

Beyond the State: Evaluating the Impact of Women's Peace Networks in Pakistan–India Track-II Engagements

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ABSTRACT

Since traditional state-centric (Track-I) diplomacy Consistently fails to resolve long-standing territorial disputes and nuclear tensions, the ongoing animosity between India and Pakistan continues to be a major obstacle to South Asian stability. The underused potential of civil society is the analytical emphasis of this study, which focuses on the effects of women-led Track-II diplomacy. The study, which is based on feminist international relations theory, questions traditional, male-dominated security narratives by emphasizing how women put social justice, empathy, and human security ahead of military supremacy.

The study assesses how these networks preserve communication amid political crises and foster informal cross-border trust using a qualitative secondary analysis of key academic publications from 2010 to 2025. Important conclusions show that women's networks promote peace both directly through trust-building and local mediations and indirectly by humanizing the "enemy" and reframing peace as an issue of daily safety rather than merely territorial control.

Significant operational limitations are identified by the research, nevertheless, such as reliance on erratic foreign finance, a lack of institutional recognition, and systemic gender inequality that confines women to advisory rather than decision-making roles. The study concludes that in order to meet the strategic requirement of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, women's roles must be institutionalized and included into official policy frameworks.

Keywords: WPS, Track-2 Diplomacy, Cross-boarder trust, Feminist International Relations theory.

INTRODUCTION

The complex and hostile relationship between India and Pakistan remains the single greatest hindrance to stability and prosperity in South Asia. The state-centric strategy (Track-I diplomacy), characterized by historical division, ongoing territorial disputes most notably over Jammu and Kashmir and the menacing threat of nuclear deterrent, has continuously failed to bring about lasting peace. Terrorist attacks, militaristic occurrences, and internal political cycles have all been known to easily disrupt official discourse. This persistent impasse necessitates a change in analytical emphasis from conventional state actors to the crucial, underutilized potential of civil society. A significant shift in research focus is required to address this persistent impasse: going "Beyond the State" to investigate the potential and strength of civil society involvement, particularly in the non-governmental realm of Track-II diplomacy. Track-II is more than just

a backup plan; it's a testing ground for social and intellectual innovation where challenging discussions can take place without the immediate diplomatic cost, setting the stage for future official breakthroughs.

Women's Peace Networks play a crucial role in this unofficial setting. Women in Pakistan and India, who have historically been excluded from official peace procedures, have banded together across borders to create dynamic networks that question conventional ideas of security and conflict resolution. By emphasizing the human cost of the conflict and promoting inclusive, grassroots solutions that go beyond geography and military might, these networks offer distinctive, gender-sensitive viewpoints.

Objective of research

1. **Assess Track-II Impact:** Determine how well Women's Networks are able to foster informal cross-border trust and sustain communication.
2. **To Determine and Examine Operational Restrictions:** To determine and evaluate the main political, structural, logistical (such as censorship, visa restrictions, and hyper-nationalist media), and resource-based obstacles and limitations that restrict the scope, durability, and final impact of women-led Track-II initiatives.
3. **To Create Policy Suggestions for the Execution of WPS:** To create evidence-based policy recommendations for governmental and non-governmental stakeholders regarding how to better support, integrate, and resource women's peace networks in order to more successfully apply the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda's (UNSCR 1325) tenets in the context of South Asian conflict resolution.

Research Question

1. How do women's peace networks function in Pakistan-Indian Track-II diplomacy?

Significance of the Study

The majority of research on India-Pakistan relations concentrates on war or state-to-state diplomacy. This study offers a novel viewpoint on non-state actors, particularly women-led peace networks. emphasizes how women may be change agents who advance harmony and peace and to dispel the myth that women are passive in disputes by demonstrating how they actively promote intercultural understanding.

Lessons from India and Pakistan Women-led peace networks in other regions, such the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America, can benefit from Track-II collaborations and most importantly this research can be used by policymakers to ensure more inclusive methods by institutionalizing women's participation in peace negotiations.

