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Girls, education and climate crisis in Pakistan: From 'what-connects' to a sense of 'self' and education after the 2022 floods

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ABSTRACT

Girls' education has been understood as an issue pendulating between the girls as a subject and their socio-economic conditions. Countries such as Pakistan have historically struggled to ensure equal access and quality of education to girls, who have been made even more vulnerable in the wake of recent crises like the 2022 floods. In the absence of adequate state support, the potentialities of community as social support need to be considered. In this paper, we seek to centre girls' experiences of constructing the meaning of their desire for education rooted in the networks of social relations and connections, without losing sight of the structural constraints that were exacerbated after the floods. This paper asks the question: how are girls in Pakistan experiencing intersectional issues of education after the devastating 2023 floods?

This paper, focused on three flood affected villages in Pakistan, explores educational access and exclusion as a collective experience of girls and their communities. A qualitative multi-method design was utilised, including interviews and informal group-discussions with girls, male and female community members as well as experts (in education, health, and politics). The findings follow a temporal sequence, i.e., looking at the legacies of girls' exclusion from educational opportunities pre-dating the floods, the post-flood devastation and then, the experiences and emerging potential of relationality. It is argued that such crises require appropriate support from the state and community levels, whilst also urging a deeper engagement with how girls' aspirations for education contribute to a process of self-enrichment amidst a crisis.

1. Introducing the key issues

Girls' education and gender equity have been a challenge for Pakistan, a context which has been further impacted upon by political and economic precarity. Historically, events, such as the War on Terror and the resultant losses to infrastructure, such as schools, have reduced educational opportunities, particularly for girls. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Index indicated that Pakistan ranks 145 out of 146 countries on gender parity, performing particularly poorly on female literacy and workforce participation (World Economic Forum, 2024). In Pakistan, there is a prevailing reliance on sons as income earners, as well as an inherent association of land ownership

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with male inheritance. Conversely, daughters are viewed as an expense and economic burden in both rural and urban areas (Sathar, 2015). These entrenched norms have contributed to lower levels of higher education for girls and their limited economic participation (Hinduja et. al, 2023). Women are also vulnerable to violence, according to a Women Safety Audit conducted by UN Women in 2020, where over 80% of women were found to experience harassment in public spaces and this was perceived as being normal (UN Women Pakistan, 2023). Amidst this ongoing volatility, Pakistan has faced intense flooding caused by torrential rains. In August of 2022, it declared a state of emergency owing to the world's deadliest flood since the 2020 South Asian floods. The legacies of this destruction were widening inequalities in the country. Rural regions heavily reliant on agriculture were disproportionately affected due to the destruction of crops. As almost 47 percent of the area of Pakistan and almost 70 percent of its exports are agricultural, the scale of destruction to its economy has been devastating. Today, the ongoing pressures on Pakistan's economy have resulted in an inability to provide equitable access to education, health and law enforcement. Alongside this, women in Pakistan have been disproportionately affected by climate crises such as these. For instance, exploratory research has indicated that women in rural Sindh are less equipped to manage disasters due to lower literacy levels and a specific lack of climate-related knowledge. Additionally, cultural barriers further hinder their involvement in crises management, with women believing that their primary role is that of a caregiver (Memon, 2020; 2023; Butt et al. 2020).

Based on being at the battle front for the so-called War on Terror (WoT) and the recent rising intensity in environment disasters and economic crises, it is difficult to ignore the injustice and inequality that young girls are facing in Pakistan. The intersectional nature of these overlapping crises, further compounded by complex socio-economic elements, have made girls a far more vulnerable group than they were before.

The paper is organised by, first, contextualising the landscape of girls' education in Pakistan. Secondly a detailed account of the research sites is laid out. We use the original names of three chosen villages, because the paper aims to document the destruction of the floods, with policy recommendations being proposed at the end. Thirdly, we explain the methodology used geared towards respecting the vulnerability of the post-flood rehabilitation context. Fourthly we discuss the findings temporally. Finally, we provide a discussion section and conclude the paper with policy propositions.

1.1. The socio-cultural context and girls' education in Pakistan

There is a compelling need to theorise the family and community through a diverse perspective that allows for a dynamic understanding of the context. Today, when natural and political disasters befall Pakistan given the reality of it being an economically impoverished state, it is the community that often mobilises to support their own (Jamshed et al., 2018; Akbar, 2018). It is not unfounded, then, to analyse girls' experiences of education as that of collective survival and struggle. We thus seek to deconstruct the girl versus socio-cultural context discourse.

1.2. Theorising the potential in community and family: socio-cultural context and girls' voices

We argue that girls' education in Pakistan needs to be viewed critically from the lens of social relations and connectedness. In a time of economic, political and environmental precarity, the certainty of social relationships provides a sense of familiarity. Negative aspects of community in Pakistan or those of Pakistani origin are well documented (Noureen and Awan, 2011; Qadir et al., 2011; Ul Haq, 2005), but the cultures of connections and their possibilities for rehabilitation are yet to be recognised.

Debatably, the family unit is a space with potential. Literature that looks at the relationships within the family unit describes how interdependencies between its members can make space for possibilities of growth (Khoja-Moolji, 2023). For example, there is evidence to suggest that Pakistani mothers expand educational opportunities for their daughters (Ahmad and Neman, 2013). When possible, mothers become the conduits between social-relationships and their daughters to facilitate and expand educational opportunities for them (Khalid and Rose (2022)). The role of grandparents in rural Pakistan has also been shown to improve grandchildren/granddaughters' experiences of life (Chung et al., 2020; Rahat et al., 2023). With the recognition of possibilities in the sociocultural realm, one can imagine girls as subjects of their own lives.

The voice and agency of girls and young people themselves merits attention. Fauzia Rahman's (2018) work on challenging global discourses on girls' education and agency in Northwest Pakistan is important in this regard. She critiques simplistic social justice logic that puts the onus of responsibility for 'change' on young girls and instead, provides nuanced accounts of their experiences of education in crisis. She argues that it is essential to hear their 'silenced' perspectives in debates about their education (p. 4).

In sum, while collective cultures of living reproduce gendered norms, they are also a place for potentialities. The unique conditions created through the relationalities of co-existence between family members and girls can provide a sense of trust and certainty in times of crisis. Young girls are an important part of this nexus and engage in meaning making activities as they navigate these complex spaces.

1.3. Moving away from global discourses on girls' education vis-à-vis context to their experiences and social interdependencies in Pakistan

Pakistan, as a country responding to global policies, is consequently drawn into global discourses around how one should tackle complexities around gender equity in education. In the past, global policies have functioned around the logic of 'what works', which intends to prescribe solutions to conditions previously understood as being harmful. However, a context such as Pakistan, which is complex due to its relationalities, requires a more sophisticated approach. Drawing on Unterhalter (2023), we suggest a 'what--connects' approach to understanding the intersectional and overlapping crises that reduce educational opportunities for girls in

Pakistan is appropriate (Sultana, 2021). Such an analytical lens engages with the community support and agency, providing space to make sense of interdependencies as potential instead of a barrier (Unterhalter, 2023, p. 145).The lens of what-connects then allows questions to be asked in a different way in the context of Pakistan: how do girls work with what they have in terms of social network in the situation of resource scarcity? How do they construct meaning out of 'education' as a process of being and becoming?

