



# Working Towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Human Rights and Gender Equality for Women in Pakistan

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## Abstract

Despite the nation's multiple international commitments to women's human rights, Pakistan's ranking for gender equality is one of the lowest in the world. The World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Pakistan 153 out of 156 countries based on factors such as economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (WEF, 2021). Pakistan's constitution grants women and men equal rights. However, since the nation's independence in 1948, the country has witnessed radical shifts in power and new laws have been created that both help and hinder women's progress. The most prominent anti-female laws that continue to exist are the Hudood Ordinances, that were established in 1979 and then assimilated into the Pakistan Penal Code in 1997. While the laws in Pakistan continue to be problematic, there are also other factors that further exacerbate women's rights because the nation is a parochial, male-dominated society. Male tribal councils, for example, ordain their own justice system within specific regions of Pakistan. In a country where custom, law, and religion are intertwined, it is these same principles that are used to limit women's rights. The purpose of this research is three-fold: first, to provide a brief background of how conflicting laws regulating women came into existence; second, to demonstrate how incompatible societal norms, socio-political exclusion, and radicalized Islam led to women being disenfranchised; and lastly, to argue for solutions. With gender equality and women's empowerment being at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, how will Pakistan achieve its goals of providing a more enabling environment for women for decent work, income security, and socio-economic development? What is the nation's gender responsive plans and policies? How can Pakistan nurture an environment for women that is free from violence, and how can essential services be accessible to all women? Recent book publications, journal articles, and news articles will be used as data resources. This research contributes to the field of women's ongoing struggle for human rights and equality in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, human rights, sustainable development