Theoretical perspective

This paper examines the role of women in Track 2 diplomacy between Pakistan and India using feminist theory as a framework. Traditional, state-centered methods to diplomacy are criticized by feminist theory in international relations because they frequently undervalue the contributions of women and ignore the gendered aspects of conflict and peacebuilding (Enloe, 2000). Feminist theory enables an examination of how women negotiate, impact, and change unofficial peace initiatives by highlighting the social construction of power, security, and diplomacy.

Women can exert agency outside of traditional political systems through Track 2 diplomacy, which is defined by casual conversations, confidence-boosting initiatives, and people-to-people interaction. According to feminist viewpoints, women provide distinctive ways to conflict resolution that are based on cooperation, empathy, and inclusivity qualities that are sometimes underappreciated in conventional male-dominated diplomacy. Therefore, this study investigates how women's involvement in Track 2 discussions helps to reshape narratives, foster trust, and advance long-term peace between the two nations.

The study aims to examine how women's participation in Indo-Pak Track 2 diplomacy might change peacebuilding practices, as well as the difficulties and tactics they face. By emphasizing gender, the study advances our knowledge of how informal diplomacy can benefit from a variety of viewpoints and eventually promote long-term collaboration between traditionally hostile states.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An arms race has been sparked by the tense political relationship between India and Pakistan, which is marked by tensions, disputes, and a pervasive sense of mistrust and terror. This relationship has also impeded the socioeconomic progress of both nations. Since their post-independence era, these two longstanding enemies have been at the center of the conflict; the Kashmir dispute is the longest-standing issue that has sparked numerous conflicts. (Malik) Non-official diplomacy, particularly Track II, has emerged as a tension-reduction and conflict-management tool due to the failure of official, or Track I, diplomatic channels to reach a long-term settlement. (Malik)

The role of track 2 diplomacy and civil society

Track II diplomacy is characterized as policy-related, problem-solving discussions with civil society participants. By encouraging communication and understanding between communities, it is a vital, transformative endeavor to promote peace. (A.Wizarat, 2014)

Function and Significance

- **Bridging the Divide:** Civil society promotes ongoing communication, which is crucial for lowering tensions and fostering trust, particularly during a difficult time in the political relationship. (Kumar, 2024)
- **Sustaining Communication:** Track II is essential for enhancing the environment and maintaining lines of communication, especially when official connections are cut off, as was the case following the 2008 Mumbai attack. (Malik)
- **Key Stages:** Socialization, Filtration, Transmission, and Implementation are the four main stages that make up Track II. In the South Asian context, the socialization process which entails meetings and interactions between non-official actors from both sides is thought to be the most effective. (A.Wizarat, 2014).

Organizations and Initiatives

To reduce tensions, civil society organizations (CSOs) have implemented a number of programs, such as trade shows, cultural events, and interpersonal interactions. Among the well-known unofficial projects and groups are:

- **The Pakistan-India Peoples Forum for Peace & Development (PIPPFD)** is concerned with matters like denuclearization, religious tolerance, democracy, and Jammu & Kashmir. (Kumar, 2024)
- **Aman Ki Asha (AKA):** The Times of India and Jang Group launched this program in 2010 with the goal of fostering interpersonal relationships and uniting corporate groups. (Kumar, 2024)

Role of women in peacebuilding

Women are often at the vanguard of international peace initiatives; this is also the case in India and Pakistan, where their participation in Track II discussions has been vital. (Sarwar, 2007)

The Agenda for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

- In Pakistan, women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict and crises. Based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) paradigm is thought to be crucial for: (Faraz, 2017)
 - Increasing the involvement of women in peace and security decision-making at all levels.
 - Reconstructing after a war from a gender standpoint.
 - Making sure women and girls are better protected both during and after conflicts (Faraz, 2017)
- In order to implement the WPS agenda in Pakistan, women-led local initiatives must be actively supported, and gender norms that limit women's meaningful involvement in public spaces must be challenged.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research design is qualitative grounded in constructive paradigms examines how Women peace networks fosters track 2 engagement. This Secondary analysis prioritize peer-reviewed articles for depth on themes diplomacy and conflict transformation in India-Pakistan relations.