Highlighting the potentialities in connections and interdependencies needs due scrutiny. Relationships are not always beneficial, but inevitably are part of the lives of girls as they are forming and being formed by the conditions in which they live. In this sense, they are crucial focal points in our exploration of what girls' lived experiences are in this context. Hannah Arendt (1994) provides some important accounts about the development of self/identity in relation with context and the others around us. She argues 'Existence can only develop in the shared life of human beings' (p. 186). Similarly, Giovanola (2005) argues that human flourishing requires an acceptance of connections between self and others as diverse. Giovanola argues that humans may also flourish through 'an internal qualitative richness… that can foster self-realisation and "flourishing"' (p. 262). The main concern of this work is: in these contexts of crisis and reduced opportunities, how do we imagine this coming together of the inner self and the possibilities that this may offer for 'self-realisation' and 'flourishing'?

In these discussions, the most important component is missing, namely what girls actually feel in relation to their contexts and the relationships around them. Thus, understanding their aspirations about their education amidst the material constraints and their social context is a noteworthy starting point.

Aspirations are a fluid concept that can include everything to do with hope - ranging from concrete goals to vague dreams and ambitions (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). They are also future oriented and can sometimes unlock agency and self-empowerment in adverse conditions (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013; DeJaeghere, 2018). But aspirations have a home outside the minds that imagine them (Hussain, 2021). This paper thus describes the physical and social context and the ways in which girls make sense of it through their experiences of, and aspirations for, education. It is in this space, that girls' aspirations can take root and trigger change. Before describing the perspectives of girls and their communities we contextualise the physical location of the research sometimes quoting what was shared by the community.

2. Locating the research sites

The three research sites, Rojhan, Larra and Katcha-Chohan, are approximately 100 kilometres apart from each other on the southernmost border of the Punjab province (see red markings in Fig. 1 for approximate location of the research sites) and are classified as Flood Response Protection regions (OCHA, 2023). They are located between a mountain range and the river Indus.

Data was collected in January 2023, approximately one month and eighteen days after the floods (Fig. 2 for details of the sites). While the Punjab province as a whole enjoys higher literacy rates (74 percent for 10 years and older) and good access to schools (98 percent Gross Enrolment Rate for children 6-10 years of age), health facilities (the highest prenatal consultation rates at 83%) and security in comparison with the rest of the provinces, the Southern regions of the province have some of the worst conditions in the country, as noted by Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM, 2019-2020) survey. The research sites are in some of those regions.

Specifically, Rajanpur District (Fig. 2 below) in Punjab, which is where all the three sites/villages are located, has the highest number (48%) of out-of-school children in the province (PSLM, 2019). Rajanpur is also amongst the lowest performing districts in

Fig. 1. Map and approximate location of the sites
Source: Ali, A. (2016). Topographic Map of Pakistan [dataset]. Pakistan Survey. 10.13140/RG.2.1.5073.3045

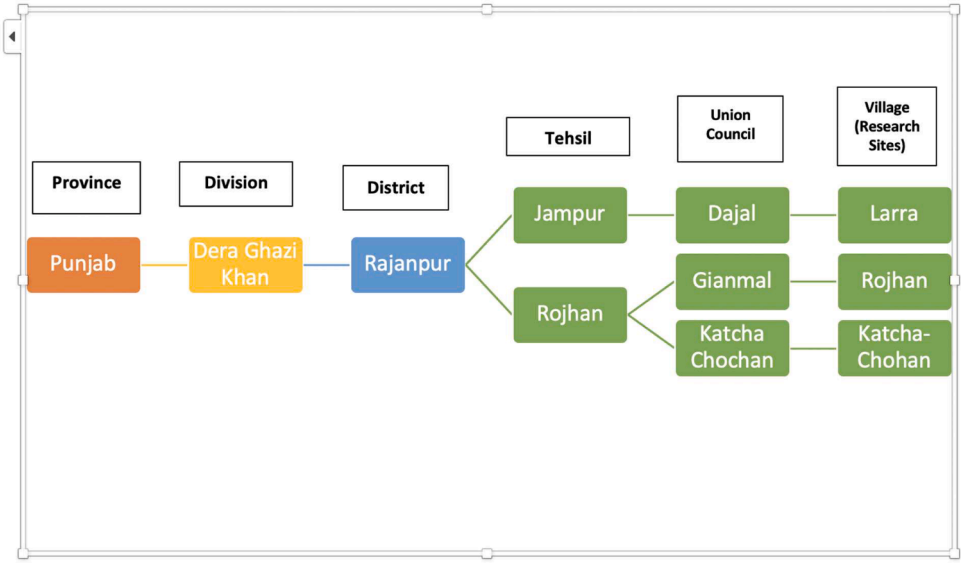

Fig. 2. Detailed visual representation of the administrative structure and the research sites.

terms of school performance (PSLM, 2019). Tehsils Jampur and Rojhan (note that Rojhan is the name of a Tehsil as well as the name of one of the research sites/villages) within Rajanpur (see Fig. 2) lack hospitals and primary schools for girls. Regarding the three focal villages, two are extremely disadvantaged (Larra and Rojhan), with Kacha Chohan faring relatively better.

As a result of the floods due to heavy rains in these regions, many houses were washed away, with people taking refuge on raised mounds to escape flood water, which brought snakes with it: "We had to settle on top of mud mounds/pillars which are far away from here. There were snakes in the trees and on the walls; we were very scared of them" (a girl participant from Larra). These villages, which were poorly equipped with education, health, and security facilities to begin with, had now lost the little they had (see Fig. 3).

School buildings were also badly damaged. The structures that were left behind were unsafe for use due to risk of collapsing. The school staff and students, many of whom had lost their homes, were now under a lot of pressure trying to rebuild their homes for shelter and providing for their families by farming again. In Kacha Chohan, the presence of an unused UNICEF school tent and educational equipment, packed and stowed away, reflects access level issues. It also speaks to the gap between the funder/supporter understanding of need on the ground and the experienced realities of stakeholders situated there. Some of the damage caused to schools by the floods is shown in Fig. 4.

Fig. 3. Villages destroyed after the floods.

3. Methodology

The project sought to understand how educational opportunities for girls were experienced by them as well as their community, drawing on their hopes and aspirations as a means to produce insights into this experience. The methodological approach was flexible so as to engage with peoples' own perspectives on experiences that they had reason to value. A qualitative narrative approach was used through semi-structured interviews with girls (16-18 years), group discussions with women and community meetings with men for data collection. In the rare cases where there were opportunities to speak with younger girls, this was in the presence of their parents, family and sometimes, teachers as well (see Fig. 5). The data collection was spread across two weeks. Since some villages were remote, a couple of days were designated for each village. The researchers spent whole days meeting people and visiting places when invited.

