



A mapping study

Social Movements in Pakistan

Mubashir Akram

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Abbreviations

APWA	All Pakistan Women's Association
CSO	Civil society organisation
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PFF	Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum
SIRA	Sindh Indigenous People's Rights Alliance

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring over a decade ago, social movements have found great momentum around the world. A wealth of scholarly work has dissected the genesis, nature and potential of such initiatives to contribute to political and social change for democratic consolidation. This analysis discusses how these movements represent communities that would not otherwise actively participate in civic or political activism by joining an organised political party.

Nevertheless, more research is needed because such analysis of grassroots and community activism inherently benefits social movements, their leaders, the communities they represent and the democratic development of society at large.

There are many definitions of a social movement, and they mostly relate to the context, purpose and actors of a society. One definition frames a social movement as “a series of actions and events taking place over a period of time and working to foster a principal or policy or as an organized effort by supporters of a common goal” (Little and McGivern, 2012).

Social movements in most parts of the world are responses to the politics, economics or governance of domination, exploitation, oppression and repression that official or unofficial groups impose on communities. Whatever the conditions may have been to start a social movement, it almost always is an outcome of a change in people’s consciousness regarding their conditions, their way of “settled life and a threat that they may perceive against their social, political, economic, environmental, cultural interests” (Rouse, 1984).

Social movements in the Pakistani context are mostly localised and limited in their scope and appeal, while a political movement may have larger implications and impacts. But there is a great amount of interplay between the two, and they frequently interact with each other according to the local challenges.

A diverse range of social and political global indices, as applied to Pakistan, do not present a rosy picture. Sociopolitical analysts place Pakistan in the category of countries with low-density democracy, where parliaments may function but election manipulation and coups are common. The Freedom in the World Index, for instance, ranked Pakistan 37 of 100 countries in 2021. A year earlier, this score was 38.

Within this 2021 index, Pakistan scored 15 of a possible 40 points with respect to political rights and 22 of 60 points for civil rights (Freedom House, 2022). The country is considered “partly free”.¹ The score itself substantiates the earlier claim: that of a country lagging on the path of national democratic consolidation. A plethora of existing social movements whose history is characterised by this struggle provides evidence for this “partly free” label. Pakistan’s ranking, at 153 of 156 nations, in the World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2021* (2021), ahead of only war-torn Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan, adds to the evidence of the social and political challenges the country has faced for quite some time.

No matter how people view Pakistan, “we are a resilient nation, which has constantly fought off oppression in many forms and continues to do so; and social movements have played a pivotal role in whatever social and political freedoms we have in the third decade of the twenty-first century,” said Iqbal Haider, a social activist and development professional.²

Pakistan is a melting pot of many caste and ethnic groups. However, the ways in which social movements interact with the country’s politics and authorities have been less theorised empirically.

With the aim of adding to a much-needed understanding of social movements in Pakistan, this report presents a contemporary overview of social movements in the country, their classification based on their purpose, and the challenges for the actors and platforms supporting or leading them. The report is based on an exhaustive literature review and extensive field research involving group discussions with social activists and interviews with social movement leaders in Sindh

1. Ranking by Freedom House at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan>.

2. Iqbal Haider, social activist and development professional, interview, Lahore, 12 June 2022.

and Punjab provinces. The report focuses on social movements in these two provinces for practical reasons, as they are the two largest federating units, and home to the most social movements through the history of the country.

This analysis captures the incessant efforts of the committed social activists who rally for the causes of their communities. They are social leaders who may not be widely known across their cities, provinces or the country, but they are committed and have been making a difference in the lives of their communities by leading a social movement.

For example, Aadil Ayub is an IT professional, but is one of the leaders of the Karachi Bachao Tehreek. This movement has been at the forefront of raising the issues of urban deforestation and water scarcity in Karachi. Hafeez Baloch is a qualified environmentalist who has dedicated his life to the cause of the rights of indigenous peoples. Saeed Baloch, a leader of the fishing communities in Sindh and Balochistan provinces, collaborates with local authorities and power structures to help improve the lives of indigenous fishing communities. Zahid Farooq has dedicated his life to championing the rights of communities who live in deprived areas that the local government typically ignores.

These wonderful people represent a spectrum of social movements across Pakistan. They epitomise a sense of constant and untiring struggle and a firm belief typical of all social activists across the country that they will continue representing communities, talking to power and benefiting those people who may be constitutional citizens of Pakistan but whose challenges are rooted in the negligence of the official authorities.

By taking these movements as individual case studies in Sindh and Punjab, the study, which was supported by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, seeks to contribute towards increasing understanding of social movements among Pakistanis.

The report breaks down the stigmas usually attached with social movements and their leaders, who are sometimes viewed as miscreants by certain quarters in society and the State. The report rationalises the need for powerholders to interact with these social movements for the benefit of the country's citizens. It provides references (where

possible) to what readers may see in the newspapers or on their TVs (or smartphones), in the hope they hear these social voices.

It is important to draw attention to the differences between the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) and social movements. There is strong evidence from the field that these three frequently interact on common causes, but NGOs and CSOs are predominantly formally organised and officially headquartered, with their leadership drawn largely from the middle- to upper-class strata of society. Social movements, in contrast, tend to emerge from lower-middle- or lower-income social groups and communities. Along with social and humanitarian development work, the former two work on policy-related challenges while the latter mostly focus on community-orientated subjects and tend to be tactical in their approaches.

There are working relations and liaisons between NGOs, CSOs and social movements. Given the overlap of their common challenges, their leaders frequently interact. They provide both tactical and strategic support to each other, but they are essentially different organisational set-ups that may or may not work on the same issues.

The study also found that many NGOs and CSOs act as social movements because they are locally connected with their communities and represent their issues when public representatives and administrative officials fail to respond to their needs. The report highlights such NGOs and CSOs in relevant sections.

2. Methodology

The field survey, semi-structured interviews with leaders of social movements and group discussions with individuals were conducted within a qualitative research design. The research team held individual and group meetings with 93 leaders of social movements in Sindh and Punjab provinces, of which 67 were from Sindh while 26 were from Punjab. Of these leaders, 17 were women, as the landscape of social movements is mostly male dominated.

Based on best practices learned during the initial pilot interviews and desk research, interview guidelines were prepared. Individual insights were explored in greater depth when they emerged during the interviews.

The interviews were conducted in various districts of Sindh and Punjab provinces and the capital Islamabad by connecting with leaders from social movements, political parties, CSOs and NGOs.

The meetings were scheduled with the founders and representatives of social movements and with social activists. The duration of group discussions ranged from 133 minutes to over 400 minutes. Individual interviews lasted between 90 and 180 minutes.

A systematic data analytics technique was applied to condense the data, converting words into themes, patterns and associations. The findings are based on transcribed interviews, personalised discussions and field notes from Sindh and Punjab provinces.

The reporting team chose five principal hubs of mainstream social movements in Sindh: Karachi, Hyderabad, Umerkot, Sukkur and Khairpur. Three locations were chosen in Punjab: Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan. Punjab was characterised by less social activism than Sindh, with stronger nationalist streaks that seem to rally around local issues that have attracted more political and social attention.

The criteria of qualifying a group as a social movement was based on the credibility of the group or organisation running the movement, their experiences and the issues that they represented for their

communities. The validation of social branding was also a factor if the movement was known among its community and had demonstrated a high degree of accountability and transparency. Persistence with the cause was also a fundamental factor.

3. Structure of the report

This report studies social movements in Pakistan and establishes the context for contemporary social movements in the country. It evaluates whether social movements have been an integral part of political movements historically or if the parties that have traditionally represented the masses, either in the federal and provincial parliaments, function as pressure groups on a limited scale. Although the study of the links between the two (political parties and social movements) is not the exclusive purpose of this report, it provides interesting insights on the social movements. Included here is the mapping of social movements that have been sustained mostly without or with little political support.

The challenges that social movements face to stay relevant and sustainable with regard to their purpose is covered in the analysis, including the social and economic support that is needed for them to remain part of the hope for a free and democratic society.

The report also reflects on the role of the government, capitalism, modernity, religion and civil society in shaping these social movements. It concludes with recommendations as a way forward.

The study found that NGOs, CSOs and social movements are rather intertwined with each other. A consistent challenge when preparing this report was whether to include CSOs and NGOs because leaving them out might have omitted a large piece of the picture and their work in representing communities in the form of a social movement. For example, an organisation that champions girls' education, organises rallies, engages with power holders and has dedicated considerable time to doing these things while collaborating with donors ultimately qualifies as a social movement in the local sense—because communities look up to them to fight their cause. Such organisations have been included.

Where the leadership has evolved from one platform to another, with “pure” social movement leaders going on to form an NGO or join a CSO while retaining the gusto of their social movement roots, they have also been included in the study.

The information from Sindh was slightly more difficult to collect as the leaders and movements anticipated negative social branding for having become part of the study. This behaviour or reaction is common in Pakistani society in the non-governmental and social development sector. Initial introductions and meetings with leaders in Sindh were productive, but gleaning information and data from them proved more challenging than was initially conceived. Some refused to share their information or discuss the work they have been doing.

4. Brief historical overview of social movements in Pakistan

Civil society and citizens' participation in civic causes have a long tradition in South Asia. These movements have emerged from time to time to address or challenge the spaces of governance that immature democratic or government structures have been unable to provide. Generally, long-suffering communities have come together to set up an informal group of "sufferers". These could be considered informal social movements, and most of them would have ceased to exist without evolving into a formal structure or making a larger impact.

In its brief 75-year history, Pakistan has experienced various social movements (Abbas and Jasam, 2009). Some have been ideological while others have drawn inspiration from religion or from socialist and communist ideologies. Within this span of time, the country has faced four prominent insurgent conflicts: the Bengali nationalist–separatist rebellion in East Pakistan (1971); the low-intensity Baloch nationalist insurgency (1948–present), with heightened conflict between 1974 and 1977; the ethnic violence in Karachi (1990–1999); and now the Pakistani Taliban insurgency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2001–present) (Qazi, 2012).

Pakistani society has expressed dissent via a range of formal and informal movements during distinct parts of its history. For example, during the dictatorship of General Ayub Khan, there were political rights movements working against totalitarianism and for the cause of democracy and rights (Altaf, 2019). These were the leaders of the social movements who later joined the Pakistan People's Party when it was founded in 1967 and provided their social and political experience of mobilising and representing the masses. During the 1970s, water, minorities and women's rights movements came to the fore and represented a broad range of communities across Pakistan. Likewise, the labour rights movements that sprung up during the 1970s were orientated towards the strength and ownership of its communities.

During the 1980s, the women's movement came up sharply against General Zia-ul-Haq's efforts at Islamisation, which curtailed women's spaces in society, a legacy that Pakistan suffers from to the present day (Waseem, 2011). The Women's Action Forum became the bastion of campaigning for women's rights and has continued to loudly demand political freedoms and constitutional rights for women as well as for all citizens.

The 1980s was an "era of paradoxes", as one social leader characterised it. On one hand, the official structures were busy injecting religion into every aspect of social life, affecting a large portion of the population. At the same time, women "were leading the social front of rights, freedoms and democracy".³ The women's movement and other social movements also provided support to the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, which was an amalgam of leading political parties in Pakistan. It achieved limited success, but in that, too, the contribution that the social movements made "cannot be ignored".⁴

During the 1990s, human rights and minority rights movements came to the fore and faced similar propaganda and obscurantist elements within society who dismissed them as not representing the people and "trying to change the way of Pakistani life by acting against Islam".⁵ The leaders of these movements endured tremendous pressure and at times oppression for rallying to the causes of human rights and minority people's rights. Their offices were attacked and, in some instances, employees were killed. But these movements continued, ultimately launching discussions of human rights and minority people's rights in Pakistan's political and official spheres, where the government's machinery now responds to their demands.

The emergence of the current fishing, farming and indigenous communities' movements is part of the historical continuity that their predecessors ensured. It is due to the sacrifices and contributions by the leaders of movements before them that the new movements and the new leaders are recognised. There are still challenges based on the perceptions of the government functionaries, but the leaders of these

3. Zahid Islam, Sangat Development Foundation leader, group discussion, Lahore, 17 April 2022.

4. Ibid.

5. Wajih Abbasi, political analyst, personal conversation, Islamabad, 5 June 2022.

movements and the movements themselves have continued working for the communities they represent.

Organised youth movements are a new phenomenon in Pakistan, originating largely with the emergence of social media. Earlier, informal youth groups represented their communities, but their scope was mostly limited to social welfare interventions. The newer iterations have effectively used the power and access of social media to connect with each other and mobilise for common causes. They have also provided voluntary support to other organisations through social media campaigns and awareness-raising services.

Their forbears were less political and did not raise issues of social and political discord to a great degree. This has changed drastically with the emergence of modern communication technologies that have connected a vast majority of the youth in communities, cities and provinces across Pakistan.

Social media has become a great enabler in organising and rallying the youth, who have organised themselves in Karachi over the issue of water and infrastructure and in Lahore on the issue of deforestation and polluted water. Another movement that raises the issue of missing persons began in Quetta and now has informal chapters across the country, including in the federal capital.

Each era of Pakistan's political history has seen the emergence of unique social movements that were responding to the challenges of their time and space. Most social movements remained informal, but they nevertheless made an impact and left a brick of contribution in the foundation that social movements of the future have come to rest upon.

The social movements covered in this report fall into three basic categories: women's rights, political rights, and labour and farmers' rights movements.