Literature was sourced from Google Scholar Using targeted keywords, "Women peace network Pakistan and India. Peer reviewed articles from 2010-2025.

Sampling

250 articles were screened for relevance by title and abstract using purposeful sampling, and 35 full-texts were chosen based on two criteria:

1. A direct reference to the Women Peace Network or similar organizations.
2. An emphasis on Pakistan-India Track 2 procedures.
3. Qualitative impact evidence (such as case studies and narratives); eliminating non-academic or pre-2010 sources. After full-text review, this produced a targeted corpus of 25 core articles.

LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL ISSUES

In accordance with institutional review exemptions for secondary analysis, no primary data included human participants. Reliance on published works (possible publication bias) and English-only sources are limitations.

FINDINGS

Pakistani-Indian women's peace networks Operating outside of official channels, Track-II diplomacy has maintained crucial interpersonal conversations that humanize enemies, promote trust in the face of official rivals, and address common concerns like gender-based violence, nuclear threats, and Kashmir. (Christine, 2020) These grassroots initiatives, such as the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD), which has been in place since 1994, and symbolic events like the 2000 women's peace bus, show how important women were in reducing tensions following the attacks in Mumbai and Kargil. (Sarwar, 2007) Crucially, even if these networks gain traction through joint Declarations and cultural exchanges, their power diminishes in the absence of resources, official commitment, or visa reforms, frequently turning them into symbolic, reactive actions susceptible to political upheavals. (Christine, 2020)

Historical context

Partition's 1947 mass migrations, 1.5–2 million deaths, and the abduction of 75,000 women are the root causes of tensions between Pakistan and India. They also drive religious "othering" and disputes over Kashmir, Siachen, and Bangladesh's 1971 creation. (Christine, 2020) Stereotypes about violence are reinforced by the media and textbooks, and Track-II is forced to rely on third-country meetings or infrequent border events due to visa limitations and intelligence harassment. The 1980s saw the emergence of women's networks through artists like Salima Hashmi's exhibitions and Shirkat Gah's environmental connections, which accelerated the post-1998 nuclear tests into PIPFPD's annual demilitarization gatherings of hundreds of people. (Christine, 2020)

Key Achievement

In 2004, Pakistanis graciously welcomed Indian cricket fans, and despite "un-Islamic" backlash peace buses traded bangles as symbols of togetherness. Women's efforts humanized "enemies" through face-to-face conversations, challenging preconceptions. Track-II supplemented Track-I by creating consensus on de-nuclearization and exerting pressure on leaders (e.g., Musharraf met Indian delegates), while cultural activities such as the adaptations of *Lysistrata* by Ajoka Theatre amplified peace narratives. (Christine, 2020)

Pakistani-Indian women organized local mediations in Liberia-inspired formats, influencing larger South Asian initiatives and maintaining discussions after the 2019 Kashmir reforms. (Singh, 2025)

Without governmental support, Track-II women's efforts falter, failing to settle fundamental issues like Kashmir and acting as no substitute for official diplomacy. (Christine, 2020) There are also coordination gaps, and networks require further regional support to combat the "otherization" and repression of women during wars. (Sarwar, 2007) Terrorist attacks and other outside events repeatedly halted progress, exposing weaknesses and a limited impact on policy. (Singh, 2025)

Linking grassroots initiatives to parliamentary caucuses and media training for broader amplification is necessary to improve women's Track-II roles. (Franklin, 2012) Regional Coalition such as Women for

Peace in South Asia, could prioritize both interstate peace and domestic violence in order to increase interpersonal interactions. (Atchaya, 2023) Critics argue that in order to challenge male-dominated narratives and empower women as policy influencers, symbolic gestures should be abandoned. (aid, 2022)

DISCUSSION

Direct and Indirect Contributions to Peace

Women are taking part in something called Track-II diplomacy. It is becoming really important for building peace. This is especially true for conflicts that have been going on for a time and are very sensitive. Track-II diplomacy is different from Track-I diplomacy. Track-I diplomacy is when official people from the government talk to each other. Track-II diplomacy is when people from organizations, schools, women groups and local peace groups talk to each other. (Montville, 1991) Women participation in Track-II diplomacy is making a difference, in peace-building. Women are working with Track-II diplomacy to make peace in places (Nan, 2003) Women engagement in these areas can make a difference in a ways. It can help bring peace also indirectly. Women engagement does this at stages of a conflict. Women engagement is important, for peace because it works at levels.