Pre-data collection, a set of thematic areas were identified using instruments in a previous study that drew on aspects of aspirations and agency to explore young people's experiences during COVID-19 (Khalid and Singal, 2022). A detailed interview guide was created covering the thematic areas identified. The detailed interview guide can be found open access (Khalid and Chidamabaram, 2024). It was decided that in such a vulnerable context, the following themes would help to loosely structure conversations and capture experiences:

- Experience of physical and social context pre and post crisis
- Aspirations for life and education
- Activities and efforts to support self and others
- Aspirations for improvement

3.1. Process of collecting narratives

Fieldwork for the project was conducted by Khalid, the second author so this section will draw on singular experience. Conducting this research has been a critically reflexive experience of understanding the narratives of people undergoing some of the most challenging times of their lives. Even though formal ethics approval from the Department of Education ethics committee at Oxford was granted for this study (CUREC ref: C1A_2223_080), the realities of the field demanded careful attention to participants' intellectual needs. As the communities were still grappling with the devastation of the floods, we were conscious of the time asked of them. A flexible narrative approach was used to decide the locations and timings of the interviews and discussions. The researcher went where they were invited at the behest of the hosts/participants. As a researcher, our commitment was towards 'learning' from the communities, which meant that requests had to be accommodated for and knowledge had to be sought. This accommodation and seeking included everything from an impromptu request for a school speech to a quick detour into a community isolated from road access to a visit to a local social worker's house to meet her peer village women.

It was clear that some communities had never been approached (neither by government nor NGOs) since the floods, which greatly saddened them. The sentiment was that nobody had cared enough to come. We would like to believe that our attention to these villages meant something valuable to the communities. One event is noteworthy, where a mother from Kacha Chohan asked the researcher to write their name on a piece of paper. She said that she wanted to keep it as a memory of someone who came to ask about them (who cared). We wish that we could do more than just ask about them. While not substantial, the researcher contributed in little ways, for example, delivering an impromptu speech at a school to encourage students and make them feel heard, reviewing an official letter, and

Fig. 4. School buildings after the floods (please print in colour).

Fig. 5. Participant interaction settings.

connecting with young students to provide support for college applications. In a context like this, it is difficult to speak to aspects of research like methodology and rigour, but what follows will explain the care that was taken in implementing this project.

The researcher was very mindful of not setting unrealistic expectations by explaining the limits of what the research could achieve to interlocutors as well as key informants. Following the local customs, contact was made with local authorities, who provided information about the political leaders in the community before approaching the research sites. These political leaders owned most of the land and employed the small-scale farmers. Some villagers mentioned that the 'feudal lords' that owned the land had provided financial support for recovery during the floods (Durrani et al., 1995). It is important to note that feudal activities and role in villages are controversial and the oppression that these economic and class structures entails has been thoroughly documented (Naveed, 2024). Given these dynamics, it must be noted that our visits were facilitated by the landed gentry and so the power was already tilted in the favour of this class. The accounts produced must thus be viewed critically within this complexity.

With the support of the gatekeepers, we contacted three local political representatives in each village and one translator/interpreter. The representatives had political and health related expertise and were fluent in both the languages of the region, Saraiki and Sindhi, which along with Urdu were the languages spoken in the villages. The translator accompanied us to all the three sites. A convenience sampling strategy was used. We visited the villages and spoke with the community members and girls. A three-step recruitment plan was followed: (i) initial meeting with gatekeepers and key informants, (ii) village visits and (iii) debriefing with research team at the end of each day (see Fig. 6 for recruitment strategy).

One of the authors is proficient in Urdu and has a good command of Hindko, which shares roots with Saraiki. The interpreter helped with Balochi. The interviewer (one of the authors) would ask a question in Urdu, whilst the interpreter or key informant would translate it into the relevant language and then, translate the responses. This three-way conversation was recorded on tape and later

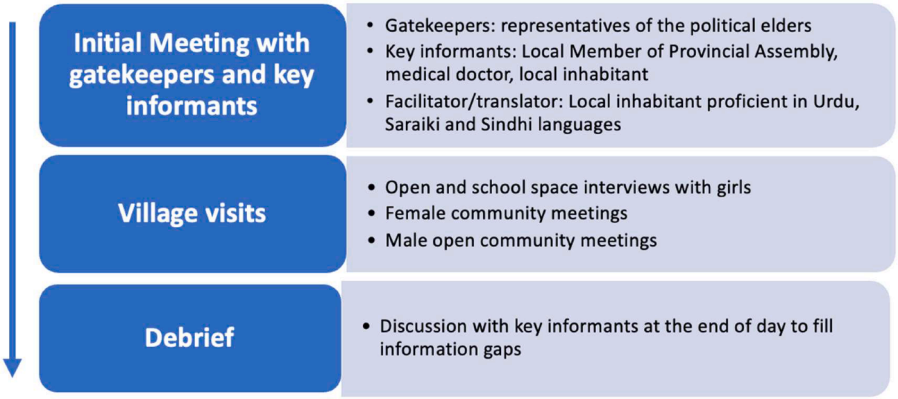

Fig. 6. Recruitment strategy (please print in colour).

anonymised and outsourced for transcription and translation. A random sample of some of the transcripts was reviewed for accuracy by the author involved in data collection. This resulted in a total of 21 interactions lasting 50-60 minutes on average. The data collected is illustrated in Table 1.

3.2. Analysis

A thematic approach was used to first, analyse the social experiences shared by participants covering the data holistically and identifying crosscutting themes (Czarniawska, 2004). The 21 interviews/discussions were organised into stakeholder groups: girls, members of the male and female community and experts. The organising of the groups was essential, because each group's data was analysed separately, with narrative analysis subsequently being undertaken to get a collective story. Each group's interview data was then read to identify narratives around girls' experiences. Through this reading, the following themes or codes were identified across the groups:

- Barriers to education within their local context
- Perceptions on the value of education
- Intersectional disadvantages focusing on health, security and income
- The impact of the climate crises

Alongside the above broad themes, specific stakeholders also reflected on additional themes that were then added to their narratives. For instance, members of the male community also spoke extensively about administrative challenges, whereas the female community explored occupational mobility and girls themselves reflected on their responsibilities, aspirations and self-reliance. Once each group's narratives were written, the different stories were woven together comparing across each to makes sense of the main story referred to as the 'core story' in narrative analysis (Emden, 1998, p. 35). This formed a broader story about girls' experiences in this context.

The findings (or the 'core story') emerging as themes from the analysis are organised around the logic of 'context' (physical and social) and aspirations, of the communities and the girls' themselves (Emden, 1998). The section is structured in three temporal sections: (i) The legacies of girls' exclusion from educational opportunities pre-dating the floods, (ii) The post-flood devastation, and (iii) Emerging potential of relationality from the perspective of girls and their communities

While describing themes, wherever possible within group analysis has been highlighted. For example, through statements such as 'male community felt that…'. Additionally, the paper is structured such that we first outline the views of different stakeholder groups on issues that were most pertinent to them in this context (distinctly drawing on community and expert groups), followed by the voices of the girls (data drawn from conversations with girls only).