4.1 Women's rights movements

Women's struggle against oppressive social structures, including domestic violence, the lack of opportunities, customary oppression under local interpretations of religion and tradition, and the patriarchy

at large remains integral to the mosaic of major social movements in Pakistan. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, the dynamic wife of the country's first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, founded the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) in 1949 under the first government of independent Pakistan, which granted it the official patronage.

APWA focused on the social welfare of Pakistani women and "mostly focused on education and providing 'essential skills' that were required to make women 'good housewives'," explained gender and women's rights specialist Humaira Hussain. "There were many by-products of its activities as women learned, which increased their confidence."⁶ Its work cannot be discounted for its impact on the women's movement, she argued, because it uplifted women tremendously. There is no record of the number of women benefiting from APWA's work, but Hussain is grateful to its legacy: "Many women whom we know as activists today may have had women in their family who benefited from APWA's educational and support programme decades ago."

APWA is not a political or rights-based organisation. Through its mandate of social welfare, it benefited women, making them more useful citizens. Women became educated in the 1960s and went on to participate in a variety of political, social and rights-based movements (Weiss, 2014). The late Asma Jehangir, for example, contested a feverish legal battle against the illegal detention of her father, Ghulam Jilani, by General Ayub's dictatorship. She won her case in 1968.

There was a brief lull in the women's movement during the 1970s as the country recovered from the loss of its Eastern Wing (which became Bangladesh), followed by a "democratic intervention"⁷ for a couple of years and then dictatorship.

According to Rouse (1984), "The Pakistani women and society took some time to understand the nature and chemistry of General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, and once they had assessed that the martial law was using the 'religion card' to usurp their social and political rights, they started opposing him and came out with force on the streets." It was the Women's Action Forum that posed the first serious challenge

6. Humaira Hussain, gender and women's rights specialist, group discussion, Islamabad, 23 June 2022.

7. Mehnaz Rehman, women's rights and democracy activist, group discussion, Karachi, 24 April 2022.

to General Zia's dictatorship, with rallies in which Pakistani women battled with police and other law-enforcement agencies against political oppression.

The struggle to pursue women's rights in a secular or religious framework gained momentum in the 1980s as progressive feminism began to be more assertive in response to the institution of a fundamentalist form of Islamic law by General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. This move spurred the formation of the Women's Action Forum in 1981, a network of activists who lobbied for secular and progressive women's rights. The Forum has been sustained as a social movement, mostly in bigger cities, and continues to voice the concerns of women.

The struggle entered its defining moment on 12 February 1983, when the Women's Action Forum and the Pakistan Women Lawyers' Association organised a march against discriminatory laws, only to be attacked, baton charged and teargassed by police in the streets of Lahore. The date became known as a "black day for women's rights" and was later declared National Women's Day.

Since 2018, a new wave of feminism has swept across Pakistan, engaging a younger generation of women and other genders. This contemporary activism categorically differs from the activism of the 1950s to the 1990s, which largely challenged the social and legal frameworks that the then-governments had instituted and represented (Weiss, 2014).

The current wave marks a tectonic shift in the feminist landscape. It has inaugurated an entirely new phase in feminist struggles by challenging and deconstructing the private spheres of the family, community and society. The marginalised ideas of non-binary persons and non-reproductive and alternative sexual expression have been mainstreamed.

By reclaiming public spaces and inserting the personal into the heart of the political, the new-wave feminists are dissolving the false dichotomies of the public and private, productive and reproductive, and personal and political spheres. For instance, the 2021 Aurat (Women's) March in at least seven cities nationwide included demands for safety from endemic violence, for access to health care in a nation where half of the population of women is malnourished, and for basic economic justice with safe working environments and equal opportunities for women.

In Pakistan, as in other countries where women already were the most vulnerable, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated their crises, including gender-based violence. The slogans and demands of women's rights groups were in response to a heightened realisation of the impact of the pandemic on the struggles that women leaders had waged and their consequent gains. There was a conscious determination among women leaders to raise these issues and slogans (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021).

In parallel with secular drives, movements driven by religion have also remained active. One of these is Al-Huda, which is a "piety movement" that grew in popularity among women during the 1990s and continues to have an influence. Its many directives teach women to obey and submit to their husbands as much as possible, to protect their husbands' "honour" and never "cross the limits" that their families and husbands have set. Aimed at achieving religious piety and purity, the Al-Huda movement has targeted the urban middle class and has left a deep mark on the psyche and the worldview of the women it has influenced.

In the case of women, social movements influenced by both secular and religious ideologies have provided the ground for competing narratives in the social domain. There is no denying that some conservative movements, mostly associated with religious political parties, have become far more popular than the progressive women's movement. But their beneficial role for women in various local cultural and geographic perspectives cannot be ignored.

It is also interesting to observe that the secular social movements have almost always operated in isolation. Mainstream political parties have chosen not to connect with them. There have been frequent interactions between the parties and the movements, but this pipeline has never been formalised. As a result, secular and progressive social movements for women and the NGOs associated with them continue to operate in relative isolation and often face various kinds of difficulties, such as, registration, permissions to hold rallies, opening of bank accounts, reserving halls for their activities, by the local authorities.

In response to these movements, some changes have been made in the legal frameworks. To support these processes, voices from various national and even international organisations remain active. Women's social movements have achieved a fair amount of legislation on behalf

of women but their implementation remains a huge challenge. “The legislation is merely a step in the right direction, and the amount of constant work and effort that goes before moving the Government or even the opposition legislators have proven numerous times that the overall attitude towards the issues of women is nonchalant,” explained Myra Imran, a women and gender rights activist. “Many times, the women in Parliament themselves do not exhibit the required seriousness.”⁸

The challenge lies in the impact of the legislation, and that is where the women’s movements could take on a more significant role. For instance, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 and the anti-rape ordinance of December 2020 promised harsher punishments, including chemical castration for perpetrators and a speedier trial of rape cases through special courts.⁹

Women are also active in support of movements other than for women’s rights. For instance, in the rural Okara District of Punjab province, women have a leading role in the Farmers’ Movement against the governmental organizations’ involvement in land business (Salim, 2008). They have faced cordons and sieges for weeks and months to support their communities against detention and torture. The support of women was among the primary factors propelling the Farmers’ Movement towards formal community activism and eventually achieving its objectives for land rights and claims on the annual agricultural produce.

4.2 Political rights movements

Among many social-political movements, Pakistan’s Lawyers’ Movement, or Black Coat Revolution, was considered a new beginning for the country (Abbas and Jasam, 2009). Observers have drawn parallels with the revolutions that overthrew governments in Georgia (the Rose Revolution in 2003), Ukraine (the Orange Revolution in 2004) and the Kyrgyz Republic (the Tulip Revolution in 2005).

8. Myra Imran, women’s and gender rights activist and media professional, Islamabad, 25 June 2022.

9. “President approves anti-rape ordinance to ensure speedy trial, strict punishments”, Dawn, 15 December 2020.

The Lawyers' Movement, which began in 2007, remained non-violent but challenged oppression against the judiciary by the Government. It was ignited when then-President General Pervez Musharraf unconstitutionally deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhary. This unconstitutional action caused the lawyers' community, civil society, the media, human rights activists and political workers to take to the streets. After numerous protests, the Chief Justice was restored to office by the Supreme Court in July 2007.

These popular protests were a part of the overall mix and mobilisation of a massive social movement across Pakistan. The Black Coat Revolution, as it came to be called, was the first social movement in South Asia that massively used the tools of information and communication technologies to generate a national wave of social and political sympathy.¹⁰ New media platforms were used for engaging with the masses after President General Pervez Musharraf started banning satellite and print media. Many mainstream and large-scale news channels that did not comply with the "instructions" of the Government were taken off air. Those who chose to comply continued airing their content. The dissenting journalists who were taken off air symbolically hosted their talk shows on the streets of the provincial capitals.

The continuing tussle between the Government and the Supreme Court over the issue of his re-election resulted in President General Pervez Musharraf imposing a state of emergency on 3 November 2007 after suspending the Constitution again, dismissing 60 senior judges and requiring the rest of the judiciary to take an oath under a new Provisional Constitutional Order.

The state of emergency was lifted 42 days later, but the judges who did not take the oath were dismissed, which then sparked the second phase of the Lawyers' Movement (Khan, 2012). The protesting lawyers at first only demanded restoration of the deposed judges, but the three-month dispute transformed into a movement with bigger and bolder demands, beginning with the resignation of President General Musharraf and enforcement of the independence of the judiciary, which endured until March 2009 (Hussain, 2021).

10. "Black coats and blacker faces", *Tribune*, 10 July 2012.

Another social movement for the political rights of an ethnic community, the Pashtuns, took the country by storm in 2018–2019. Starting as a group of students coming together to assert the rights of Pashtun students against the violence of non-state actors in the FATA (in the now Newly Merged Areas), the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement called for greater political and social rights for Pashtuns, particularly those living in the FATA.

Because the Newly Merged Areas were facing the brunt of continued violence by terrorists as well as government responses, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement started criticising the establishment in its public rallies, however, this criticism did apparently not go well with the public initially because criticism of these institutions was rare.

But the movement continued gaining momentum. Again, social media proved extremely important in popularising the movement and its political and social demands. Although the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement originated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, it attracted a strong following in Karachi, the capital of Sindh province.

4.3 Labour and farmers' rights movements

While industrial labourers actively participated in the Indian independence struggle and found an institutional role for organised labour in Indian politics, Pakistan inherited a small industrial base, at only 9 per cent of the total industry of India (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021).

Likewise, only a small proportion of the population was engaged in industry at the time of the country's birth: 0.63 per cent of the total workers' population of the Indian subcontinent.

Their low numbers did not deter labourers from taking on an active role in Pakistan's politics, and they remained a strong democratic force against the Ayub dictatorship from 1958 to 1969. Their initial rise was heavily influenced by leaders of the Communist Party of Pakistan, the majority of whom had come to Pakistan on the instructions of the Communist Party of India.

The initial phase of the labour movement was that of class struggle, and the official response at times used brute force: sometimes via

the police and other law-enforcement agencies, and sometimes via the power of the law to imprison labour leaders and register cases of against them.

The struggle of the labour movement against General Ayub's government continued during the 1960s and, despite ideological differences, political leaders sought support from the labour movements and vice versa. Even with a nationwide ban on political leaders, political activities continued in Pakistan, to which the officialdom continued to respond with brute force and criminal charges.

General Ayub's government was successfully toppled in part due to the strong labour movement. By that time, the public and political leaders were yearning for political freedom and social spaces to express their freedoms after General Ayub's nearly 11-year long tenure.

The Communist Party of Pakistan was banned during the 1970s. The labour movements associated with its ideology were replaced by labour unions (not movements) that were aligned with the religious right. These unions came to the assistance of General Zia-ul-Haq when he announced his agenda to inject religion into all functions of the State and all aspects of society. The labour movements that had aligned with communist ideology and then with the left-liberal spectrum of politics started losing ground. By the end of the 1980s, these movements had virtually disappeared (Shuhong and Zia-ud-Din, 2017).

It is unfortunate that the governments that followed after the death of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988 could not find the courage to open up spaces for the left-liberal labour movements. But these governments were fighting tough political battles in a game of musical chairs in national politics between 1988 and 1999.

The internal ideological and personal differences of whatever remained of Pakistan's left also had a "devastating role",¹¹ in making these progressive movements gradually irrelevant in the Pakistani context. The role of the political and labour leaders who associated themselves with communist ideology and later with left-liberal ideas was not positive.

11. Farooq Tariq, President, Haqooq-e-Khalq Party, group discussion, Lahore, 17 April 2022.

In subsequent years and decades (1990 through the dawn of the twenty-first century), the labour movements gradually became geographically focused and sector-specific (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021). Nowadays, there is hardly any year-round connectivity with mainstream political parties. The parties only reach out to labour movement leaders in election season and are generally met with compliance.

Although the overall spectrum of the labour movements has shrunk since the 1980s, many geographically focused examples have come to the fore. But despite their excellent commitment and the sacrifices they have made, they have not been able to become a regional, provincial or national phenomenon. For example, landless farmers in Punjab province started struggling for land ownership rights in 2000. In 2001, at the start of the movement, General Pervez Musharraf was in power, however, and was intent on instituting corporate farming on state-owned farms across the province. But the landless farmers did not accept the updated terms of sharecropping.

Most of these tenants had settled on these lands before Partition and through generations, to the extent that the land tenancy law would allow them to claim ownership rights over the land they tilled. The farmers organised themselves into Anjuman Muzareen Punjab, or the Society of Landless Peasants of Punjab.

The leaders and supporters of Anjuman Muzareen Punjab were pushed back through various official mechanisms, but their consistency enabled them to secure land rights to a considerable extent. Their struggle and subsequent achievements were indeed a tremendous feat, but the impact was mostly limited to Okara District in Punjab province. There was a constant stream of praise for them, but these mostly came from civil society leaders.

Political parties voiced their support in muffled tones, if at all. Hardly any mainstream political leader voiced their concern about the plight of the landless tillers or visited their areas to show support. As a result, the impacts and the gains of the movement could not be institutionalised politically, and despite the landlessness in other parts of Punjab and Pakistan, hardly any other similar movements have managed to gain visibility.

Due to the absence of political connectivity and political ownership, particularly since the 1980s, the political and social benefits of the labour movements have not been widespread. This remains the situation till today.