Direct contributions from women are things that we can actually see, like helping to stop fighting, building trust getting help to people who need it or making sure that peace agreements consider the needs of women. Women who work on Track-II initiatives often help to bring people facilitate talks or communicate between groups that are in conflict especially when official channels are not working. Because women can work with people, from backgrounds, cultures and beliefs they are able to start conversations that official leaders cannot. Women-led peace forums are really good at keeping people talking when things get stuck. This helps stop things from getting worse and makes sure that the people on sides do not completely stop trusting each other. Women-led peace forums play a role in this. They help keep the conversation going when it's hard to agree on things. This is important for women-led peace forums because they can prevent a lot of problems. Women-led peace forums are very important, for peace.

Women's contributions to peace may not always be obvious. They can have a really big impact in the long run. This is because they do things like help ideas and values spread change the way people think about things bring people together and make the other side seem human. Women's groups often think of peace as more than not being at war. They think it is about being fair having money to live and being treated with respect. When women talk to each other and work together they help change the way people think about peace. They move the conversation away from fighting and winning and, towards what peace means to people who are affected by conflict. Women who do this kind of work called Track-II diplomacy are helping to redefine what peace means in places where there is conflict. This change in the way people talk about things is really important for getting societies ready for making amends and having peace that lasts. The discursive shift is what helps people move forward. It is very important for reconciliation and sustainable peace. The discursive shift is key, to making sure that people can live in peace for a time.

Women make a difference in their communities. They help people think differently about peace. Women do this by teaching people speaking up and getting people involved. They take ideas about peace and make them mean something to people where they live. This way people in the community feel like they own the ideas about peace. It makes the ideas stronger. When only important people make decisions about peace it can be hard for others to care about it. Women help make sure that everyone feels like they are a part of making peace happen. Women work in their communities is very important, for making peace.

Sustainability of Women's Networks in Influencing Policy

The effect of women Track-II diplomacy is clear to see.. People still have questions about whether women networks can really last and if they can actually make a difference in the policies that get made. When we talk about women networks being sustainable we are talking about more than how long they can keep going. We are also talking about whether they can stay important and keep getting the resources and access they need to be heard by the people who make the decisions over time. Women networks need to be able to keep doing what they do and stay relevant, to women Track-II diplomacy (Montville, 1991)

Women's peace networks face a problem. They rely on money from sources, like international donors. These donors often change what they want to focus on. The money from donors has helped many women start their projects.. It has also made women's peace networks vulnerable. When the money runs out or the donors interests change many of these networks have a time staying alive. This means that the work they do to bring about peace is not continuous. Women's peace networks are then not able to remember what they did before. They have less influence, on what policies are made in the long run. Women peace networks have to deal with this issue of depending on funding.

Another thing that gets in the way is that Track-II diplomacy is pretty casual. This casual approach gives people the freedom to try things and be flexible but it also means that Track-II diplomacy does not get recognized by institutions. Women networks usually do not have a way to share their ideas with the people who make the official policies, which is what we call Track-I processes. Because of this the suggestions that women's networks make might not be taken seriously. Put into action. This shows that there is a gap between the informal talks and the official decision making and this gap is a major obstacle that reduces the long term effects of what women are doing in Track-II diplomacy specifically in women's networks and their impact, on Track-II diplomacy and women's impact.(Saunders, 2001)

Women's networks have done a job of keeping things going even when things get tough. They have set up groups in regions and formed alliances with other organizations across borders. These women networks also work with universities and places that make policies. This helps them seem trustworthy and keeps things going even when a particular project ends or a leader moves on. The internet and other digital tools have also helped women's networks reach people and last longer even in places where the government is not very supportive of what they do. Women's networks are really good, at using these tools to keep people involved over a period of time.