4. Findings

In illustrating our findings, we adhere to a temporal sequence, describing the pre- and post-flood era and then, finally, the emergence of a sense of community that allowed girls to feel supported in their pursuit of education. Each of these findings first describes the contexts and conditions, followed by the state of aspirations and visions of education in each era.

Table 1
Total data collected.

Type	Codes given	Number of interview/ discussions	Type of information	Duration
Girls' interviews (individual, pairs and groups)	Participant-numbers 1 to 7-individual-village name	Individual= 7 Pairs=3 Total=10	Experiences of education as a girl	10-40 minutes
Female open group meetings	FG - numbers 1-3 - village name	Total= 3	Women's experiences of life, crisis and children's wellbeing	50-60 minutes
Male community open meetings	MCM- numbers 1-3-village name	Total=3	Economic, political and social issues of the village	50-60 minutes
Expert discussions	Participant- numbers 17 to 20- Expertise - village name	Total=4	Area (education, health and security) specific discussions	20-50 minutes
Project start gatekeeper and key informant briefing, strategy and planning meeting	Gatekeeper-key-Informant-meeting	Total=1	Background of the social and economic situation of the region. Situation before and after the floods. Loss of life and livelihood	60 minutes
Total corpus of data (interviews and discussions)		21		

4.1. The legacies of girls' exclusion from educational opportunities pre-dating the floods

Reduced opportunities for girls to receive education are a result of a historic exclusion of the most marginalised groups. In this context, the state of crisis for girls predated the floods in 2022 as each village had temporal and historical barriers to socioeconomic stability, education and health and safety. Woven within these discussions is the intersecting line of economic insecurity. It is in this complexity that we relate the temporal journey of girls' education in flood affected Pakistan.

In this section we discuss overlapping complexities from the perspective of the communities in two sections: conditions of access and historic inequality and their impact on aspirations.

The physical context

The physical context dictated the limits of access to education. Being economically disadvantaged, physical access, without guarantees of safety or physical wellbeing, had an impact on whether children could reach schools.

Access to schools

Access here refers to a range of issues, including a scarcity of school buildings as well as externalities that have a knock-on effect on school attendance - for example, absence of law and order. Girls dreamt of accessing education and demonstrated a keen awareness of its importance. However, they felt that the geographical distance to school was a physical barrier: "Yes I would have liked to attend but there was no girls' school. If there was a school then definitely, I will go there", indicating a lack of opportunity but not a lack of will. Instead, the only option remained a school which was "20 km far away. on the other side of the river" (FG2R). Understandably, the girls expressed frustration and dejection, stating that "no one is there these days who cares for us" (FG2R). When schools were farther away it was harder for families to financially support their daughters, with their perceiving "education as a luxury" (MCM-3-R).

Educational access was not only limited to the presence and absence of approachable schools, but also, the overall access to facilities in the villages. In some villages, the only way to reach schools was to travel great distances. Certain areas had insufficient infrastructure to support the needs of the communities. A male participant reflected that "people do travel to the regions of Dajal, Jampur and D. G. Khan, but the dirt roads are quite broken and in bad condition" (MCM-2-L).

Challenges to receiving education were not limited to girls, as boys equally faced these issues too. For instance, one male participant in Rojhan said "there are separate schools for boys and girls up to class 10. There is also a college for boys, but there is no degree college" (MCM-3-R). Without the presence of a college and in a community with serious resource constraints how could people access education from afar? The vicious cycle became harder to overcome. With limited access to education historically, some families had never had any member who had received education. They did not have the resources to travel to schools in nearby cities and had to invest what little they had in ensuring their basic survival.

Barriers to access also extended to modes of education that were acceptable to the community. A male participant in Larra articulated the lack of female teachers as a reason for girls not being able to attend school: "Even if girls get elementary education, the parents will not let them go to school in later years until there are female teachers…This is also a big issue in this area" (MCM-2-L). The issue of access was an intersection of physical and social complexity as there was a thread of safety concerns that ran through conversations.

Concerns about reaching schools safely

Male elders in Rojhan described the lack of safe transport to schools as one of the most significant barriers for girls. One male member in Rojhan said, "the schools that are here are very far away and the men of this community say that they would rather kill the daughters than send them far away… as a daughter being molested or raped would bring dishonour. We cannot afford safe transport for girls to those schools" (MCM-3-R). In the regions where law and order were compromised, there was no guarantee that a girl without a chaperone or on a safe means of transport would make it to her school unscathed. This instilled fear in communities. Women's killings for (dis) honour by their own family is a serious concern in Pakistan. This presents complex challenges that cannot be addressed without considerations of the intersectionality at play.

Women's (mothers') perspectives illuminated the deeper meanings of exclusion. In open meetings with women from different tribes (50-60 women), whilst they highlighted the lack of availability, more importantly, they expressed their concern about the difficulty of trusting someone with their daughters. For example, in a group meeting, one woman said: "Umerkot is 5 km away, so we will not send our children there. We don't trust anyone even if we have transport. If school is inside the village, then we will send them. We are very disheartened about the lack of development in our area" (FG1R).

Lack of healthcare and its adverse impact on experiencing education

Healthcare was a very important issue in these villages. There was a lack of proper health facilities and as a result, the prenatal mortality rate was extremely high, which would debilitate anyone from learning. As a male participant reflected, "the current BHU is about 25km far away. During delivery cases, many females died while reaching to the centres. We also need maternity centres, as well as readily available doctors" (MCM-4-Kacha Chohan).

These issues were significant to women in the community, who reflected, "In this area there is no hospital, no school and no dispensary, here during delivery many children died, during flood there is a lot of damage" (FG3-KC). A female health worker from Kacha Chohan similarly noted: "Here we don't have such equipment to deal with emergency cases, if someone got sick in night, it is a big problem. A few months ago, there was a delivery case of a young mother, they didn't have transportation.once it is arranged, it was too late, she died due to lots of bleeding. There are so many such cases" (P-13-Kacha Chohan-LHW). Disease and death in the family often result in daughters dropping out from school to provide support at home. One can imagine the socio-emotional burden that girls bore in this region knowing that they could lose a loved one (generally mothers due to neonatal deaths) .

The social context: Historic inequality and its impact on aspirations

The female community also felt that there was a lack of occupational mobility: "We can't move to anywhere. If we go people say

'Rojani' came (used derogatively), there is a discrimination, they pushed us back, we cannot move forward, we are not graduating" (FG1-Rojhan). Another participant in Rojhan stated, "yes females work in cotton field but male members often take the money" (FG2-Rojhan), indicating how their opportunities are restricted.

Some members of the male community also expressed frustration at the lack of female opportunities**.** A male community member explained how this historic exclusion from accessing education curtailed their aspirations for their daughters: "our girls start working when they are big and able to do some work. They work in the field, cotton fields. If there were a school, I would have received education myself and my daughter would also get education. we are living here as nomads [in a state of homelessness] and will spend our whole lives as nomads" (MCM-2-L). Access, then, is not merely about a lack of resources that do not allow certain families to receive education, for not wanting to give education to their girls, but also, about historic social exclusion and curtailment of opportunity.