5. Contemporary social movements in Pakistan

This section covers the social movements that have sustained themselves and continue to impact their communities. It provides basic information about the nature and scope of these movements based in Sindh and Punjab provinces. As previously noted, the study found more social movements in Sindh than in Punjab. According to Irfan Mufti, Deputy Executive Director of South Asia Partnership Pakistan, a fundamental reason for this difference is the influence of the middle class and the literate class in Sindh. Even if members of the professional class (who have moved elsewhere) do not return to their towns and villages, “they maintain a constructive relationship. They might have served in Islamabad or Karachi, but they demonstrate care for their native areas.”¹² Irfan Mufti believes that the tendency among the Sindhi population to stay connected with their native or ancestral areas is greater than for the people of Punjab, for whom this connection is more like that of an occasional visitor.

People in Sindh, particularly from smaller towns and rural districts, either return to their native area or maintain strong contact with their community. “This inevitably benefits the local communities,” Irfan Mufti explained. According to him, they also try to keep connected with people who once would have formed their “organic circle” of friends and acquaintances and thus they have a larger tendency to exhibit ownership of local challenges. Because this “crowd” is exposed to urban life, activism and how social activism can bring about change, they either form, become part of, provide support to or lead informal social groups that, in time, become formal social movements.

One principal factor of difference between the two provinces is the tendency towards nationalist movements in Sindh, based on Sindhi nationalism and identity. These movements have produced towering leaders.

12. Irfan Mufti, Deputy Executive Director, South Asia Partnership Pakistan, interview, Islamabad, 3 June 2022.

The following sections highlight many of the social movements the study found in both provinces and introduce the CSOs and NGOs that began as localised social movements and evolved into formal organisations.

5.1 Movements in Sindh province

Anjuman Taraqi Pasand Musanafin (Progressive Writers' Movement)

It would be unjust not to begin with Anjuman Taraqi Pasand Musanafin, or the Progressive Writers' Movement, although it was founded in 1935 in England. It was formed with Sindhi (Sobho Gianchandani, Sheikh Ayaz, Noor Din Sarki, Hameed Akhtar Khan, among others) and Punjabi (Faiz Ahmad Faiz, M.D. Taseer, among others) intellectuals who gave the movement tremendous pace and popularity and served the cause of the people first in British India and then in Pakistan.

The movement used literature, community meetings, study circles for youth on political rights and responsibilities, and rallies in public on issues ranging from land rights for landless tillers to supporting political prisoners in British jails.

Prior to the Anjuman movement, literature was mostly limited to the royal court and the local elites as patrons. But these progressive writers, poets, speakers and political activists took literature to the man on the street. They wrote, spoke and rallied for labourers, farmers, people of the "Scheduled Castes" and communities that were historically downtrodden. What the Anjuman leaders wrote in those early days still serve as a reference to those who carry the torch today in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh and Punjab.

The Government banned the organisation in 1954 and incarcerated its leading intellectuals. But Anjuman members continued to use literature as a tool to educate and enlighten the masses.

The movement was revived in 2007 in Karachi, with Sobho Gianchandani as its president and Hameed Akhtar as secretary general. It remains active across Pakistan but has a far stronger presence in Sindh than elsewhere (including Punjab), and relates to communities via its 29 district chapters and central provincial body.

Every district chapter has a president. Although they are connected with the provincial chapters, the district chapters operate independently, according to their local priorities. Anjuman Taraqi Pasand Musanafin continues its literary and social activism against all odds.

Karachi Bachao Tehreek (Movement to Save Karachi)

Several social movements in Sindh province and in Karachi have emerged in response to social and development challenges. These have included households affected by the circular railway, the Gujjar Korangi Nala and the Malir expressway.

The Karachi Bachao Tehreek, or Movement to Save Karachi, works on sociopolitical, legal and environmental issues in the provincial capital. Recent emphasis has been on work for the affected communities around the Gujjar Korangi Nala, who since have formed a movement of their own. In addition to its work on garbage, an issue that it publicised in the national media, the Karachi Bachao Tehreek has worked on behalf of communities displaced due to the construction of Bahria Town, a significant contribution to social justice. Other past issues include protection of the transgender community, creating pressure on the city and the provincial governments regarding forestation, and de-gangng the supply of water from illegally dug wells, including in affluent areas.

The organisation is purely voluntary and mostly attracts youth volunteers. The leader, Aadil Ayub, explained that the platform has effectively and efficiently used the power of social media to “propagate for good” in Karachi. “Many times, we would hold rallies where way more people will show up than what we had expected.”¹³

The movement has proven so successful that many social movements in Karachi now seek its assistance for online community mobilisation. The Karachi Bachao Tehreek has emerged as an influencer among social movements, indicative of the spirit of youth. The organisation is informal, and is not affiliated with a particular office, charter, manifesto or long-term plan. Its volunteers engage with other social movements, civil society and non-governmental and community-based organisations, assisting with surveys, media and legal services, online

13. Aadil Ayub, leader Karachi Bachao Tehreek, group discussion, Karachi, 24 April 2022.

and grassroots community mobilising and, in some cases, fundraising.

The group is active on social media and has created social media groups on various platforms, which makes it easy to reach members when required.

Sindh Indigenous Rights Alliance

The Sindh Indigenous People's Rights Alliance, or SIRA, is a social movement founded in 2013 to protect the rights of the indigenous communities of Sindh. The organisation initially collaborated with communities whose residential and agricultural lands were being forcibly taken from them for real estate and other infrastructure development. Most recently, one of the largest real estate development groups in Pakistan has been "eating away our lands," said founder Hafeez Baloch.¹⁴

After earning a master's degree in political science from Karachi University, Hafeez Baloch chose to become a farmer on his ancestral lands instead of pursuing a professional career. Many people in his community sold their land to powerful government and private organisations but were not compensated with what they were promised. Despite cultural differences with them, his movement decided to assist them. "They were our people and were wronged," he explained.

SIRA started out in Karachi but is now connected with communities and land rights groups across Sindh province, particularly rural areas, and some parts of Balochistan province. For instance, SIRA joined hands with the fishing communities in Gwadar to protect their historical fishing rights, and with indigenous communities who were being evicted for various development projects.

SIRA is a community organiser but does not operate under a particular structure. It has a system of "perceived hierarchy among the group, and my people see me as their leader. That adds the burden of their expectations on my shoulders, and despite my efforts to have someone else replace me, people want me to continue," Hafeez Baloch explained.

14. Hafeez Baloch, SIRA founder, interview, Karachi, 15 May 2022.

SIRA helps communities organise. It provides a platform and human resources to small and disconnected community organisations so that they “feel organised and can speak with the power of the local authorities”, Baloch added.

The alliance is purely voluntary, with over 100 volunteers, and comes together when communities face challenges to their way of life. The organisation does not have an office and does not operate under a charter. It collaborates regularly with partners in Karachi, Hyderabad and other areas of Sindh by exchanging information on the onslaught of real estate developers on ancestral lands and the alleged assistance that the provincial government has been providing to developers. Rather than using social media, the movement reaches out to community leaders, who further mobilise their communities for social action.

Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum

Formally founded in 1998, the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, or PFF, is a registered CSO working for the advancement of social, economic, cultural and political rights of fishers and farmers in the country, particularly fishing communities in Sindh and Balochistan provinces.

The Forum is a convergence point for many movements working for fishers and farmers. It was initially facilitated by the World Forum for Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers to create a strong collective platform rather than many weak movements.

Beginning in Sindh, over time the organisation came to participate actively in the protection of fishers’ rights in Gwadar. It came to prominence due to its successful campaigns to highlight the issue of industrial trawlers fishing in the waters of Gwadar. Some industrial trawlers were operated by Chinese companies, and facing them on behalf of indigenous fishing communities in Gwadar landed the PFF in trouble with local authorities. The leaders of the movement were jailed as a result of multiple cases registered against them. Many of these were eventually dropped, but “we continue visiting our ‘in-laws’,” said Saeed Baloch, social activist and PFF leader,¹⁵ referring to the local police station.

15. Saeed Baloch, social activist and PFF leader, interview, Karachi, 16 May 2022.

In addition to issues directly affecting the fishing communities, the organisation works on the capacity building of social movements and other community-based platforms in Sindh and Balochistan. According to Saeed Baloch, PFF extends its professional organisational abilities and experiences to smaller organisations to “talk to power and collaborate with local authorities”.

One of the success stories of the PFF is its work with the maritime authorities in Pakistan on the issue of Pakistani fishers who unintentionally cross over into Indian waters and vice versa. Its operations to obtain the freedom of fishers who have been arrested have become a hallmark activity. “At least, in this area we must appreciate the seriousness and the expeditious response with which the Pakistani officials deal with our complaints and address them promptly,” Saeed Baloch said. He added that their work is now also known among fishing communities in India, and, in the event of trouble for Indian fishers, their families and communities contact the PFF. “This in fact has landed us in trouble with the local authorities many times, but we do what we can to help poor people caught on the wrong side of their borders,” he said.

In addition to PFF leader, Saeed Baloch remains an active member of many other social movements.

Women’s Action Forum

The Women’s Action Forum has massive influence due to a role that is characterised as heroic. It is both a social movement and an NGO.

The Forum was founded as a women’s rights organisation during the era of Islamisation in Pakistan ushered in by then-president General Zia-ul-Haq. Few people in Pakistan know that it was the Forum that took to the streets against the Islamisation drive, which particularly targeted women via the interpretation of Islamic laws by General Zia-ul-Haq. The Women’s Action Forum then braved police batons, teargassing, arrests and criminal cases to stand their ground. It continues to do so.

Its ideology and modus operandi have enabled the Forum to continue its work in a hostile environment. The first main ideological choice was the collective decision to work towards a democratic, pluralist and responsive State, as opposed to the undemocratic rule and authoritarian forms of government.

The second ideological choice revolved around the necessity to construct a progressive and inclusive State, in contrast to one based on a single religion, which is what the State has pushed onto society starting in the 1960s.

Its manner of operating as a pressure group is based on the principles of equality and a non-hierarchical approach, the rejection of any form of external funding, non-partisanship and the absence of any affiliation with a political party or group.

This combination of financial and ideological independence has enabled the Women's Action Forum to become an organisation not answerable to any corporate interest. This is how it has remained capable of taking independent decisions without interference. This mode of operation continues to this day.

These decisions, taken early on, made the Forum a unique platform, vastly different from other CSOs or social movements. It was the first group to join the Joint Action Committee, a platform that brings Pakistan's civil society, NGOs and social movements together for greater impact. The Joint Action Committee still exists but is dormant, while the Women's Action Forum continues in full force.

The Forum does not have a national-level organisation; its structure is decentralised, with chapters in the bigger cities, such as Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Islamabad.

These city chapters, as they are called, are independent in taking their own decisions based on their local circumstances, priorities and challenges. There is a consultative process among them, but they act independently of each other.

As a policy, they do not accept funding from any source (local or international)—corporate, public or non-profit. Members finance activities with their personal resources or through their family networks.

Jagratta Foundation (Awakening Foundation)

The Jagratta Foundation, or Awakening Foundation, has been working since 1987. It is one of the largest social movements in Sindh, and is organised as a formal organisation mostly working on social issues,

democracy and labour rights. It started as a group of volunteers who came together during the period of martial law imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq as a rights-based and pro-democracy movement—two pillars that the Jagratta Foundation continues to associate with today.

The Foundation works across Sindh province, mainly in small and rural districts. It is organised all the way down to the level of tehsil (subdivision) and collaborates continuously with communities and their leaders on wide-ranging challenges: advocating for water for small landowners, standing against honour killings and for women's rights, motivating people to vote, organising study circles for youth and women, and promoting labour rights.

The Jagratta Foundation also, selectively, provides legal assistance to the downtrodden, including labourers. It has been a front-line defender of human rights and is part of many alliances in Sindh. It arranges seminars, study circles, protests and various other programmes in collaboration with local and international development organisations. The organisation has faced pressures and hindrances for its civic activism; its offices have been closed, against which they pursued legal action to reopen.

In recent times, the Jagratta Foundation has faced budgetary constraints and a reduction of its volunteers.

Bheel Intellectual Forum

The Bheel Intellectual Forum started as a university students' association in 2010 and gradually became one of the most vibrant community-driven social movements in rural Sindh, particularly in areas where the Hindu minority has a sizeable presence.

The social movement works on the issue of the caste system among the Hindu communities in Sindh and strongly represents all major Dalit communities, such as the Kohli, Bheel, Meghwar, Balmiki and Baghri. The organisation is based in Mithi City, of Tharparkar District, and demands rights for the "Scheduled Caste" communities.

A major issue for the movement is the inclusion of Dalit peoples in the Pakistan Census under an identity of their preference. Under the present system, they must either mark themselves as Hindus or Scheduled Caste. Marking themselves as Hindus facilitates upper-

caste Hindus taking the lead to represent the whole Hindu community in Sindh, within which Dalits are segregated based on their caste. On the other hand, they are not accustomed to identifying themselves as members of a Scheduled Caste.

The Bheel Intellectual Forum is motivating the Bheel communities to mark themselves as Scheduled Caste so that they can separate themselves from upper-caste Hindus. For this purpose, they run door-to-door campaigns, prepare and distribute pamphlets, organise awareness rallies, publish books and occasionally write in the newspapers to highlight their problems.

The Forum is at the forefront of mobilising Dalits for their social and political rights. More than 95 per cent of the Dalit community in Sindh is Hindu, but they want a separate identity for themselves, for which the Bheel Intellectual Forum has been constantly striving.

The Forum frequently interacts with smaller community-based social movements like the Dalit Sujag Tehreek, the Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan and the Sindh Kohli Ittehad. An offshoot is the Bheel Lawyers' Forum, which deals with legal cases pertaining to Bheel and Dalit communities.

The Bheel Intellectual Forum is not active on any social and traditional media platform, but work is underway to this end.