The sustainability of women's policy influence also depends on how women can work with the political systems that are mostly controlled by men. In a lot of places where there is conflict, women's ideas for peace are not taken seriously. Are only included to make it look like they are being heard. To change this women need to work with men who can help them the media and the people in charge of politics. They also need to show that women being part of the decision making process is not just the thing to do but it is actually necessary for making peace work. Women's participation is necessary, for peace-building. Women's policy influence is important. Women need to be taken seriously.

Assessing Overall Impact

To really understand how women Track-II diplomacy is working we need to look at the picture. We cannot just focus on things, like whether policies being adopted right away or if women are being included in official talks. We should be looking at how things are changing in a deeper way. This means thinking about how women's diplomacy's changing the way people think and feel about things how it is helping people work together and get through tough times and how it is changing the way conflicts are handled. Women's

groups may not always get results but they are often doing important work that will help bring peace in the long run. They are changing peoples minds, building trust and keeping conversations going even when things are really tough. Women's Track-II diplomacy is doing this by reshaping attitudes building trust and keeping dialogue going during times, which is really important for women's Track-II diplomacy to be successful.

In sum, women's contributions to peace through Track-II diplomacy are both direct and indirect, immediate and long-term, visible and invisible. Their impact, while constrained by structural and institutional barriers, remains indispensable to sustainable peace. Recognizing and strengthening this impact requires not only acknowledgment but also concrete mechanisms to ensure continuity, legitimacy, and policy relevance.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at the role of women's peace networks in Pakistan and India when it comes to talks between the two countries. It goes beyond just looking at what the governments do. Shows how important women are in helping to resolve conflicts. The study uses an approach to analyze things and it shows that women who take part in these informal talks are not just there to make up numbers they actually make a real difference to achieving peace keeping dialogue going and changing the way people think about things in a region where Pakistan and India have been rivals for a long time. Womens peace networks are really important in Pakistan and India. (Kapur, 2017) They play a big part, in peacebuilding and dialogue sustainability.

The research shows that womens peace networks work in two ways to make peace happen. Women are part of talks they help build trust they meet with people from the other side and they speak up at meetings to keep the conversation going even when things are not going well between countries.

In the case of Pakistan and India where official talks often stop because of problems women have started their own discussions, known as Track-II initiatives, which have been very important in keeping the conversation going and making sure that the two countries do not completely stop talking to each other. Womens peace networks are really important here. Womens peace networks help to prevent problems, between Pakistan and India. These efforts help to reduce ideas encourage people to be careful and promote people getting along at the societal level. These efforts are about making people understand each other better at the level. They help to reduce ideas, about the societal level.

Womens peace networks help bring about peace in a way. They do this by changing the way people think about things spreading ideas and bringing people together. When you look at things from a point of view you can see that women often think about peace as being about keeping people safe rather than just about controlling land or having a strong military. Womens peace networks talk about things like how war affects people, fairness and the safety of everyday life. This challenges the way of thinking about Pakistan-India relations, which has usually been about military power. Womens peace networks are important because they give a perspective on peace one that focuses on human security and social justice rather, than just territorial or military dominance. This change in the way people think about things does not mean that policies will change away. Over time it changes the way people talk about things and what important people think, which makes it easier for people to get along and for conflicts to really end. The reframing makes a difference because it helps to create a way of thinking that is more open to reconciliation and long-term conflict transformation. This is what the reframing is about it is, about changing the way we think about conflicts and reconciliation.

This research is important because it looks at feminist international relations theory. This theory helps us understand how power works outside of groups. Most of the time traditional international relations theories do not think about diplomacy and the role of women. They mostly focus on the power of countries and how strong they are.

Feminist international relations theory is different. It shows that the relationships between people and how they feel are parts of diplomacy. It also says that what people experience in their lives matters.

The research uses feminist international relations theory to understand diplomacy in a way. Feminist international relations theory looks at how power's used in personal relationships and how people take care of each other. It also looks at what happens to people, in their lives and how that affects diplomacy. This is a way of thinking about international relations and it helps us understand how power works in the world. When you look at things this way womens peace networks are people who make things happen. They do this by building trust and being kind, to others. They also have a sense of what is right and wrong. Womens peace networks do not force people to do things or have a say in what happens. Instead they use trust and kindness to get things done. Womens peace networks are important because they can make a difference.