4.2. The post-floods devastation

The inadequate infrastructure and lapses in creating educational opportunities for girls was further exacerbated after the floods. Participant communities also spoke strongly against the division of resources and the inequality sustained as a result. We outline the pressing issues as a result of the destruction, as noted by the participant communities, as well as more structural inequalities sustained through administrative structures. In these villages, the younger generation was stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty, which prevented them from maintaining a competitive advantage with those from more privileged positions in well-established cities.

The physical context

Destruction to infrastructure

Within the male community, a participant reflected on how because of the flooding, "Houses were damaged, schools were damaged, all infrastructure - roads, bridges were all broken, after one week there was a heavy rain which added more water" (MCM-3-R). Girls in this community also expressed worry about the destruction to property, with one participant in Rojhan stating, "During the flood, we had to settle on top of mud mountains/pillars, which are far away from here. There were snakes in the trees and on the walls, we were very scared of them. We are trying to rebuild different portions; it is still under construction" (P-6-R). Girls also spoke about the vast damage to educational infrastructure specifically. The floods destroyed school equipment and books, as well as whole school buildings. Participants also spoke about the impact of the flooding on their education, explaining that they found it difficult to attend online classes, making it safely to school and thus, failing in exams (P-4-L and P-5-L).

Others spoke about damage to their books: "All books were wasted /damaged, will purchase new, still not purchased" (P-6-L). Two sisters (P-3-L and P-4-L) recalled how they grabbed their 'sindooq' (small metal chest) of books and took it with them, drawing stark parallels to WW2 and the evacuation of children. Similarly, other participants also reflected on their experiences: "No, before flood, rains started so we packed our stuff clothes, book in a wooden box and keep that in school that is why it was saved. But we spent these 3 months in much difficulty" (P-1-L and P-2-L). In a community previously lacking access to safe schools, the 2022 floods thus posed further restrictions on girls' ability to continue their education.

Loss of livelihoods

As a result of the flood, the community also faced a loss of livelihood. In a community meeting in Larra, male participants described how "people are now more financially weak than they were 30-40 years back. Here they crop cotton, rice and sugar cane, but all are damaged" (MCM-2-L). Another participant in Larra likened their loss of trade to education, reflecting that "We have a shortfall of wheat. In upper Punjab they grow two crops, but here we grow only one crop… same situation is with education" (MCM-1-L). This is an interesting comparison. Education meant as much as livelihood, but sadly, the inequity meant that compared with bigger cities people were not left with many options. Using this analogy that, if one crop was destroyed due to floods, they did not have another rely on, similarly with education, they had a failed system and no fall back one. Flooding also meant that homes needed to be rebuilt and livelihoods needed to be maintained. Yet, male members of the community also had specific views on women's roles in coping with the flooding crisis, stating that, "females must look after the kids inside home or also sit with males to look at the water level to inform families. If they are in need or in emergency, females must request to the teams to provide them food in their homes" (MCM-2-L).

Coupled with the need to ensure they receive an education, this has put girls in what has been called the 'triple burden' on women in the contexts of disaster/COVID (McLaren et al., 2020, p. 1). For example, one female participant in Larra said, "I went to school and did household chores with my mother also. Yes, we will construct/rebuild this house again" (P-3-L). Another participant similarly said "I went to school in the morning, when I came back, I worked in fields/crops. I make Roti (bread,), but during this work I keep my books with me" (P-2-L).

Coupled with financial barriers, the roles of women are complex, as explained by a lady health worked in Katcha Chohan: **"**Women do household chores, look after the children. Even during pregnancy women work, they work in fields, cut grass although they need proper food and good diet at that time, but they don't have resources" (P-13-KC-LHW). A lot of these issues are a product of limited resources that are allocated based on administrative structures. For example, when government jobs are advertised young people from impoverished regions have to compete with those from big cities in Punjab. The more disadvantaged the region is the harder it is for the youth to have received good higher education. They are inevitably set to fail.

Administrative and financial challenges

Administrative tools in relation to access to schooling, distribution of development funds, including rehabilitation and lack of mechanisms for claiming social support, interacted with poverty to exclude the future generations of such communities from opportunities. This is the area where the intersection with poverty was the strongest. For instance, a female participant in Larra stated: **"**Money is the biggest hurdle, if we don't have money then we can't go to college. When we have fees only then will we go" (P-5-L),

while another reflected on the myriad bureaucratic structures that posed challenges to educational access: "Now there is a requirement of Form. B (identification document) without this we will not get admission. Fees of each Form B is Rs. 700-800" (P-1-L). Another participant felt that these financial barriers also played a role in reducing the community's motivation to educate its girls, particularly during times of crisis, such as the floods when other priorities can take precedence: "Those who try to get education they face financial issues. They are not interested in education" (P-2-L).

The social context: What comes first, aspirations or conditions?

With such stark inequalities, aspirations for better futures seemed an unachievable dream. As voiced strongly by the male community, there were stark inequalities in terms of how they were ignored for resource allocation during the floods. What was their right was never used for their betterment. There were specific challenges in relation to securing funding, with it being extremely biased and inconsistent. A participant reflected that, "Political influence and corruption in disseminating relief funding was immense…many would just provide to their favoured people regardless of the need. The people who were really affected badly only received support, if they were specific political party supporters. If they were not, they would not receive help" (MCM-1-L), thus indicating how the community was left with no means to assert themselves against corruption. They also reflected extensively on administrative challenges, touching on issues such as a lack of support from political leaders and NGOs, leaving people "more financially weak than they were 30-40 years back… with no rehabilitation support" (MCM-4-KC).

In relation to women specifically, male participants in Larra felt strongly that women were not receiving the support they needed as funding programmes were delayed with no explanation. One member said "During the floods the only support that was given was for households of those women who were registered with BISP (national social support programme). The rest of them, some very poor, did not get anything" (MCM-1-L). Additionally, due to the falsification of survey data and delayed payments, funding was not consistently given to women during the floods. This funding was also described as highly conditional on adhering to certain cultural norms, like registering marriages and making certain religious pilgrimages. The lack of support available to women, thus, created an additional overlapping challenge during the floods, further affecting their access to education. One could argue that conditions such as these would set back the visions of gender equity in education. Contrarily, there were glimpses of a 'critical hope', retained in such adversities (Freire, 1978, p. 80), resonated in the girls' perspectives.

4.3. The role of the ontological 'self' and the value of relationships

It has been argued that a crisis gives rise to disruptions that cause irregularities in the structure of the field, allowing one's habitus to reorganise in productive ways. In this state of confusion, a space of potential called a 'margin of liberty' emerges (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992, p. 111-112). In this margin of liberty, actors are more predisposed to hope that 'another (better) world is possible' (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992, p. 111-112). This lens helps to understand girls as beings, functioning at the margin of liberty (when one is left to deal with crisis/disruptions on their own without much help) as actors, not passive observers. Acknowledging the agency and capability of girls through this framework echoes previous work by scholars, such as Fauzia Rahman (2018), who similarly make space for the potential of shared cultures in Pakistan and position girls as active advocates of their futures. Discussions with girls revealed how their aspirations flourished within the support systems that they facilitated and their social conditions. These findings are being discussed as a narrative, illustrating firstly the experience and desires for education related with the developing of self, secondly the worth and value of relationships, and lastly, the role of aspirations.