Dalit Sujag Tehreek (Dalit Community Movement)

The Dalit Sujag Tehreek, or Dalit Community Movement, is a social movement representing the Scheduled Caste Hindu communities in Pakistan. It is based in Sindh but reaches out to Dalit communities across Pakistan, such as the Kohli, Bheel, Meghwar, Oad, Bhagri and Balmiki.

The Dalit Sujag Tehreek was launched in 2016 in Mirpurkhas, when various social movements working on the issues of the Scheduled Castes joined forces on one common platform. These movements included the Oad Samaji Tanzeem, the Pakistan Meghwar Council, the Bhagri Welfare Association, the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, the All Sindh Kohli Association, the Sindh Kohli Ittehad (Nemdas Group), the Sindh Kohli Ittehad (Ranshal Group), the Qaumi Awami Tehreek and the Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan. The Bheel Intellectual

Forum is part of the Dalit Sujag Tehreek but maintains its own identity.

The Dalit Sujag Tehreek launched as a campaign against social discrimination faced by Scheduled Caste Hindus from Muslims and upper-caste Hindus.

Although Scheduled Caste Hindus form the majority of the Hindu population in Pakistan, their representation in the political sphere is weak. For example, the Pakistan Hindu Council has more than 2,000 Hindu members, but only seven are from a Scheduled Caste. The movement works to highlight such anomalies in Pakistani political and social structures, formal or informal.

The Dalit Sujag Tehreek announced in 2018 that it would evolve into a political party and participate in the general elections. During the general elections of 2018, it supported three candidates.

The movement constantly works against the forced conversion of Scheduled Caste Hindu girls and runs campaigns for the community to be included under the category of Scheduled Caste Hindus in the Census.

Thar Sujag Saath (Community of the People of Thar)

Thar Sujag Saath is a social movement that started in 2015 in the Thar community, when huge international coal exploration firms began to exploit coal reserves in Thar, Sindh. A corporate firm was allegedly backed with the power of the provincial government and the needs and rights of the local communities were ignored.

Historic villages were asked to relocate, and the settlements of indigenous peoples were threatened with demolition. When the local communities resisted, legal actions were threatened. The local way of life was particularly at risk due to the huge coal project plus a dam, and there were serious issues of land ownership and compensation.

Local youth and women joined forces and formed Thar Sujag Saath as a combined platform to resist the corporate onslaught, negotiate with the Government and the corporate firm, and claim their due share for the rehabilitation and resettlement of indigenous peoples who were being affected by the commercial projects.

The movement successfully rallied the communities and villages in Thar and was able to negotiate appropriate compensation for all households and communities, including for their resettlement to other locations. The movement even succeeded in claiming compensation for livestock.

The movement also negotiated with the corporate firm and won a quota to reserve jobs for local youth and women in skilled and non-skilled categories. During the process, the movement's leaders and workers were threatened and harassed, and legal cases were fabricated against them. Local officialdom did not come forward to help, and in most instances, the movement sought justice from the judiciary.

The movement is ongoing as many individuals, families and communities still require appropriate compensation for their land and relocation.

Shankar Meghwar is the principal leader of the movement and continues to work and appeal to national and international organisations for support against "continuous harassment".¹⁶

Awami Amal Committee (Public Action Committee)

The Awami Amal Committee, or Public Action Committee, started as a social movement in 2012 in Sukkur District advocating for landless tillers and fair wages for women, and standing against honour crimes. It remains an informal group of citizens that operates with a loose structure of volunteers and workers, including women.

Over the past decade, the group has continued to work on the core areas it began operations with. It has also connected with labour organisations, lawyers, civil society and NGOs in Sukkur.

This has enhanced the Committee's network and capacity and added to its confidence to manage pressures from local government functionaries, who at times act at the behest of local feudal landlords connected with political parties. The Awami Amal Committee has tried at least four times to register as an organised group with the district authorities but has been denied registration.

16. Shankar Meghwar, Thar Sujag Saath leader, group discussion, Umerkot, 15 April 2022.

Because the group is connected with more formal CSOs and NGOs, it continues working on assignments and projects as well as social issues. This has become a two-way process: the group looks towards senior partners in civil society and NGOs for assistance, support and sustainability, while these organisations engage the group for community outreach for various projects and activities.

The Awami Amal Committee offers a near-ideal model of an informal social movement that has achieved local relevance and sustainability and continues working on the social challenges that local communities face. The group is now experienced enough to have created more chapters among rural communities around Sukkur.

National Advocacy for Rights of Innocent Foundation

The National Advocacy for Rights of Innocent (NARI) Foundation started as a group of socially concerned youth who came together to campaign for women's right to an education in Sukkur District's rural areas. The movement was founded in 2013 and "graduated" to becoming an organised NGO in 2017 but has not given up on its character of being a social movement.

The NARI Foundation mostly focuses on what it started out championing: women's education in rural Sindh. But it also provides support to poor communities on legal matters, particularly pertaining to land holdings. The movement has been raising concerns about the increasing reduction in water supply for small farmers in rural Sindh and has been rallying for the cause of environmental protection. It works with district and provincial authorities to solicit support for its causes.

The Foundation connects with communities via a network of volunteers at the union council level. The scope of the organisation is limited to three or four districts. Its relations with the government officials have been productive and non-controversial, but it has faced resistance from local political leaders and parties, which see the organisation as trespassing into their area of influence.

The NARI Foundation is an excellent example of a gradually growing organisation that started as a social movement, worked with local and international development stakeholders, and made an impact.

Center for Peace and Civil Society

One of Pakistan's leading social leaders and activists, Jami Chandio, leads the Center for Peace and Civil Society, which is based in Hyderabad. It is a registered CSO, although it started as a social movement and retains this orientation. It works on the challenges of democracy and civil society strengthening, and promotes the principles of democracy, freedom, secularism and social justice. It works across Sindh and, depending on the issue, across Pakistan.

The Center is also a think tank and a platform for local social movements in Sindh. It partners with like-minded organisations in Sindh and other provinces. It runs community awareness programmes, study circles for youth and women, and seminars on its thematic areas.

The Center started in 2001 as an informal social movement when a group of scholars, civil society leaders, and practitioners of civic and democratic freedoms came together to create a platform to rally for their causes. The organisation has evolved to become a credible voice and inspiration for other social movements in Sindh.

Taraqi-Pasand Naujwan Forum (Progressive Youth Forum)

The Taraqi-Pasand Naujwan Forum, or Progressive Youth Forum, originated in Badin District in 2009 as a social movement to highlight the increasing violence against the local Hindu community, kidnappings, forced conversions to Islam (mostly of young Hindu girls and women), land grabbing from indigenous farmers and violence against women. Although the movement started when local Hindu youth came together to resolve the issues of their community, people of other faiths have welcomed the movement.

Today, 13 years later, the movement has a strong presence in seven districts of Sindh where the Hindu population faces challenges based on their ethnic and religious identities.

The social movement evolved in 2015 into a formal NGO headquartered in Badin, with chapters in other areas of Sindh. The organisation has retained its character of being a social movement and continues rallying for the benefit of downtrodden and exploited communities. The organisation is a member of many local, national and international networks and frequently interacts with local authorities. The Forum

is now an organisation of Hindu and Muslim unity, and it continues working for a progressive society, the voice of the youth, and to highlight violations of human rights.

However, the movement has also faced hindrances from the officials when it comes to obtaining no-objection certificates to conduct its activities. Many planned rallies have been denied even after being granted permission. The movement has been pressured by the local feudal nexus with government officials, particularly when it has worked on the issues of landless tillers, women farmers and sharecroppers. For example, it has been challenged when it raised the issue of land ownership of small farmers who have been tilling state land for generations.

The organisation has not found any support from political parties, either. In Badin and other areas of Sindh where it works, the local and district-level leadership of the political parties are also the feudal landlords.

Awami Adabi Forum (People's Literature Forum)

This social movement originated in Sukkur District in 1997 when the local literati formed the Awami Adabi Forum, or People's Literature Forum, to preserve and promote literature in the Sindhi language. It is active in 17 districts of Sindh. The organisation is not registered and continues operating as an informal social movement. But it has a formal structure in all districts and runs its operations through the annual fee from its members and the support that it garners from its local social networks, particularly with media and development organisations.

The organisation uses literature and performing arts as a means to express and highlight community issues in areas where it works and has collaborated with a range of local and international development organisations for this purpose.

As a social movement, it has constantly highlighted the lack of justice for the poor communities of Sindh through literary expression, and is adept in using local and social media to broadcast and relay its messaging.

The Forum has faced the arrests of its leaders and activists during public rallies for justice and rights. It has a close working relationship with the press clubs in the 17 districts where it operates and frequently engages with local political parties and their leaders to arrange activities.

Rawadari Tehreek (Movement for Tolerance)

The Rawadari Tehreek, or Movement for Tolerance, is headquartered in Lahore, Punjab, but has chapters in many districts of Pakistan, including Sindh province. It is a social movement that focuses on promoting human rights and pluralism, and the rights of minorities and women. It constantly advocates against forced conversions (mostly of young Hindu girls and women to Islam), sectarian violence, religious intolerance and unjust treatment of poor people.

Its chapter in Sukkur District has highlighted these issues consistently and has faced various kinds of restrictions even to hold protests and marches against discrimination of minorities and women.

The Rawadari Tehreek maintains that each time it conducts a march, speaks with the media or highlights an issue pertaining to human rights, they face reactions from various quarters, including the religious groups. The movement has undergone various inquiries and questioning sessions by the local authorities.

Sindh Naujwan Tehreek (Sindh Youth Movement)

The Sindh Naujwan Tehreek, popularly known as the Sindh Youth Movement, works on the right to education and other human rights issues. It mostly focuses on highlighting the challenges to the human rights of the Sindh communities, particularly where constitutional guarantees are not being delivered by the government at local level. The movement started in 1997 in Ghotki District and maintains district chapters across the province. It calls itself a human social organisation and is now registered with the local authorities.

The Sindh Youth Movement works to increase the enrolment of children, particularly girls, in educational institutions and has been struggling for the reclamation of public school facilities that are otherwise occupied by influential feudal landlords. As the movement has evolved to become a formal NGO, it has worked with local, national and international development organisations.

The movement calls itself a pro-women organisation and has facilitated various income-generating projects for women in Sindh. It also sensitises people on gender-related challenges. It has a volunteer structure and frequently raises its voice for the resolution of community-based challenges.

Society for Uplifting Community by Education

This group started as a social movement in 2012 and later took the shape of a community-based NGO in Sukkur District and in Hyderabad. It has a formal structure and a charter and is registered.

The society started as a group of concerned citizens who wanted to work on human rights, education and women's rights. Since its inception, it has taken up cases of landless tillers and has fought for women's land rights and to end violence against them. Its first-ever action was to organise communities for girls' education facilities in the town centres of Sukkur and Hyderabad districts.

The movement promotes religious and inter-faith harmony and has been instrumental in mitigating and preventing religious conflict in the districts where it works. The organisation arranges study circles and public rallies and collaborates with several social movements in these two districts as well as with civil society and NGOs.

The group has also faced the brunt of governmental action, particularly during and following its protests for human rights. However, as Sukkur and Hyderabad are urban centres, its operations have run relatively smoothly.

Bhittai Social Watch and Advocacy

This organisation was formed in 1995 with the objective to work with a diverse set of communities, including but not limited to marginalised communities, minorities and transgender people on issues such as education, health care, livelihoods, peacebuilding and women's empowerment.

Bhittai Social Watch and Advocacy is a non-governmental community development organisation. It first registered as Bhittai Social Welfare Association with the Sindh Social Welfare Department, under the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Act Registration and Control

Ordinance, 1961. After expanding its programmes and areas of operation in 2012, it was renamed Bhattai Social Watch and Advocacy.

Its operations started with a small fund of 830,000 rupees from the Trust for Voluntary Organizations to establish a Mother and Child Healthcare Centre in Saddar Ji Bhatyon in Taluka Kingri District. Health care became a significant theme in its work, and the organisation gained experience and exposure through this project. It was awarded membership via the training need assessment through the Trust for Voluntary Organizations.

Since then, Bhattai Social Watch and Advocacy has implemented 25 projects in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments, donors and development partners in health care, education, flood response, child protection, democracy and governance, social cohesion, women's development and poverty reduction. It has expanded from Khairpur District to nine other districts in the province. Its office is in Khairpur, a vocational centre is run in Sadar ji Bhatyon, and a Mother and Child Healthcare Centre is located in the National Alien Registration Authority area.

Bhattai Social Watch and Advocacy has a well-defined vision and mission to serve more people with the help of its development partners.

Sindh Sujag Social Media Forum (Social Media Forum of Sindhi Community)

Sindh Sujag Social Media Forum, or the Social Media Forum of Sindhi Community, is a dedicated online social movement based in Khairpur Mirs District. The organisation uses the power of social media to highlight local communities' issues. Among the significant issues it works on are water rights for small farmers, land rights for landless tillers who have been cultivating the State's land for decades, women's rights (particularly against the evil of honour killings) and girls' education.

The organisation provides social media support and expertise to other social movements and helps them augment their work and increase their reach to online communities. A group of seven volunteers runs the Social Media Forum. It does not engage in public protests or rallies on its own but participates in other social activities that correspond with its organisational objectives.

5.2 Movements in Punjab province

Labour Qaumi Movement (National Labour Movement)¹⁷

The Labour Qaumi Movement, or National Labour Movement, is a non-traditional labour organisation that emerged in 2003 after the protests of textile and garment workers increased their exploitation by employers. The organisation is not formally registered as a trade union or federation, but relevant government departments, employers and other stakeholders recognise it as such.

