards legal protection of women in tribal society; despite its responsibility to contain all types of violence against women. Before the merger, government attempted to introduce Riway Act in the tribal belt, where along with some other laws, laws for the protection of animals were included. But there was no mention of extension of Family Law to the area to curb anti-women social practices like child marriages, denying women property, divorce rights, swara, valver (bride money), ghag or killing in the name of honour.

In Kurram, there are two forms of informal justice system i.e. Jirga System and Markaz for Shia Community. The Markaz is situated in Parachinar, Kurram. The Markaz established and recognized Anjuman-e-Hussaini – a body of Shia activist youth active in resolving people's conflict and issues in Kurram. (Rehman, 2014). Women's related cases are entertained in Jirga and Anjuman too, but women participation does not exist in both the sources of the informal justice system.

In response to the question of availability of rescue and relief services' to GBV victims, the following responses were received:

- Majority of the women stay silent and bear what is happening to them because of shame, stigma and family 'honor'
- Women who suffered more, and got hurt or injured, report to their (paternal) families
- In very rare, but severe cases, the victims report such incidents to the local Jirga

However, the traditional village elders, in most cases avoid intervening because violence by husbands or in-laws on women is mostly considered to be a family affair (Khan & Samina, 2019).

Post-merger, the federal and provincial governments announced the establishment of a fully functional judicial system in the newly merged districts. However, except Kurram, none of the districts have the courts available within the districts. Judicial courts are established in the district headquarter Parachinar. FGD and KII respondents told that not a single GBV case reported so far, but they were optimistic that once trust of the people in the new system is gained, they will come forward and move their grievances through these courts. They also added that accessing the judicial system also depends on the associated cost factor and applicants' ability to bear such costs. Some government initiatives to enable women access relief free of cost will play an encouraging role. These initiatives should also include putting up women police stations or establishing women-desk in every police station.

3.5 Women's Leadership and Political Participation

The provincial elections 2019 was a very interesting experience for the people of Kurram district. The main feature of this election was to give people of MDs an opportunity to use their vote to elect their representatives in Provincial Assembly of KP. In Kurram there were two provincial assembly constituencies finalized through a process namely PK-108 Kurram-I and PK-109 Kurram-II. Two members reached Provincial Assembly from District Kurram, thus can raise needs of the areas to law and policy makers. Despite being the first experience, people especially youth showed deep enthusiasm in elections and contestants conducted rallies not only in the urban but also in the far-flung rural areas also. Youth involvement was a clear indication of desire for change in the area. Moreover, out of the two females who contested the elections directly in MDs, one was from Kurram district. Unfortunately she could not succeed to receive enough votes to reach the provincial assembly. While commenting on the elections in the merged districts, Ms. Bandial in the Arab News of July 23, 2019 discussed:

“The elections could, arguably, have been an opportunity for the million or so registered female voters in former FATA to come out in numbers and vote for change, for inclusion and representation, and for an end to patriarchal practices. But only 28.6% of the registered female voters participated in the elections – much lower than the expectations”

Ms. Bandial in the Arab News of July 23, 2019



Female voter turnout during the provincial elections in Kurram District

Source: FATA Reforms – The Tribal News Network

Highlights of 2019 Elections in Kurram District:⁹

- Voters to population ratio was 58%
- Total registered voters were 360, 741
- Female voters were 43%, whereas male voters were 57%
- Around 53 candidates contested election, out of which 44 candidates were independent and 9 candidates had party tickets. A woman also contested the provincial elections

⁹FAFEN Report “Peaceful, Well-Managed Elections in Newly Merged Districts mark Completion of Constitutional Merger”

Documentation of observations of Key Informants:

A political science scholar, representing the women from Kurram, in an interview said:

“Women in Kurram believe that laws and initiation of political activities in result of the merger and reform process are positive and good step in favour of women's rights (Naseer N., 2020).”

It is worth noting that women participation in elections through their votes was the highest in Kurram district as compared to any other MD. The following two factors were worth consideration for women's better participation as compared to other MDs:

- Literacy rate comparatively is higher in Kurram than other MDs.¹⁰
- Women participation in political process – General election contest by Ms. Malasa Ali Begum from district Kurram – This should be seen as taking women inclusion trend forward

Although women's participation was better in Kurram, however, it was still much lower than women participation in other parts of KP and the country. Women face several challenges to get engaged in Kurram's civic affairs.

During the research, the team inquired the participants in Kurram district regarding their participation and thoughts on the recent provincial elections and their hopes for and expectations from the future local government elections in their area.

Many respondents from Kurram districts who had taken part in the election through their votes and/or were mobilizers of certain candidates expressed that this was their first and novice experience. Nonetheless, they also had faced several challenges and expressed some of them, which can be grouped into those related to cultural constraints and few related to institutional or structural constraints.