Education and the developing of the 'self' and the sense of community

The girls engaged with the crisis in various ways to achieve what may be interpreted as 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991, p. 35). To reach such an ontological state involves a slow process of negotiating with what it means to be safe when there is no external support, eventually reflecting on how acceptance comes from within.

Desires for education and the hope for a better future fuelled this sense of security. As noted by a girl from Larra, "from this [education] all my problems will get resolved. With education one can move forward in life" (P-1-L). The sense of hope and repair was retained through individual and collective sensibilities that fed their ontological needs for education. "I studied myself from books…I do hard work so that I will be prepared well for my exam" (P-3-L). Another participant said, "We also searched material for ourselves during studies. We have learnt a lot, if there is in need, we will give them help. If we can help them then definitely, we will do so" (P-6-R). Even in the case where help was not available, some mentioned working hard by themselves and keeping their materials safe.

Education provided them with the awareness, a window into alternative futures (DeJaeghere, 2018). For them, education would help them survive the world with dignity and respect. As some female participants reflected: "When we get education, we know about everything [knowledge], so we deal with hardships easily, awareness makes life easy, we know how to live alongside others" (P-3-L) and "Education brings awareness, through this we come to know about 'Deen-o-Duniya' (religion and world affairs)…uneducated people suffer or face many difficulties" (P-4-L). What does it tell us about the sense of self and the other that emerges through education, especially in times of crisis?

Religion gave patience and the faith to achieve a sense of being. Circumstances needed to be accepted in this precarity to sustain imagination for a promised future. In this meaning making of the self in crisis, religion was central: "Allah is the greatest support. In the Quran it is stated that one can achieve anything if he tries and tries for. There is an ease after every difficulty" (P-4-L). Religion not only provided the lens to make sense of unpredictability, but also, opened alternative access to education. "We recited the holy Quran and then went to school. When we came back, we did homework and then, went to read the Quran" (P-2-L). "Tablegh-i-jamat [Islamic missionary groups] visited our village…they teach the Quran and provide elementary education till class 8. They teach in masjid [mosque]" (P-3-L). Some also taught the Quran to children in their neighbourhood. The solace offered by religion provided hope during these crises, perhaps helping girls to remain focused on their goals. The support of the community included family, teachers and

community who provided a safety net in these dire times.

Sensibilities towards family

Families played a key role in supporting girls in negotiating access, sometimes by directly opposing other family members. One girl (aged 14) in Larra noted "My wish is to study more. My brother told me to stop going to school after 2nd year [of college], but my parents supported me, now I have continued my studies" (P-1-L). In another instance, extended family members believed in the value of education, which then helped facilitate easier access: "My parents, my grandparents supported me, whereas my other relatives had an issue with my studies. They kept nagging my family about allowing me to continue education. But my family believes that life has highs and lows [is unpredictable], girls should be independent enough so they can survive easily " (P-1-L).

Family support sometimes grew beyond the blood family to have a cumulative social impact. For a young girl from Larra family support opened doors for not just her, but her friend too, "During the floods, my friend's house collapsed. She did not send/submit her admission [secondary national exam enrolment documents], I asked my uncle who helped her" (P-1-L). Culture, community and society was therefore multifaceted. While historic conditions transformed cultural values to 'restrict' access there was space to create opportunities. While previous systems perspectives imagine these interconnectivities, they are restricted to those that are most influential. A what-connects lens helps to go beyond the functioning system to look at these disconnections and regressions that lead to slower and sustainable transformations in systems.

Sensibilities towards community

Girls also drew on the community to support their need for education. Efforts by teachers helped many girls access education. A male headteacher in Kacha-Chohan said, "We filed an appeal in the Punjab assembly to open a girls' school which is now being constructed. We are currently accommodating girls in our school, so my responsibility has been doubled" (P-7-KC-H). There was only one boy's primary school in the community in Kacha-Chohan. The headteacher explained how the headteachers before him had negotiated with the government to open the school to girls as well. This created an opportunity for girls to attend school, but the complexities of safety prevailed. To gain the community's trust, it was important for the headteacher to fiercely protect the girls. The headteacher said, "I personally stay till school time and monitor students and staff, as well as providing clothing and shoes" (P-7-KC-H). The power and strength of the headteacher in actively advocating for girls' education had then prompted more girls to enrol, a precedent set when his own daughters also began studying in this school

It was particularly hard for teachers who had to "commute from other places with difficulty; they live far away… with Rs.7000 or Rs.8000 (approximately 23 GBP) only" (P-3-L). In some of the worst affected areas teachers took on the work of community workers. They kept track of the students' wellbeing. When someone fell off the radar, they would go door to door in their communities to ensure their students were well: "Our school teacher contacted us; he asked about us trying to find out how we were" (P-1-L).

The role of aspirations for education

The girls were ambitious, with the majority wishing to become doctors or teachers. A young girl in Larra said "I want to become a doctor so that I can treat patients since hospitals are far away" (P-4-L). This reflects a commitment born out of pain and loss for themselves and their community. There were always one or two families nearby, who had lost a female family member at childbirth. Despite this there was a sense of doing and working towards better things.

In Larra, two sisters explained how their journeys to education had resulted in being activists for girls' education (P-3-L and P-4-L). Their activism was not of a political nature, but rather, what Arendt (2005) notes as 'becoming an active being' (p. 102). Their father was a teacher in the local school and ensured that his daughters continued their education. Both girls were in college now, studying STEM. One sister who was betrothed to be married soon (mentioned earlier) had negotiated with her husband-to-be and was going to continue her education after marriage. The other sister was teaching girls from her village at home: "I wanted to become teacher, open school in this area, we have also applied to open a school for an informal education… now we have taught students in our house" (P-3-L), thus demonstrating how her aspirations were shaped by a deep consideration for those around her.

Together, they very clearly articulated that their efforts were for a higher cause – to provide educational opportunities to young girls from their community who lacked the means for educational access. As they lived in service to others around them, they realised deeper meanings to what it meant to live as relational beings: "I like teaching. If I become a teacher, I will bring pride to my parents" (P-3-L). Their dedication to education has also had a profound impact on the girls around them, with other female participants echoing these aspirations: "I will try to get awareness to those parents whose girls are not getting education" (P-6-L). Such instances indicate how one may hope that singular endeavours can become catalysts for transformation with girls at the centre as agentic beings.

5. Discussion

5.1. The physical and the social as intersectional issues

Temporally analysing a multitude of issues relating to the physical and the social contexts around girls has revealed intersecting lines across gender and resource poverty that exclude girls from education in Pakistan. As seen in the literature, the global narrative references the specific vulnerabilities that girls may face and how they may be excluded. In our study, we go beyond this global imaginary and directly explore how exclusion is experienced 'vis-à-vis the context'. As seen in our findings, girls experience indirect exclusions due to intersections between health, security and finances.