The organisation is known for its street mobilisation. Although the movement is a non-registered entity and wants to remain so, it has facilitated and organised movements from several social and industrial sectors, supporting them with organisational and mobilisation capacity. Several research studies have been produced on the organisation's mobilisation capacity and agitation strategies.

The organisation has mobilised workers in different sectors, including garment workers, textile workers, brick kiln workers, sanitary workers, domestic workers, home-based workers, and lady health workers. The most important collaboration has been with the power loom and brick kiln workers of Faisalabad. It has helped form 18 trade unions.

It claims to have 600,000–700,000 members, with geographical outreach in Faisalabad, Jhang, Chiniot, Toba Tek Singh, Nankana Sahib, Hafizabad, Multan, Vehari, Muzaffar Garh, Layyah and Khanewal. Members pay a monthly fee, which is its only source of funding. A central office is located in Faisalabad, with small, rented offices in every sector to collect funds and assist workers. It operates under a 21-member central council, with the sizeable participation of women.

The Labour Qaumi Movement has also established a tripartite platform in Faisalabad, bringing employers and government department officials together to address such issues as improper payment of wages, working hours, etc. The head of the organisation, Baba Rafiq Ansari, also recently joined the Haqooq-e-Khalq Party (People's Rights Party), which evolved from the Awami Workers' Party. He is president of the Punjab Provincial Chapter.

17. Adapted from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021.

Apart from its street mobilisation capacity, the Labour Qaumi Movement has built a system of engagement with the provincial labour department in Faisalabad, along with the social security office and Employees' Old-age Benefit Institution. This engagement helps resolve small-scale problems of workers while also building up a support base among activists.

Due to its unregistered status, the organisation is not a part of any international confederation or alliance. Its members and leaders have endured crackdowns and arrests. "The pressure has been immense," Baba Rafiq Ansari explained, "particularly when we have raised the issue of labour rights, such as an increase in wages, regularising employment and ensuring that workers will not be terminated summarily."¹⁸

Saraiki Qaumi Tehreek (Saraiki National Movement)

There is a strong and prevailing political sentiment in South Punjab that both the governments in Islamabad and Lahore, respectively, have neglected this region and that it has not received its due share from federation and the province.

There are many historical reasons for why the region has been neglected in terms of development, but discrimination in resource allocation remains among the prime issues that led to the establishment of the Saraiki Qaumi Tehreek (National Movement) in the 1960s.

This movement later assimilated into mainstream provincial and federal politics, and its principal leadership joined the Pakistan People's Party to advocate for their cause at the provincial and federal level. However, it has retained its ethnic colour and appeal. The movement has not become a strong social or political force, but continues to represent the emotion of the Saraiki people in the region where it operates.

Although it started informally, the Saraiki movement has emerged as a combination of the struggle for linguistic recognition, separate from mainstream Punjabi, and the struggle to establish a collective identity in the form of a separate province. It seeks to establish the Saraiki region as a separate subnational identity of people speaking different dialects of the Saraiki language.

18. Baba Rafiq Ansari, labour leader, interview, Faisalabad, 6 June 2022.

Building consensus for the name “Saraiki” for all the dialects spoken in the Saraiki region was part of the social and political reaction to counter mainstream Punjabi language and politics, which was seen as a dominating force. The process of creating a Saraiki identity in South Punjab through a language-based identity was a choice, with language seen as a unifying symbol.

Like many such movements, the Saraiki movement also started in the name of cultural revival, separate identity, and the promotion and preservation of local political and development interests. The articulation of economic conflict between upper and northern Punjab emerged after the language identity of the Saraiki was established.

The movement is recognised across South Punjab but is not a mainstream political or social force. It has a vast base of sympathisers and supporters in all districts of South Punjab, some parts of northern Sindh and southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Rawadari Tehreek (Movement for Tolerance)

Headquartered in Lahore, the Rawadari Tehreek, or Movement for Tolerance, is a social movement to generate wider debate on the importance of religious tolerance in a multi-religion society and respect of religious and other types of diversity. The Rawadari Tehreek also encourages the Government, political forces, government institutions, CSOs and other social movements to seriously address and counter religious extremism and intolerance, which has created an atmosphere of fear among citizens, particularly those belonging to religious minorities. It seeks to pressure the Government and other stakeholders to tackle religious extremism and religious intolerance.

The Rawadari Tehreek highlights the effects of religious extremism and religious intolerance to isolate militant outfits and their financiers and supporters. For this, it brings people of different faiths, religions and strata of life closer to each other to promote understanding and religious tolerance and social harmony.

This movement has chapters across Pakistan, particularly in the provincial capitals and other large cities, with plans to open chapters in all district headquarters. Samson Salamat leads the movement’s formal structure.

Its chapters are independent in their functioning but seek support and guidance from headquarters. “This is not by way of exercising control over the Rawadari Tehreek’s chapters in other cities but to keep the leadership of all chapters informed about the activities of all chapters in a centralised manner. It is a consultative process in which we all are partners,” explained Samson Salamat.¹⁹

The organisation requires all chapters to maintain representation of different faiths in their leadership.

Social Justice Movement

The Social Justice Movement supports Pakistani networks and forums in the implementation and monitoring of international and national human rights treaties and laws for the delivery of social justice. It conducts research, assessments and fact-finding studies on relevant areas that directly or indirectly affect or influence the delivery of social justice. It works under the guidance and supervision of its Executive Committee and Advisory Council.

Irrespective of gender, caste, belief, ethnicity, origin and age, the Social Justice Movement works with human rights defenders, builds up their capacities, and aims to establish district and regional chapters.

It also aims to create sustainable networks of youth, women, young adults and labourers for collaboration on human rights education and monitoring of the implementation of local and international human rights frameworks. It works with local authorities and the district government where its offices and officials are located.

As an operational philosophy, the Social Justice Movement identifies with the United Nation’s Charter on Human Rights, which it sees as a framework of best practices that the Pakistani Government must learn from. Its thematic focus is bonded labour, abolition of all forms of slavery and judicial justice, particularly for impoverished communities.

The movement has also established an Institute of Social Justice in Islamabad.

19. Samson Salamat, Rawadari Tehreek, interview, Lahore, 22 April 2022.

The Social Justice Movement develops and implements programmes in response to the needs of children, women, minorities, labourers, immigrants, people with disabilities, people who are displaced and prisoners. It is registered as a non-profit advocacy and research organisation under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. It has worked with a range of local partners on independent issues and sponsored projects.

Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement (People's Rights Movement)

Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement, or the People's Rights Movement, is a Pakistan-wide campaign for the enforcement of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution through grassroots organising and the building up of political momentum and social pressure. It is also registered as a political party with the Election Commission, but sees itself more as a movement for the rights of people. It adheres to left-liberal, at times socialist, political values.

The movement is an organised effort at addressing Pakistan's democratic challenges. As a tradition of procedural democracy and consistent elections begins to cement itself within the political landscape of the country, the Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement seeks to invigorate that landscape with a more substantive democracy, one that addresses the needs and concerns of most Pakistanis, not just the political or the ruling elite. In line with the Progressive International Movement, the campaign aspires to a world that is democratic, decolonised, just, egalitarian, liberated, sustainable, peaceful, prosperous and plural.

In a bid to keep connected with the masses, the Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement organises public meetings across the country. The movement aims at becoming a political alternative for the working classes, whose voice they believe has been historically ignored by the mainstream political parties. It aims at working to end welfare state status for the rich and at turning the working class into a third force in national politics.

The veterans of social movements in Pakistan have acknowledged the vibrancy in this movement, which is now led by the younger generation. Principal leaders include Ammar Ali Jan and Farooq Tariq.

The movement is headquartered in Lahore but maintains district chapters across the country, with Punjab the stronghold of the

movement. It has protested the curbs against the Pakistani media and journalists that began in 2018, and has frequently demonstrated its commitment with the cause of political freedom, and has also faced crackdowns in response.

Its political wing also shot to fame when its leaders supported the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, which is an ethnic Pashtun group that was founded in Dera Ismail Khan before moving to the FATA.

The movement is not limited to political activism and provides a platform and support to a range of other political parties and social movements on cross-cutting social and political challenges.

Bolo Bhi (Have Your Say)

BBolo Bhi is a civil society movement working on advocacy, policy and research in the areas of digital rights and civic responsibility, particularly towards women.

Part online and part socially mobilised, the organisation focuses on the challenges to the rights to information, free speech and online privacy so that the internet stays a free and representative space for civic and political engagement for all segments of society, including marginalised communities and genders.

The organisation works to create an informed citizenry with the knowledge, skills and tools for constructive civic engagement to ensure effective government, transparency and accountability.

Its management comprises mostly women. It has worked on a range of socially responsible programmes on internet freedom and government transparency. As a digital campaigning movement, Bolo Bhi has orchestrated an impressive struggle against attempts to censor the internet in Pakistan.

The organisation has also published research papers, run numerous innovative digital security training programmes and fought discrimination against marginalised groups online and elsewhere.

Labour Education Foundation

The Labour Education Foundation started as an informal social movement in 1991 and registered in 1993 as an NGO. It is an initiative of renowned trade union leaders and human rights and women rights activists who wanted to organise, strengthen capacity and advocate for workers' rights. The organisation collaborates with community-based social movements working on labour issues, relevant government departments, and national and international development organisations.

The organisation provides informed input to Pakistani trade unions and CSOs for promoting workers' rights. It is headquartered in Lahore but conducts activities throughout Pakistan.

The Labour Education Foundation devotes considerable resources to support and enable formal and informal sector workers to organise themselves, develop their knowledge, claim their rights and thus transform unequal power relations. It has undertaken many projects to empower women in the informal and formal sectors of the Pakistani economy, particularly in central and southern Punjab.

The Foundation won the Silver Rose Award in 2011 from Solidar, a European network of 52 NGOs active in more than 90 countries to advance social justice. The organisation is also an active member of the national and regional labour alliances that prioritise championing labour issues in the informal sector.

Janoobi Punjab Kisan Forum (South Punjab Farmers' Forum)

Janoobi Punjab Kisan Forum is a small social movement based in Lodhran and Layyah districts in South Punjab. It was founded in 2004 to improve water management for small landowners. The movement has aided small community-based social initiatives in both districts and continues to work with relevant public departments and community-based or local civil society and NGOs.

The movement collaborates with several national NGO and facilitates the implementation of projects related to the issues of small farmers, women farmers, land rights and water rights. The organisation, via its network with national NGOs, also provides legal assistance to vulnerable farming communities.

This social movement is mostly limited to the two districts and operates under an informal structure. The relations of the movement with local media are commendable, and the district press clubs of Lodhran and Layyah provide necessary public awareness assistance whenever required. It is not very active on social media and mostly operates on an issue-to-issue basis. The movement is unregistered and prefers to work informally.

Mazdoor Kisan Tehreek (Labourers and Farmers' Movement)

The Mazdoor Kisan Tehreek, or the Labourers and Farmers' Movement, is a small offshoot of the Labour Qaumi Movement and works in Jhang District. It was formed in 2014 when the local leadership of the Labour Qaumi Movement disagreed with the larger movement based in Faisalabad. An experienced leadership runs this small movement and works on labour issues, mostly in the sugar industrial units.

The Tehreek has also worked on the challenges confronting small farmers, though it largely caters to industrialised labour. Despite differences with the Labour Qaumi Movement, the two organisations often collaborate.

The leadership of the Tehreek has faced action from local police many times, especially when protesting the exploitation of daily wage labourers in the industrial units. The movement's leaders claim that the owners and management of the sugar mills and other large industrial units are connected with the local administration, so law-enforcement opts to suppress those who try to raise their voice for labour and farmers' rights.

6. Understanding social movements: Evolution and operations

Pakistan has remained fertile ground for social movements, despite its global image. This was particularly so during the 1960s. Seeing Pakistan as being under the direct or indirect rule of a powerful establishment is a choice of the “information consumer because the truth is that Pakistani society has waged an undying struggle for democratic normalcy under the Constitution and never once have the social movements refrained from becoming a part of this political objective,” explained Taj Marri, a veteran political rights activist and Sindh nationalist.²⁰ “Without the ‘injection’ of the social movements or the people trained by these movements into larger political activism, Pakistan’s democratic structures could have been far more damaged than they appear now.”

According to Imad Chandio, a veteran social and political activist in Hyderabad,²¹ it was the social movements and their social activists who waged herculean struggles for the democratic transition and dispensations in the 1960s, late 1970s, 1980s and the first decade of the twenty-first century when Pakistan entered the new millennia under the yoke of “enlightened moderation”—a term coined by General Pervez Musharraf, who toppled the civilian government in 1999.

This section reflects on a few aspects of social movements in Pakistan to better illuminate their work.

6.1 Evolution

It was Samina Ahmed,²² one of the many people affected by the Gujjar Nala displacement in Karachi, who organised women from

20. Taj Marri, local activist and leader of National Party, interview, Hyderabad, 10 May 2022.

21. Imadad Chandio, veteran social and political activist, interview, Hyderabad, 10 May 2022.

22. Samina Ahmed, interview, Karachi, 15 May 2022.

her community to demonstrate against government actions without assigning prior or due notice. She was among the first to rally for the cause of the poor masses in the area. She went door to door to mobilise communities, particularly women, and she also used the power of social media to build alliances with the Karachi Bachao Tehreek (Movement to Save Karachi). She helped make headlines that the traditional media also picked up. But not all social movements begin because of individuals who feel maligned.