Challenges owing to cultural constraints

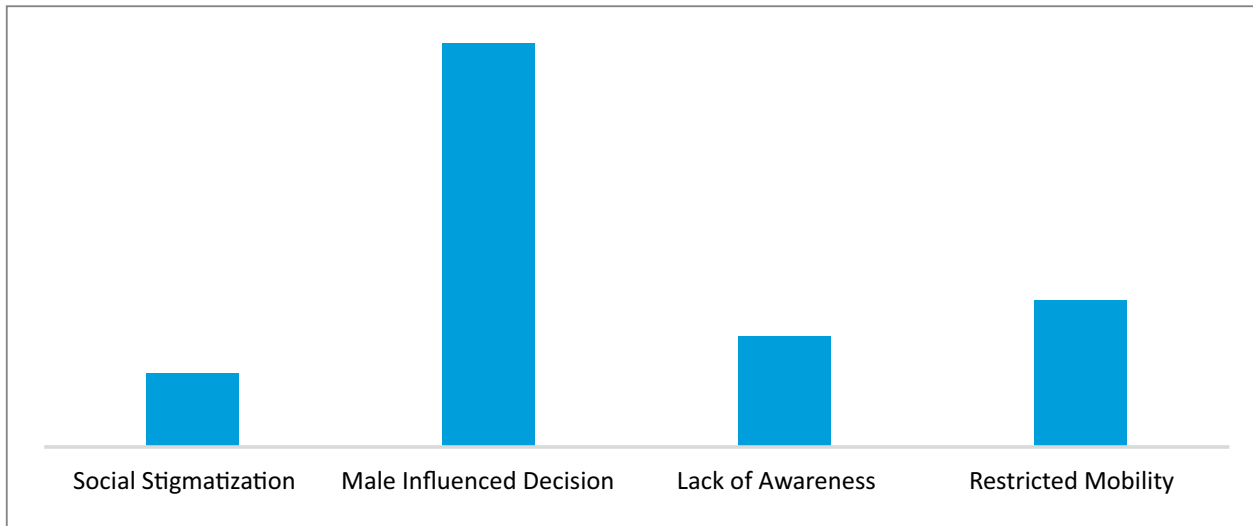
- Social stigmatization
- Male influence over females' decision and participation
- Lack of awareness
- Gender discrimination
- Restricted mobility

Challenges owing to institutional/structural constraints

- Lack of women polling stations
- Lack of transportation
- Fear and lack of security
- Ill-treatment of women within the political parties
- Women's disinterest in politics and political process

Below given graph shows the weightage given by participants to various challenges:

¹⁰Gender News, 2014



Graph 11: Political Participation Barriers and Challenges expressed By Respondents

45% of the respondents said that men influence women's decisions in the political process. In the tribal system of Kurram district, people follow the footsteps of their tribal elders and male family members. Instead of taking into consideration the manifesto, plans, and priorities of the contestants, people given weightage to certain clans. Also, the religious sect is given due consideration. One of the FGD participants from Kurram expressed her views as:

“Men have more wisdom and experience and can make better decisions.”

A female FGD participant from Kurram

25% of the respondent said that politics require mobility and exposure to the world outside their homes, which is a hindrance for women subject to mobility restrictions.

“Due to local culture and Islamic society women cannot leave homes on their own will. Women cannot make decisions on their own, they have to seek permission for whatever they do in the public domain.”

In addition to the lack of financial resources, less family support, women have no knowledge related to electoral procedures and processes thus make it difficult for them to participate in politics or other civic affairs. In addition, illiteracy, lack of proper education, lack of exposure to media keep the women indecisive to decide “who to vote”, and therefore abstain from voting. The male-dominated environment of the political parties is a challenge for women's participation in the political process.

“Success in politics needs strong support and backing but in Kurram's tribal society women are neither supported nor given any leadership roles.”

Several women FGD participants

Participants also mentioned that women easily get stigmatized as soon as she steps out of her home and runs for politics. However, another male FGD participant from Kurram, who happened to be a student and social activist, was of the opinion:

“Unfortunately, women are highly discouraged to play leadership roles by this patriarchal society. If a woman wants to contest elections, her family and people of the area will not allow her as it is considered against the local customs and people will badmouth her.”

A male FGD participant from Kurram

3.6 Grassroots Leadership Development

Along with several other benefits of the erstwhile FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa merger, the people of the merged area got exposure to the outside world through more frequent visits and meetings with the people from the government and non-government sectors. The displacement to urban centers, despite its several negative scars, also was a kind of 'blessing in disguise' for thousands of inhabitants for the merged areas. Indeed, Kurram being located at the international trade route as well bordering with good business hubs like district Hangu, Kohat, North Waziristan, and Khyber, have an edge over the other districts. Particularly in its large city, Parachinar, the education ratio and business-related mobility are much higher than any other part of the merged area. People in Kurram, particularly the youth are more receptive to change. Kurram has comparatively more civil society organizations in the tribal region.

During multiple interactions with the people from Kurram, the research team identified several young men and women as potential leaders and activists – from the business, education, civil society, and politics sectors, enthusiastically willing to participate in Kurram's development as women/gender influencers, grassroots leaders and change agents. These individuals have passion and potential for future leadership; however, they need proper guidance, support, and enhanced technical capacities to become effective change agents and influence the rigid cultural and tribal traditions obstructing gender-equality in Kurram.

Another source of potential grassroots leadership identification and development is the pool of activists and potential candidates from the upcoming local government. These people, particularly the elected local government youth and women, can play an important role in the identification and implementation of women development focused schemes at the grassroots level.

On the other hand, in general, within the framework of tribal identity, most of the people are willing to accept change, including educating their daughters. With the utilization of energy and enthusiasm of the youth, Kurram can see development and prosperity in the near future especially with the post-merger supportive interventions.



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