Health is an important area that intersects with educational access and opportunities. These outcomes remain a stark reality for the participants in our research, who, as revealed above, describe the lack of adequate health facilities as a significant barrier to women. Specifically, the prevalence of unassisted deliveries and a lack of infrastructure within these villages impact on the health of girls and women. Our findings strike a chord with research by Habib et al. (2021), where focus groups with women showed that stigma

surrounding female health issues and a lack of medical facilities and female health providers at the village level delayed health care considerably, posing grave dangers to women in rural Pakistan. With healthcare facilities miles away, how could families who can barely afford food access healthcare, let alone education? Moreover, as seen in our findings, there was an additional burden placed on girls who had to drop out to care for their unwell family members. This echoes a mixed-methods study, which found that parents in rural Pakistan assign sibling caretaking responsibilities to the eldest daughter, particularly when their mothers are taken ill (Bhamani et al., 2023). In these cases, parents explained that the burden of care was placed on daughters due to traditional norms, where caretaking is a solely female responsibility (Kamal et al., 2024).

Safety is another significant concern within this region. Increases in instances of violence against women, coupled with damaged roads and a lack of emergency transportation creates challenges for citizens in rural areas in both Sindh and Punjab provinces (Pradhan et al., 2022). In villages in this study, girls often need to travel long distances to access education, because their villages often lack schools nearby. Both mothers and fathers in our study feared deeply for the safety of their daughters and were willing to protect them at the cost of their education, corroborating findings from country-wide studies in Pakistan, where parents cited 'girl child security' (p. 4) as a significant barrier to education (Khan et. al, 2011). It is argued that concerns of safety result in increased school dropout for girls in Pakistan (Suleman et. al, 2015). In our study, parental concerns of safety extended to sociological concerns as well. There were worries about the lack of female teachers who they could trust within this region. Interestingly, unlike the above studies, we found that parents also worried about the lack of access to schools for boys, although this was in relation to suitable higher education options as opposed to safety. This highlights the gendered nature of accessibility concerns and highlights how safety is primarily spoken of in relation to the daughters of the family.

These issues cannot be considered as mutually exclusive as the experiences are intersectional (Habib et al., 2021). The environment of precarity, where death may befall a family because of lack of health care and personal safety for their daughters could then suggest why in our study, education is positioned as a 'luxury'. Literature suggests, rather simplistically, that in these contexts female dropout is linked to a cultural preference for male children (Choudhry et al., 2019) and that fathers resist their daughters' having an education (Jamal, 2016). Our study shows that these intersectional disadvantages impact negatively upon the aspirations of the social communities, but there is a positive side to community too. Parents felt that due to economic, health and safety concerns, there is a significant lack of occupational mobility for women, although they desired this for their daughters. The male community also expressed how these disadvantages resulted in historic exclusion from certain occupations, restricting girls to agricultural and domestic tasks and reflected on the need for change.

While these intersectional issues are deeply rooted within this context, we argue that there is a need to provide space for women to articulate how they conceptualise and work within their conditions. In particular, in the global narrative, girls are understood as vulnerable, because of these inhospitable conditions. However, we argue that the recent flooding crisis provides a valuable starting point to highlight the possibilities that arise: the ways in which girls and the wider community enact their agency, despite their conditions.

5.2. Recognising that these vulnerabilities were exacerbated due to the floods

Communities in this region possess crucial resources and networks that can support sustainable interventions, as seen in our research. Some of the insights gathered from our participants are represented in the dominant state narrative.

Whilst there is an implicit emphasis on community engagement, the policy efforts treat these interlinked issues as separate and are largely reactionary. As participants reflected, issues in this region extend beyond destruction to infrastructure. There continue to be multiple administrative and financial challenges linked to girls' education, affecting a family's ability to educate its girls. While participants reflected on deeper systemic issues around corruption and political biases, policy initiatives mask these in their efforts to merely rebuild infrastructure. Consideration for the loss of livelihoods because of the floods, and the ways in which women are expected to take on additional roles is also needed to ensure that girls have the capability to prioritise their education. How will girls come back to school in a UNESCO tent when they do not have a roof over their heads and food on the table, and the burden falls on them to manage these challenges? While the programmes underway may be in their initial phases, the plan delegates implementation responsibilities to NGOs with contractual services, dissolving itself of responsibility for delivery. Additionally, in our study, women reflected on how there was a lack of gender specific support with regard to accessing funding and their complex roles within the crisis, pointing towards a crucial gap in state responses. By incorporating both girls' perspectives and community input, more inclusive and responsive strategies can be developed to address vulnerabilities effectively.

5.3. Community as an important experience – from girls' perspectives

Relationships and connections within this region form an integral part of girls' lived experiences. Acknowledging this, we make the case that community is an important experience for girls in this region and impacts upon the ways in which they face intersectional issues amidst crises. The floods in Pakistan offer valuable space to rethink the role of the community, focusing on its vast potential. Aligning with this view, a multidimensional engagement with the 'girl versus socio-cultural context debate' has been suggested (Shah and Shah, 2012). Recent literature allows for an alternative view of socio-cultural context – comprising parents and communities as positive forces for change (Shaheen, 2018).

As outlined in Arendt's work, providing adequate space for shared experiences, can help us understand how people realise their identities and capacities during a crisis. In the absence of meaningful external support, participants in our research mobilised to help themselves (apni-madad-aap). This process of coming together in times of crisis can be further understood as the 'human flourishing'

conceptualised by Giovanola (2005), where we witness how people may enact their agency through connections with others in the community. For example, in our study, girls' families were a source of support for their education. Whilst studies have shown that mothers may negotiate education for their daughters (Ahmad and Neman, 2013; author 2 and Rose, 2022), in this region, the entire family came together to ensure their daughters went to school. In some cases, the extended family unit (such as grandparents) actively resisted other community members who opposed girls' education and showed deep recognition for its value. The importance of support from extended family members is evidenced in longitudinal cohort studies, which link the involvement of grandparents to the cognitive and socioemotional development of children in rural Pakistan (Chung et al., 2020). In our study, we have found that this may extend to grandparents facilitating their granddaughters' education, functioning as active advocates for girls' independence. This echoes research by Rahat et al. (2023), where in-depth interviews with grandmothers in Lahore showed that their caregiving could result in better opportunities for their grandchildren, despite it increasing their workload. Although not explored exclusively in the study, we learned that family support was not limited to biological relations, for it also positively impacted upon other girls in the community by expanding their educational opportunities. These examples clearly demonstrate how the family serves as a space for development and opportunity, highlighting the possibilities of sociocultural relations.

Teachers were also a valuable support system within the community. In our research, they went above and beyond to ensure that all female students had the capacity to sustain their studies. This echoes a study by Awan et al. (2015) in the D.G. Khan District, which analysed literacy data and found that female teachers helped increase the literacy rate of students and were more successful than male teachers in sustaining enrolment of girls in the community. However, in contrast, in our research, it was a male headteacher who worked to gain the trust of the male community, and then, actively negotiated access for girls in this area by protecting their safety and setting an example by educating his own daughters. He also used his cultural capital and connections to make requests to government officials, demonstrating how he used his specific privileges to benefit his students. This shows how advocacy by males could work in conjunction with efforts by female teachers to garner enthusiasm and trust from the community; working within their traditional practices and catering to their specific concerns.