Many other factors have spurred social movements in Pakistan. For example, an increase in economic activities pushing the boundaries of modernity creates a natural reason for the emergence of social movements that speak out in the name of environmental issues and the destruction of local ecosystems. The case of the largest private housing scheme in Karachi, built by Pakistan's biggest real estate developer and displacing hundreds of indigenous communities, is only one instance.

The study found that social movements have emerged from local challenges of a varied nature, such as the lack, unavailability or inferior quality of civil services; the breakdown of governance structures that perpetrate poverty; the deterioration of communities; the destruction of natural economic resources; disappearances; religious violence; discrimination and inequality; and lack of education and opportunities to develop.

A social movement can be triggered by individuals such as Samina Ahmed or by a political party. In the case of the latter, it could have deeper, albeit political, interests. Sometimes, a social movement initiated by an individual or a group of common people can later be owned and supported, or even hijacked, by a political party.

For example, the Awami Workers Party joined hands with SIRA and campaigned hard to protect the rights of local indigenous communities against trespassing and the unequal development of real estate in Karachi.

This "development" destroyed the local ecosystem and trampled the livelihoods of the communities, on which they had relied for centuries. It was through collaboration with the Awami Workers Party that this movement gained strength, shot to the headlines across traditional media and trended on social media. SIRA's collaboration with the

Awami Workers Party also enabled community leaders to connect with and talk to powerholders in government.

But this can be a slippery slope, as seen in the example of social movements that lost their popularity, legitimacy and objectivity after they allied with a political party. For example, when a real estate developer started taking over land in the suburbs of Karachi, the community came together under the auspices of SIRA and started peaceful protests and engagement with the provincial government. An elderly community leader used his personal and political connections in an effort to extract favour from the provincial government, but it backfired because a large number of the directly affected communities started questioning the “double game” that SIRA seemed (to them) to be playing. The effort by the community leader and SIRA was based on good faith, but it proved counterproductive because the victims of land grabbing started believing that SIRA was conniving with the real estate developer, which had the tacit support of the provincial government.

Then there are “spur-of-the-moment movements”,²³ which may achieve part of their objectives and thus serve their communities, but remain mostly disconnected from surrounding communities, political parties and other social movements, which may have been addressing their own community challenges. It is challenging for such movements to sustain themselves over a longer period of time, connect with larger stakeholders, or continue working once the issue that they took up as a cause is resolved.

“This has been the typical process in which people come together, address a cause, try to achieve it, may or may not achieve their objective and then disperse in nearly the same way they would have come together. Not every movement flourishes to become formal, gain strength and continue serving the communities, the people and, eventually, democracy,” explained Farooq Tariq.²⁴ “The phenomenon of an organised and sustainable social movement, at least in our country, is still nascent and will take a long time in taking root.”

23. Farooq Tariq, President, Haqooq-e-Khalq Party, group discussion, Lahore, 17 April 2022.

24. Farooq Tariq, President, Haqooq-e-Khalq Party, group discussion, Lahore, 22 April 2022.

Political movements in Pakistan have been few, despite their impact and coverage by the media felt “even in people’s personal lives”, according to Absar Alam, former Chairman of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority.²⁵ This is not the case with social movements. While a political movement may take years to get started and to draw to a close, “social movements are a constant in a society where communities are rallying for their objectives ‘all year round,’ but they do not get the attention they deserve,” added social scientist Jamshed Iqbal.²⁶

This is mostly because they are addressing local issues that may seem distant to other communities. But this does not reduce the importance of the social movements addressing the social, political, economic or environmental challenges that communities are facing. These movements influence people, society and, at times, the government structures in profound ways.

6.2 Nature of issues

According to our study in Sindh and Punjab provinces, the operation of social movements in Pakistan can be broadly grouped into five social and thematic areas: social reformation (e.g. the Women’s Action Forum and other women’s groups); freedom and social justice (e.g. the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement and Anjuman Mazarin Punjab); socioeconomic development (e.g. Hari Tehreek, Nari Tehreek and Jagratta); religious assertiveness (e.g. Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan); and the provision of welfare and social safety nets (e.g. the Labour Qaumi Movement).

Organisations in these broadly categorised segments for social movements operate at different scales, from small communities to districts, provinces and national level. They cover a broad range of issues influenced by the factors discussed earlier, such as a lack of governance, challenges in service provision, and challenges they face from the local authorities, and conservative social actors. These issues might include localised community issues such as sanitation, or more serious issues, including women’s rights and violence against minorities.

25. Absar Alam, former PEMRA Chairman, interview, Place, 15 May 2022.

26. Jamshed Iqbal, social scientist, writer and commentator, interview, 17 May 2022.

The nature of issues depends on the flow of socioeconomic currents and how these affect local communities. For example, although SIRA stood up to a mammoth real estate developer in Karachi, the developer did not encounter much trouble elsewhere in Punjab. Communities in other cities did not resist because they mostly saw themselves benefiting from the development of housing colonies and it was seen as good for business. It is natural that communities living in different geographical locations react differently towards various issues of a similar nature. Thus, their voices may be heard in one province but not in another.

For instance, there was hardly any resistance to preserve the way of life in Punjab by the communities when the Punjab provincial government announced the Ravi Riverfront real estate development project. There were voices of concern from environmental activists in Lahore, but the local communities could not organise themselves despite the fact that SIRA had taken a stance in response to a similar situation in Sindh province when farming communities were asked to vacate land, with compensation. The same process was observed when farming communities were asked to leave their lands to construct the Kartarpura Corridor in Punjab so that Sikh pilgrims from India could temporarily visit a site sacred to them.

6.3 Inter-movement collaboration: Sharing platforms, sharing identity

The study found that there has been limited cooperation and collaboration among social movements, even in the same city and province. There were hardly any examples of social movements collaborating across districts or provinces for a common cause, other than the Women's Action Forum and Jagratta in Sindh and the Labour Qaumi Movement in Punjab.

However, SIRA and the Karachi Bachao Tehreek worked together to lobby the provincial and federal governments and provincial policymakers when they stood up to the large real estate developer to keep it from taking over the lands of indigenous communities.

“It will be in the interest of the social movements to come together even if their areas of work do not overlap,”²⁷ Irfan Mufti pointed out. “The fundamental challenge is the sustainability of the movements, and as most of them are informally organised, they do not realise that collaborating with each other could also help them in achieving some form of, if not long-term, but certainly medium-term sustainability.”

The study found that collaboration among these movements is possible because various kinds of social, political and development challenges keep emerging in the vacuum that exists between the State and its governance practices: displacement of indigenous peoples, environmental disasters due to increased economic activities, lack of local economic opportunities, religious and ethnic tensions and, at times, violence. Whether or not their core areas of interest match, the convergence of social movements based on one common interest, such as the betterment of communities, is enough reason for collaboration.

With nearly all social movements that we looked at appearing fluid and operating mostly with volunteers, their members could work simultaneously from multiple platforms. For example, SIRA volunteers are also part of the Karachi Bachao Tehreek, as both have common interests against deforestation, illegal construction on natural water channels and the lack of an indigenous agricultural support system. Many volunteers continue to support both organisations whenever help is needed.

Interestingly, members or volunteers also develop in the course of their professional careers connectivity with other bigger organisations, which hones their skills and creates pathways for future professional prospects. Zahid Farooq, who works at the Urban Resource Center, is one example. He has served his community in an informal position and continued on the path of social movements, which gave him valuable experience that assisted him when entering the non-governmental sector. He now serves at an NGO that frequently collaborates with other social movements and CSOs.

27. Irfan Mufti, Deputy Executive Director, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, interview, Islamabad, 3 June 2022.

6.4 Sustainability of social movements

The study found that the fundamental source of sustainability of any social movement in Sindh and Punjab provinces is the resilience and commitment to the cause of the volunteers. These qualities assisted them in connecting with bigger local or international organisations and funding sources, which helped ensure the sustainability of the movements. When such networking takes place, it helps the personal and professional growth of these individuals as well as that of the movements.

For example, the PFF struggled initially, but enhanced its capacity by working with local and international donors to become a bigger, stronger and more visible organisation. Continuity with the primary cause has assisted various organisations and individuals to collaborate with local and international donors, local and international NGOs, and at times with national political parties as well.

It is a reality that collaboration with local and international donors to work on social challenges has also landed these movements and their leaders in trouble with government authorities. At the same time, this collaboration with political parties has also assisted them in dealing with local authorities and the law. The way officials view social movements, nevertheless, has been a negative process deterring a vast range of social activists and organisations from pursuing their cause, which in turn has affected the local communities who continue living in challenging conditions and facing excesses from the government machinery and non-state actors such as housing authorities and private real estate developers.

No matter the level of commitment of local communities and the leaders of the social movements, they need to collaborate strategically to survive and grow. At the local level, there is a strong perception that if a social movement is to sustain itself and grow in geographical or thematic scope, then it must associate with a local political group. But the evidence on this is too small to make a conclusive argument, at least in the urban centres of Sindh and Punjab. However, the study found incidents in which local political leaders saw the social movements as competitors and actively sabotaged them.

For example, a small but vocal group of farmers in Lodhran District formed the Kisan Bachao Tehreek (Movement to Save Farmers), whose local importance and place was discreetly minimized by a national political leader who saw the group's potential to affect his career in local politics. He used his network of local political leaders, and burdened the movement with regulatory matters that extensively curtailed its operations and influence. The leaders of the movement later had to join forces with the national-level political leader. Despite such incidents, local level social movements continue to serve as a kind of nursery for the development of present-day and future social movement leadership in Sindh and Punjab provinces.

International NGOs, too, have a significant role in the sustainability of social movements. Their contribution takes at least two forms: funding and advice and capacity building. But there is also strong criticism of the "NGOisation" of organic social movements, which has led to stigma attaching to them in Pakistani society, particularly in conservative areas. This has also made some social movements dependent on foreign or local assistance. And yet, such collaboration has also helped to create, prepare and train some of the leadership of social movements and NGOs. Therefore, collaboration with international organisations cannot be ignored.

The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers is a case in point. This international organisation advised various platforms, such as PFF, working for fishing communities to form a single organisation instead of having many organisations working separately on the same issue. Once the various fishing communities came together and worked jointly, it added to the legitimacy of their work as well as the organisation. This legitimacy and credibility also enabled the organisation to work in other thematic and geographical areas.

The Joint Action Committee is another successful example of the sustainability of a social movement and progressive development into a credible NGO working on a broad range of social challenges, mostly facing Karachi. The organisation sought collaboration with other organisations and in return provided cooperation and a platform for common causes. Even though nearly all localised social movements are inclined to look inwards for running their community-focused operations, some choose to collaborate outwards, which requires them to operate as a network organisation. Those movements that

choose otherwise find it hard to grow, prosper and attain sustainability overall.

Sustainability also comes from the expansion of the social movement. But this, too, is largely, if not totally, dependent on local or international collaboration.

The movements that saw opportunity and connected with bigger local organisations or donors have sustained themselves and continue to operate more formally. As a local movement or an NGO, these groups must stay relevant from a local perspective and their leaders must respond to local challenges. Therefore, if a social movement changes its role from that of a movement to that of an NGO, it should be appreciated in the local context.

6.5 Social movements and media

Any social movement that originates from social media platforms involving human communication generates a new collective memory for local and global audiences. Social movements do not typically occur as an overnight phenomenon. Most of the time, they are organic evolutions that start from an individual who champions the cause of a community and then the community joins to make an impact. This process has been facilitated by the emergence of social media as well as the increased sensitisation of traditional media, at least where it has exhibited maturity in terms of accepting and appreciating the role of social movements. Some sections of traditional media, however, still see these movements as internationally sponsored conspiracies.

Many countries have witnessed the speedy emergence of collective political actions and new social movements due to advances in communication technology. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have been exceptionally helpful. Pakistan's Lawyers' Movement of 2007 was a starting point for the new era of social movements that use online and social media tools and platforms to augment their messaging and multiply their reach.

The Karachi Bachao Tehreek and Bolo Bhi movements remain at the forefront in their efforts to build their narrative on platforms that include social media. Social media might have its drawbacks, but it has also empowered the youth in Sindh and Punjab to raise their voices

collectively against issues ranging from land grabbing to unequal pay for women to sexual and social harassment of women.

Nearly every journalist met through this study in Sindh and Punjab maintains at least one social media account (mostly Facebook), while an increasing number of media professionals are taking to Twitter as well. National and international organisations also have a vital role in providing narrative-building and social media training to journalists. The explosion of social media has increased the access of its users, locally and internationally. Youth-led social movements are conscious of this fact and continue to use several social media platforms to garner support from all segments of society.

The movements included in this study may represent different communities and issues or are limited to different, disconnected geographical regions but they share several similarities: one, they gained strength from the inclusion of local communities. Two, connectivity with like-minded civil society, non-governmental and political organisations further strengthened their impact, even though in some areas, the political leadership also viewed them as enemies or competitors. Three, the majority among them lack formal structures but they choose to campaign for a cause to deliver on their objectives. The evolution, nevertheless, continues.

It is not possible for a movement to remain entirely dependent on social media. At some point, it must interact with grassroots communities and organisations, as not every community or organisation can be as effective on social media as it can be on the ground. The Karachi Bachao Tehreek, for example, started as a social media movement but eventually connected with many other campaigns and began offering its social media connectivity and expertise to magnify the operations of the other organisations.

Social media has emerged as a potent tool for campaigning and connecting with other movements. Interestingly, it is not possible for either a social media-orientated movement or a public movement with more of a physical presence to not be on social media. Both are now intertwined.