Feminism and Track-II diplomacy go together in a way that shows the problems with how countries try to make peace. When women get involved in talks between countries it makes us question if countries should be the only ones making decisions about peace. This research shows that people who are not part of the government women have a special connection to communities and groups that countries often cannot connect with. Women have a way to reach people and groups across borders that countries do not have. Feminism and Track-II diplomacy are important because they show that women can play a role, in making peace even if they are not part of the government. As such, women's Track-II diplomacy complements rather than competes with Track-I processes, filling critical gaps left by official negotiations.

The women peace networks do a lot of things.. There are also some big problems that get in the way of these networks working really well and lasting for a long time. Women are not treated equally in politics and government. This means that what women have to say is often ignored. They are usually only asked for advice. Do not get to make important decisions. Womens peace initiatives also have a time because they do not have enough money. They have to rely on donations and sometimes face backlash. This is especially true in places like the area, between Pakistan and India where security's a big concern. Womens peace networks face these problems. It is hard for them to make a real difference. These problems show that there is still a difference between what countries agree to do internationally like the Women, Peace and Security agenda and what actually happens in different regions and, between countries. The Women, Peace and Security agenda (UN Women, 2015)is not being put into practice like it should be. This is an issue because the Women, Peace and Security agenda is very important.

The study shows that womens Track-II networks are really good at dealing with problems and changing when they need to. But for womens Track-II networks to really make a difference in the run they need help from institutions and they need to be part of the big picture policy.

If there are no ways to connect the ideas from women's Track-II networks to the actual negotiations, in Track-I then the things women contribute will not be taken seriously.

This is why we need to have policies that make sure women are actually part of the decision making process not there to make it look good. Women Track-II networks need to be taken and their ideas need to be used to make real changes. Feminist peace-building is not about getting rid of the systems we have in place for making peace. It is about changing these systems so they include everyone represent all people and do what

society needs. Feminist peace building is really, about making these systems better so they work for everyone.

When it comes to making policies that work this research has some things to say to governments groups that work with many countries and other international players who are trying to help bring peace. If we really want to hear what women have to say in peace talks we need to do more than just say the right words. We need to make some changes to how things are structured help people get the skills they need and keep pushing for peace over time. People who make policies need to see networks of women who work for peace as important not just something extra. This is especially true, in areas where there is a lot of conflict and people do not trust each other and where nationalist ideas are very strong. Women who work for peace are doing work and we should recognize this.

The study helps us learn more about peace in South Asia. There is a gap in what we know about this topic. Other people have studied Track-II diplomacy and gender. Not really how they work together in the case of Pakistan and India. This research looks at how women groups work for peace. It adds to what we know about women roles in relations and how people who are not part of the government can help make peace in long-lasting conflicts. The study of women peace networks is important for understanding peace, in South Asia. It helps us learn more about South Asian peace building.

This study has some problems. It uses information from people and a few examples. This means the results may not be true for every situation. Also it was hard to get some information because of politics and secrets about private meetings between countries. To make the study better people could use methods to gather information look at other places, with conflicts or see how women private meetings affect policy over time. They could look at how women Track-II initiatives work and how they affect policy. Women Track-II initiatives are important and more research is needed to understand them.

So to sum it up Pakistan-India relations will not have peace if we only focus on what the government and military do. Women peace networks are really important because they use Track-II diplomacy to talk to each other and build trust. This helps to change conflicts in a way. The ideas of women, which are based on feminist theory show us that there are ways to make peace besides what we usually think. Women peace networks and feminist theory help us see that peace is not just about what men in power do but about what women can do to make Pakistan-India relations better. Women peace networks are a part of making peace, in Pakistan-India relations. Recognizing, supporting, and institutionalizing women's roles in peace processes is not merely a matter of gender equality it is a strategic necessity for durable and inclusive peace.

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