As seen in the examples above, the flooding crisis has demonstrated how members of the community may be working against the prevailing systemic inequality affecting girls in this region in unique and highly contextualised ways. In this case, it is these shared relationships and networks that have worked to give girls agency, and making 'human flourishing' a reality.

5.4. Girls engaging with their context

Despite the vast damage caused by the floods, the resilience and aspirations of the girls within this 'margin of liberty' are visible in our research. When the flood water came rushing in a lot of girls picked up their books when they were being evacuated. What makes one value a box of books like a treasure chest enough to rescue it in the face of oncoming flood water?

This process of meaning making can be explored through the capabilitarian notion of 'being' and 'becoming', which suggests a potential in becoming/realising the self in the present as well as having the ability to imagine the future (Unterhalter, 2012). Such a perspective allows for an alternative way of looking at people's struggles in times of crisis as beings and agents engaged in struggle, while making a link to how actors may work within Bourdieu's concepts of the margin of liberty.

Maintaining, resilience, hope and the value of education

The girls themselves were working within these systems, 'becoming an active being', as Arendt would agree (2005, p. 102). Their aspirations for education were inspired by the needs that their region had seen in the past and is testament to their sense of relationality and ultimate desire for 'human richness' (Gionavola, 2005, p. 262). Many of them wanted to become doctors or teachers, desires cultivated because of a crisis that left many people helpless in need of support, both medically, but also, educationally. Throughout their narratives there were echoes of what Author 2 (2023) calls transformational aspirations. Education conceived in a sense of being and becoming; an introspection and extrospection of sorts. It is an inward-looking analytical lens through which one starts to re-evaluate the value of a thing in life, including education. Khalid and Chidamabaram (n.d.) in their study focusing on the educational experiences of young people from ethnically diverse groups in England argue that, in times of crisis, this sense emerges strongly when there is not just the desire, but also, a need, to reassess what holds value in life. Intersectionality here illuminates the ways in which various influences come together to shift perspectives.

Indeed, education had a meaning for these girls beyond what status they would have (for example, become a doctor, teacher), to how they would impact upon their communities. There are many aspects of the inner self as Giovanola (2005) reminds us. The coming together of what one can be and the process by which they seek those ends show the "dynamic dimensions of personhood, according to which individuals are 'becoming themselves' in search of self-realisation and construction of their identities" (p. 249).

Education symbolised by books, was much more than a means for social mobility. There were instances where girls had carried their books during their evacuation when the flood hit their houses. Could it be that in the mere act of saving their books as the flood destroyed their lives the girls somehow retained their sense of hope and agency? Did the books symbolise their aspiration of 'becoming' larger than life with education?

Salem (2023), drawing on Freire (1997) in her recent work, argues that hope is an ontological need (Salem, 2023, p. 4). Drawing on her work with Syrian refugee youth in Jordan she argues that youth that live in conditions of continuous precarity learn to retain a sense of self by developing a sense of 'hope' and self, which acts as an ontological lens through which they lead their lives.

6. Possibilities of support through policy

Pakistan, as a signatory of the UN charter since 1947 has followed global commitments towards equal and quality education for all.

Regardless, it is a stark reality that the performance of students in that nation is below average (ASER, 2019; 2022). The allocation of public funds for education has fallen in the 2020-21 budget, comprising only 1.92% of GDP (the lowest in South Asian countries). Low literacy rates and low average primary, middle and matric level enrolments and considerable gender disparities continue to affect the education system. Extensive reviews have shown that primary education in Pakistan is under-resourced, with no mechanisms for ensuring accountability (Shah et al., 2019).

It needs to be recognised that the current inefficiencies in the provision of education, health and safety are interlinked parts of a composite issue. Increased budgetary commitments to all sectors are necessary, especially when a girl's education is affected by environmental crisis. In a system that already excludes them, it is essential to consider how lack of schools, health facilities and lack of safety create further exclusion for the most vulnerable girls. What follows are our recommendations for what we see as necessary policy shifts.

There is a possibility of using community informed policy reform to support a holistic and equal growth in the country. We see the potential of taking our recommendations onboard through various avenues. Pakistan Government formulated Pakistan Vision 2025, focusing on rural areas and urban slums, aiming to strengthen Basic Health Units and improve existing infrastructure. The main objective of the vision is to work towards sustainable and inclusive growth (economic and social) collaborating with national and international stakeholders to chart out a concrete vision for the direction of Pakistan. Mechanisms of inclusion can be built within these policies to enable equitable and sustainable growth.

We also see potential in the Sehat-Sahulat programme, which provides financial help to under-privileged citizens to access quality medical care. The most notable and recent response toward healthcare has been included in the Flood Response Plan (2022). As part of this plan, the government in collaboration with the United Nations, proposes increasing tented and mobile health facilities and increasing transportation services. The following suggestions are principles that can be incorporated in the noted policy implementation framework to achieve sustainable and equitable growth.

- There needs to be an inherent policy shift from blanket provision to more targeted support for girls, women, and other marginalised groups. Policies need to acknowledge that disadvantages are intersectional and can impact upon how an individual responds to a crisis. This would require a whole systems approach that targets the root causes of inequality, necessitating a move beyond temporary measures, such as relief funds and temporary learning centres. This would involve the inclusion of all levels (to the unit council levels) of stakeholders, especially women and girls, in decision-making around crisis response and financing.
- Policy efforts must also focus on the wider barriers to education, such as the overall health care, transport conditions and administration for this region, as these also impact upon access to education.
- In terms of education, the policymakers need to target all aspects of inequality. This could mean providing inclusive educational facilities for girls. Policy efforts could also go towards creating a cultural shift involving increasing financing to support parents, advocacy from teachers and mobilising community actors.
- Policy should focus on improving occupational mobility as a part of its education and crisis response plans. Allocation of funds needs to come with administrative re-structuring. For example, one of the key issues sustaining the cycle of poverty is selective provision of employment opportunities by the state. Seats for government jobs are allocated at a regional level, which means that these small administrative units must compete with bigger cosmopolitan cities. In a region where access to college level education is not available there is no true opportunity for the young people to get into good professions and resultantly, improve the condition of their region.
- Finally, policymakers must utilise enablers to education identified through this research (supportive males, advocacy from teachers and the aspirations of students) and should make efforts to maintain the relationships with community. Building their feedback into policy reform systems would also be essential.

Policy needs to consider girls along with the economic and socio-cultural constraints as well as viewing conditions as opportunities for reconstruction. The conditions are unjust, and ultimately it is the responsibility of the state and society to provide equal opportunities to them regardless of their gender and location. However, it is also important to channel efforts in imagining alternative ways informed by the experiences of girls and their communities, to understand aspirations for alternative and better futures.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Aditi Chidambaram: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Aliya Khalid:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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