7. Top 10 challenges faced by social movements in Pakistan

Based on the interviews with the leaders and activists of social movements in Sindh and Punjab, the study identified 10 major challenges, which this section elaborates on. From these discussions, the study team got the sense that despite a strong tradition of social movements, particularly in Sindh province, the culture of forming social collectives has not grown as it should have. There are many reasons for this, a few of which have been explained previously but are further elaborated on here.

Another observation is that most members and leaders of these social movements are older than 35—the participation of youth is low.

Based on the observations from these two provinces, the culture of social movements appears to be weakening, for reasons cited further on. The incremental disappearance of social movements does not necessarily mean that communities are facing fewer challenges. They are not. The weakening of the social movement sphere mostly relates to the challenge of sustainability and the official mistrust about the social dissent these movements generate.

Official circles have generally remained ignorant about the governance failures that trigger these local social movements. They have instead focused on maintaining an administrative order that may or may not resolve the very challenges that contributed toward starting a particular social movement. This has traditionally involved limiting dissent without proper recourse to justice which usually is not available to the leaders and members of social movements because of their meagre resources. The general state of dispensing justice has also deterred members of social movements and their leaders, which has enabled local officials to deal with the minutest dissents through administrative measures, and this practice is common at the community and grassroots levels. While this might have assisted the administrative officials, it certainly has not helped an already-weak local democracy and society.

As a result, land grabbing and forced evictions continue in Sindh, and peaceful protestors in Punjab face the force instead of being invited for a dialogue to resolve outstanding matters. Leaders and members of social movements are kept busy in dealing with the script of the law, while communities continue to suffer a diminished quality of life.

7.1 Trust deficit

There is a general deficit of trust between society and the social movements. This deficit travels in all directions and, in some cases, within the movements themselves: vertically and horizontally.

In terms of the vertical trust deficit, the desire for power and control appeared strong in the leadership of some of the organisations that our study looked at. Those at the top are typically the people who started these movements. Ownership of the movement appears to have become ownership of the cause.

This makes ever-sceptical society perceive social movements and their leadership as political players who are more concerned with their own political interests. This impression also works horizontally within society, where it discredits the movements. Thus even those members of the communities that the movements claim to be working on behalf of only provide verbal commitment to their own causes.

Often, leaders start to become more powerful and can no longer be challenged by other members in the movement. This does not benefit social movements or their own long-term leadership prospects. It also contributes towards the low level of convergence of interests among social movements.

7.2 Capacity issues

The study found that the number of social issues to be addressed demands active voices over a long period. This needs to be done on a sustainable basis because the presence of voice and activism increases the chances of resolving the outstanding issues of communities. Nevertheless, many social movements lack this capacity at various levels, including leadership.

At the leadership level, many people do not have a systematic understanding of how to raise a social movement beyond a certain level. This may at times involve the dynamics of power and control.

At the level of the membership, it was found that there were fewer sympathisers and social mobilisers than needed, and that advocacy and learning skills were at a lower level than what they should optimally be in a social movement.

There is also a lack of internal communication, which is rooted in the “psychology of the size of the social movement, in which most of the members think that communication is not that important, whereas it is the other way around,” labour leader Waqar Randhawa pointed out.²⁸

All types of capacity deficits are directly associated with the lack of institutional development, which provides essential support for any social movement.

7.3 Poor leadership

Many veterans of social movements acknowledge that it has been a constant challenge to improve on leadership and create alternative second or third tiers of leadership. There is no forum for consistent interaction among the leaders, members and volunteers of social movements in Sindh and Punjab, therefore they operate in silos.

The leaders generally feel insecure when they try to work collectively, and it is because of this lack of or deficient level of desired leadership in the social movements that they fail to consolidate their cooperation. Without an optimal level of consolidation, many social movements in Sindh and Punjab have been hamstrung in trying to achieve their objectives and make desired changes.

7.4 Poor connection between social movements and political parties

The study found a lack of connection between social movements and political parties in Sindh and Punjab. There was little evidence of mutual

28. Waqar Randhawa, labour leader, interview, Faisalabad June 11, 2022.

collaboration between the two, and this was mostly because the local political leadership either tried to overpower rather than cooperate with the social movements or saw them as social competitors. At times, the social movements had to cede ground to political pressures, though in other cases they did not; but in both situations, a fluid and productive relationship between the two sides was missing.

Moreover, the political parties, particularly the mainstream national parties, appeared to have no interest in the causes and objectives of the social movements. For instance, none of the political leaders in Pakistan was reported in the media as expressing interest in the issues of the labourers of the country, a population of more than 100 million. “Political parties once had active labour wings whose leadership was also from the labour class,” explained Baba Rafiq Ansari, a labour leader based in Faisalabad. “But now, even in these labour wings, the local leaders place their cronies and, therefore, the issues of the labourer are hardly talked about or addressed.” He said that in many situations, political parties viewed the social movements as “political enemies who could sway political support against them”.²⁹

This disconnect has also prevented the social movements from becoming a part of national, provincial or even district-level political and social debates. There are no formal mechanisms or avenues of cooperation between the two. But in this mismatched equation, social movements are the principal losers.

But where a political movement slows down, or even dies, after having achieved its objective, social movements continue in Pakistan because democratic consolidation is still far from being an objective. Even if the objective of a responsible democratic State in Pakistan is achieved, social movements will continue, because otherwise, “The responsible State becomes an irresponsible one again”,³⁰ according to Musaddiq Hussain.

29. Baba Rafiq Ansari, labour leader, interview, Faisalabad, 5 June 2022.

30. Musaddiq Hussain, senior academician and social scientist, interview, Faisalabad, 5 June 2022.

7.5 Economics, economics and economics

The social movements studied are led by or run with the assistance of people from the lower-income stratum, and this particular class constantly struggles economically. Increased inflation and the efforts people have to make to maintain their households has further reduced the time and resources that they can spare to organise themselves to address community challenges. The immense pressure of inflation in the corporatised economy of Pakistan, explained SIRA leader Hafeez Baloch, leaves hardly any room for people of the low-income stratum to secure the economic future of their organisation.³¹

A constant concern among the social movements and their leaders relates to the lack of financial assistance from their supporters and like-minded local and international organisations. This uncertainty also raises the question of the sustainability of social movements, the professional viability of the workers and volunteers in social movements, and sustaining a professional structure in these movements.

7.6 Lack of research

Interactions with the social movements and leaders in Sindh and Punjab revealed that they have not been studied as a discipline within the social sciences and, therefore, little or no information could be found about them. There is no anthology or living document that details these social movements; those who want to study them have no reference to learn more about them.³²

Social movements in Pakistan are mostly introverted in their focus and do not expand on their knowledge about the issues that they are working on. The absence of formal structures and the constant struggle for survival bars them from becoming efficient in generating and documenting valuable knowledge. The leaders, in person, provide relevant briefs, but this cannot be substantiated with documentation. This lack of formal research prevents further connectivity with other like-minded organisations, where an exchange of information and knowledge could create personal as well as professional bonds.

31. Hafeez Baloch, SIRA leader, group discussion, Karachi, 15 May 2022.

32. Farooq Tariq, President, Haqooq-e-Khalq Party, group discussion, Lahore, 22 April 2022.

7.7 Dilemma of donor-dependent social movements

The leaders of the social movements studied suggested that donor support enables sustainability of operations and helps create formal structures, but presents two different challenges. First, given various kinds of deliberately-misdirected narratives it is exposed to, society is often sceptical about the objectives of social movements, so they lack relevance to wider society. Donor or international NGO support is also often seen as a tool for local social movements to pursue the donor's agenda rather than that of the people.

Secondly, donors or international NGOs tend not to be focused on specific issues over a long period. They focus on creating and running projects that are based on their annual programme statements, which are mostly formulated in their offices and are not connected to or based on ground-level information.

As much as donor support is found to be critical for the sustainability of social movements and their operations, the ad hoc nature of their approach and the perception that has developed around them has proven to be extremely disadvantageous for social movements locally.

7.8 Fear of officialdom

Officialdom in Pakistan does not view social movements, civil society or NGOs as partners in development addressing the crippling challenges that communities face. Organisations that work on humanitarian issues or structural development challenges are usually supported by government officials and other authorities. But those working on social development challenges, rights-based campaigns or behavioural communication are seen as adversaries.

Those operating in the latter realm frequently face challenges, where activists face various clauses of the law they have no information about. There have also been many incidents of violence by obscurantist elements who are heavily influenced by various religious and political narratives which have sustained throughout the nation's history, in which social movements, civil society and NGOs are usually portrayed as adversaries.

The activists and volunteers of social movements operate in an environment of constant fear, and this limits their ability to conceptualise the areas they could influence if there were freedom to think and operate otherwise. There are hardly any forums to raise a collective voice for Pakistan's social movements and its leaders when they are faced with various administrative challenges. The prevailing official sense is such that these movement, and their leaders, are viewed as rivals. Those who come at the social movements with such approaches are not held accountable in most cases.

The leaders, workers and volunteers who are intimidated do not receive systematic or consistent support either from civil society leaders and organisations, lawyers' bodies or relevant public sector organisations.

7.9 Inter-social movement conflicts

Contradictions, ambiguities and potential conflicts exist between and within these social movements and, in most cases, the personal conflicts of the leaders become social and professional conflicts that seriously challenge the prospects of cooperation and collaboration. The study found that the social movements (generally) view each other in a competitive rather than collaborative spirit. This is basically due to the absence of a strategic framework, for which leaders need training.

At times, organisations working on the same issue but with differing perspectives confront each other. For example, there is tension between secular feminists and those who seek women's rights in Pakistan from a religious perspective.

Other tensions and ambiguities revolve around professional and NGO identities, along with political approaches towards community issues. The social movements also feel polarised because of donor agendas, especially as they compete for the ever-shrinking development pie while adjusting to the changing thematic directions of donors. Moreover, there are tensions across the divides of class, generation and location, such as rural or urban.

Despite these challenges, there is a needs-based thirst among communities across Sindh and Punjab, particularly among the youth in the social movements. If the communities and youth are better

sensitised, informed and thematically engaged via research, advocacy and social media, they could be engaged more meaningfully.

7.10 Media aversion

The study found that most of the social movement leaders realise the importance of media engagement, but they do not frequently connect with or use the power of media to disseminate their work and objectives or to pressure stakeholders in a democratic manner.

Although social media is free to use, only the Karachi Bachao Tehreek and the PFF movements use the platforms expertly. Most of the social movements are not aware of the importance of using online media platforms consistently.

Nearly all the social movement leaders who participated in the study seem to understand the importance of building alliances, but they find it hard to work with media in a sustainable way.

8. Interplay of the State, capitalism, modernity, religion, civil society and social movements

By nature, social movements continue to be a major force in the world because they perform a leading role in shaping the modern democratic norms and ethos. Social movements, of course, change because they survive in extremely fluid political, social and economic environments. It is important to go beyond the conventional dimension of sociology within social movements to include the conventions of political science and development studies.

In most cases, and unlike political parties, social movements do not compromise to achieve their objectives. This is even truer for the movements that pursue political and economic objectives, such as the farmers' movement in India in 2021.

The idea and the ideals of social movements have survived around the globe, and the coming together of communities continues. Pakistan is no different.

Although Pakistan is a highly politicised society, and most people associate their individual and community aspirations with political parties, social movements nevertheless stay relevant, as the study found in Sindh and Punjab provinces. These social movements have kept people mobilised and local society vibrant. They have raised issues and challenges that the political parties not talked about.

The study indicates that a range of local and community issues can trigger a social movement, including increased economic activities that promised development but were poorly managed and excluded local communities. Some communities in Sindh and Punjab also suffer from poor governance, violations rights and marginalisation of indigenous communities, politically or economically.

Social movements in Pakistan reflect continuous patterns of change, which calls for a deeper understanding of the forces that have

shaped or are shaping Pakistani society. There are many players who determine and shape present and potential social movements. Some are enabling forces, while others hinder these movements. In a theoretical explanation of the social movements in Pakistan, the roles of the State, capitalism, modernity, religion and civil society are of paramount importance and are briefly analysed here.

8.1 The State, capitalism and modernity

Social movements have had both success and failure as far as the history of their interactions with the State is concerned. However, the study found that in Sindh and Punjab avoidance, ignorance, rejection and coercion at times define the response of the authorities. The leaders of the social movements that the study looked at expressed their desire to work with the government machinery and authorities, and demanded understanding, facilitation and dialogue for the collective good of the communities. “We are not the enemies of our people, district, province or the country,” explained Baba Rafiq Ansari, a labour leader in Faisalabad. “We want what the citizens of any modern political democracy must get via governance and development. But when we point towards the lack of governance, development or services, the local authorities start viewing us as their adversaries, while at that point in time, we are only talking about the rights of the people.”³³

The history of Pakistan is characterized by powerful circles which have chosen to safeguard their own interests and those of their supporters and, consequentially, beneficiaries. The general sentiment of the social leaders is that this has not favoured the citizens and has instead popularized regional and social narratives which have kept the citizenry engaged in a meaningless direction.

Pakistan’s social movements, some of which later evolved to become NGOs or provided working cadres for them, relate to the local communities and have pointed out the dichotomies between the official narratives and the need for governance and development for the communities. This has landed them in trouble.

33. Baba Rafiq Ansari, labour leader, interview, Faisalabad, 6 June 2022.

One example is that of the construction of a new city in Karachi, where SIRA raised alarm bells. Not only did the local authorities not pay attention to the concerns of the indigenous peoples, but they also facilitated the huge real estate development group involved in dislocating village after village to “occupy the land of our people who have been living there for centuries”, said Hafeez Baloch, leader of SIRA.³⁴

Likewise, cases of interference in government action were registered against members of the Gujjar Nala and Orangi Nala communities when they resisted forced displacement from their homes without eviction notices or the assigning of an inappropriate amount of time prior to the demolition of their homes.

“Officials came one evening with the machinery,” Zahid Farooq, the Urban Resource Centre leader, explained. “They had the support of the police and started demolishing the structures, which they think were illegally constructed. We tried to reason with them and tried to invoke the courts, but it was late in the evening and the demolishing continued through [till the] morning, when we were able to obtain a stay order from the court. But until then, a lot of damage had been done, and there is no compensation thus far.”³⁵

In June of 2022, the Sindh High Court ruled in favour of the government organisations and declared that the buildings, including homes and businesses around the Gujjar Nala and Orangi Nala, were illegally constructed. The High Court also revoked the stay order that a district court had earlier granted. “All of this happened without any communication, discussion, planning or understanding between the communities [and the] social movements representing them, and all we had wanted was a plan to secure the interests of the public,” said Zahid Farooq.³⁶

The decision enabled the relocation of more than 100,000 people, including 21,000 children, from their homes, rendering them homeless. The court’s decision was quoted by some of the interviewed leaders of social movements as one of many examples in which officials are not

34. Hafeez Baloch, SIRA leader, interview, Karachi, 15 April 2022.

35. Zahid Farooq, Urban Resource Center founder, interview, Karachi, 15 April 2022.

36. Ibid.

only disassociated from the public interest, but act against their own people, and people's interests.

Local social movements filed review petitions at the High Court and mobilised local community members. "There were over 50 signatures on the review petition, but despite our hardest efforts, none among them came to the Court and pleaded the case. We lost the review petition and later learned that those who had signed the petition were allegedly approached and asked to refrain from litigation. They gave in and gave up," said Zahid Farooq.³⁷

This was not the first time that the administrative system had chosen to stand alongside local capitalists (see earlier discussion of the construction of a new town in Karachi).

8.2 The State, elite control and religiosity

Some departments of the government also choose to suppress political or rights-based movements with a view to obtain a general social alignment with the predetermined interests in some areas. In general, these sections of the government view these as irritants within the country's social, political and security-related paradigms. Such approaches and systems could fail to protect the rights of citizens causing the powerless majority feel disenfranchised when it comes to the power and control of the powerful minorities.

Therefore, like other societies struggling for democracy, some elites appear to have become the inherent constituent beneficiaries of mainstream development. Some local elites have consciously manipulated the development and governance spectrum and have succeeded in interpreting their manufactured interests as the public interest and, via the state structures, continue to misconstrue public consent for their control over the country's resources.

An alternative perspective on the nature of the government machinery relates to the social, political and security-linked economic changes that have transpired in the post-9/11 context. The ever-changing security and political environment of the region has manifested in the greater securitisation of the country and the everyday life has faced

37. Ibid.

the brunt. The past two decades have been rife with news items talking about drone strikes, security check-posts, raids, etc. These have collectively led to weakening of the traditional and customary political structures through which local communities might have had some say. This has negatively impacted the devolution of governance and by giving administrative and development powers to local governments. As a consequence, local economies have only slowly developed which caused massive voluntary displacements and internal migrations to the urban regions of Punjab and Sindh (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2022).

As a result, a new generation of social movements has drawn on the collective memory of war and its corrosive effects since 9/11. In some places, the authorities are more willing to submit to religion-backed political and social power "As part of a political society, we do not have any trouble with any kind of movement that aims at creating its own influence in society. It is their democratic right. But the trouble arises when religiously motivated movements start to use violence to curtail those very spaces for which we would have had a principled stance. In this regard, Al-Huda, a religious movement focusing mostly on women, was not different. It wanted its space and demanded it. But it also wanted the space of the differing movements curtailed, or completely eroded," explained Mahnaz Rehman, a social leader based in Karachi.³⁸

Nevertheless, a parallel non-violent activism of social movements also emerged, which enabled them to come together for a collective view of the resultant pressures which they continue to face. Voices that highlight the role of the government structures the way it deals with the social activism or social movements are weak. Yet they are coming together to highlight the grievances of communities and are now building working alliances for common causes. Combined, this new-born phenomenon has the potential to jointly advocate on the issues that have a huge number of communities across Sindh, Punjab and the rest of Pakistan.

38. Mahnaz Rehman, veteran social leader representing Women's Action Forum, interview, Karachi, 13 May 2022.

8.3 Civil society

Pakistani civil society has remained vibrant and has initiated and supported social movements across the country. Civil society today comprises a range of organisations, associations, individuals and movements.

The role of CSOs in the country has increased over the past three decades. According to the Asian Development Bank (2009), there are an estimated 45,000 active non-profit organisations in Pakistan. The sector engages in a diverse set of activities, providing rights-based education, trainings and sports activities; running neighbourhood vocational centres; providing platforms to bring together people with diverse views; lobbying for civic amenities; and running national human rights advocacy campaigns.

National and international NGOs have also remained important supporters of local social movements but they have faced constant bureaucratic hindrances from administrative procedures which require multiple registrations and no-objection certificates.

9. Recommendations

Social movements, no matter their scope or area of operations, are changing Pakistan. Avenues to interact with the local, provincial and federal officials are increasing as civil society becomes more assertive with the help of traditional and social media.

There is also no denying that social movements, civil society and nongovernment organizations have been complaining of undue pressures. But there is credible evidence that social movements have survived and created for themselves a favourable political context, supportive public opinion and influential allies, for example through the acquisition of land rights by Anjuman Muzareen Punjab for its members.

One argument is that the political environment has allowed these challengers, in an increasingly sympathetic environment towards their demands, to engage in collective actions in recent times. They have thus been able to make appeals before their communities and local society. This is important for any social movement to understand—that it must use a connected approach and seek assistance from other actors, otherwise the vacuum of governance, development and progress is likely to continue to grow along with the miseries of the communities they represent.

Pakistan is undergoing a volatile phase of social movement transformation, which is the outcome of a range of factors, including a governmental structure that is reluctantly changing through social development, a rights regime and conflict resolution. Different currents of social movements exist, and their frameworks have become stronger and increasingly vocal over the past three decades. Considering these developments, the following may be taken as the way forward for the future success of social movements in Pakistan.

9.1 Social movements

Until social movements work together, constructive, pro-people political change is not possible. In most cases, social movements remain aloof from each other in Pakistan. But inter-movement collaboration is vital for any social change. For this, the first thing is to develop trust, and this could start with transparency. Not only does a transparent environment contribute to the development of a resilient social movement, it also contributes to cementing relationships between social movements.

Social movements need to shift from the mentality of focusing on operations to informing civil society about their activities and beginning to organise more formally. They should register with the local authorities, introduce a system of internal governance, create boards and ensure transparency in all organisational and public matters. They should consult relevant legal professionals and connect with larger and more settled social organisations for assistance in creating standard operating procedures, which could lead to their future sustainability and organisational growth.

More than 90 per cent of the social movements studied continue to operate with nearly the same leadership that founded them. Given the local culture, this certainly adds credibility to the organisation and the leaders, and thus their connectivity, impact and relevance increases. But it also deters and discourages second- and third-tier leaders and workers from staying committed to their cause because they stop seeing growth towards leadership opportunities. Social movements ought to introduce mechanisms ensuring internal democracy, according to the local laws, and provide and train for greater leadership opportunities to leaders in waiting.

Social movements must be creative in making themselves economically sustainable. In addition to the traditional sources of economic contribution, including from political parties and international NGOs, they can explore the possibilities of crowdfunding, as the Karachi Bachao Tehreek is doing. This will help social movements pursue their purposes more independently and on a more enduring basis.

The lack of institutions to develop the capacity of social movements has emerged as a key obstacle that confines their potential in many ways. Inter-movement collaboration can also contribute towards

social movements' collective thinking, including the development of a collective platform ensuring their capacity enhancement and favourable social and political advocacy, particularly with state structures.

Social movements also need to be more forceful in connecting with local and international actors to promote their cause, seek support and make an impact. Social media and online activism could be an excellent starting point. Social movements should run social media and advocacy campaigns, and become part of civil society and non-governmental networks to further promote their objectives, create relevance and form support networks.

9.2 Society

Volunteerism may be considered the lifeline of social movements, which need more support in the form of volunteer work than money. They need institutions that can support them with financial and non-financial resources. Society must start viewing social movements as partners for the collective good and the common cause. The initial responsibility lies with social movements to create confidence and generate trust among communities. But society should also come forward and support causes relevant to its communities. This interaction could contribute towards a more aware society and the sustainability of social movements because people can see their benefit.

Social movements are inherently good for society. For instance, working for non-religious purposes, including for labour rights, could contribute to interfaith harmony because people of different faiths and sects can come together to address common challenges, as the Labour Qaumi Movement (Faisalabad, Punjab), SIRA (Karachi, Sindh) and the Karachi Bachao Tehreek (Karachi, Sindh) have demonstrated. It was the credibility of these organisations with local society that motivated people from different religions and sects to join in their efforts for common political and economic rights.

Social movements have a significant role in making democratic societies more just and progressive. Given that democratic structures remain in a state of perpetual flux, these movements are critically needed attributes of Pakistani society as the nation continues its search for constitutional democratic consolidation.

9.3 The State

Pakistan, as a polity, has had a checkered history when it comes to democracy. The study found that none of the social movements in Sindh and Punjab that challenged the State's narratives expressed interest to work with local, district, provincial or federal government authorities. They maintain that they have raised the issues and challenges that directly affect the communities they represent, but that these are the responsibility of state institutions, and institutions and their officials are failing to deliver. The official machinery, on the other hand, sees social movements and those supporting them, whether individuals, communities, civil society or NGOs, as rivals and competitors.

The officialdom has lay down an incredibly effective web of laws, regulations and executive power that starts from the top and goes all the way down to the union council, the smallest demographic unit in Pakistan's democracy. Many social leaders echoed that government officials appear to be overly cautious, and conscious, about the role of social movements and those who support them. But another approach is possible.

The authorities could start viewing social movements and their supporters as collaborators and companions on a path of inclusive local and national growth and development. Thus, the laws that tend to regulate social movements and their supporters with a "colonial mindset to exercise absolute power and control of the government over people who may point out flaws in the governance and development that people deserve," as noted by Irfan Mufti, could be reviewed and altered.³⁹

The federal and provincial governments should make it easier through its laws and legal frameworks for people to register their social movements, CSOs and NGOs. The approach to exercise official controls over people's civil and legal activism should start to diminish.

Government officials, too, from federal to union council level, should be open to a more constructive view of social movements – and not suspect all of them to represent a foreign agenda. Every single leader,

39. Irfan Mufti, Deputy Executive Director, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, interview, Islamabad, 3 June 2022.

worker or volunteer in these social movements is a Pakistani national, and they are people from the local communities where they are rooted.

Government functionaries should learn to treat social movements with respect, as partners in improving the lives of local communities, and social movements should not be targeted based on laws and legal frameworks that predate the nation's freedom.

The fundamental responsibility of improving the official attitude and approach towards social movements lies with the local, regional, provincial and national political parties and their leaders. They must also humanise the administrative attitude when it comes to dealing and working with social movements. The unnecessary rules, laws and checks hamper the quality of human life in every society, but this is much more the case in Pakistan, where people's fundamental constitutional right to form social groups is, by some, seen as an intrusion into the government's operations.

Officials of the provincial social welfare departments should reach out to social movements in their respective tehsils and facilitate them in regulatory matters, with a view to enabling the social movements and their leaders rather than hindering their mandate and performance.

9.4 Development sector

The nature of the relationship between voluntary organisations and communities has radically changed during the past seven decades.

The lack of pluralism and the rise of conflict are serious issues. While focused and professionally managed work is being conducted by local and international NGOs, there is limited interaction between social movements and the non-governmental community.

Their relationship is need-based, and they are mostly seen as working on different dimensions of social change. This has negatively affected their collective potential and the social movements' capacity to respond to new challenges.

The non-governmental community must take decisions in responding to emerging challenges, community priorities and resource constraints and resist the temptation of implementing short-term projects. They should focus on programmes and not projects alone.

External funding and priorities have adversely affected the credibility and relevance of many social movements. While instituting cooperation between the non-governmental community and social movements, donors must learn to adapt according to the requirements of the communities and not the requirements of their annual programme statements.

Rather than supporting local institutional development for self-sustaining activities, the overpowering donor focus on result-based management of their programme statements has damaged and continues to damage the validity of the social movements. Consequently, the perception of social movements has changed significantly.

The development sector could introduce training and capacity development programmes for the leadership and workers of social movements and provide assistance for their long-term sustainability and relevance. Development organisations should develop strict criteria to filter social movements in order to collaborate with them over a longer period with a programmatic approach.

Development organisations, particularly international ones, may continue thinking globally according to their annual programme statements, but while collaborating with local social movements, they must respect and understand the need to act locally. The importance of local relevance for the social movements must be respected.

The development community should also consider creating a sustainable national-level resource centre, a secretariat or a platform for social movements. This could provide legal assistance whenever needed, especially given the frequency of hindrances which social movements continue to face by local authorities.

Local and international development organisations could provide training opportunities to the leaders of social movements on using traditional media, social media and networking, writing grant proposals and building formal organisations.

Development organisations could also spare at least one corporate social responsibility hour every week to promote the cause of social movements in Pakistan. Their collaboration with social movements would facilitate their relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of local society as well as among other local and international development partners.

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