



Peace, Justice and Female Leadership: A Case Study of Pakistan's Progress toward SDG 16

Zeenat Rana¹, Abdul Qadir Mushtaq², Zarqa Mumtaz³

¹PhD Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies Government College University Faisalabad

Email: ranazeenat1223@gmail.com

²Professor, Chairman Department of Pakistan Studies, GC University Faisalabad,

Email: progcu@gmail.com

³M.Phil Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies Government College University Faisalabad

Email: ranazarqa4@gmail.com

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Keywords: Transformative Feminist Leadership, Sdg 16, Ethical Governance, Women Leaders, Pakistan, Peacebuilding, Institutional Reform.</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Abdul Qadir Mushtaq, Professor, Chairman Department of Pakistan Studies, GC University Faisalabad, Email: progcu@gmail.com</p> | <p>This research discussed the transformed leadership of women on the peace and development structures in Pakistan especially within the area of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This study aimed to investigate how women leaders in the public institutions, NGOs and peace councils go through institutional, cultural, and structural obstacles to establish ethical governance. Using the Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory, the study rationalized leadership as an ethical, collaborative, and justice oriented process that challenges the hierarchy of patriarchy and embraces institutional change. A qualitative case study design was utilized. The semi-structured interviews conducted with thirty participants selected by means of purposive sampling comprised female deans, directors, NGO leaders, and members of peace councils. Data were interpreted through the framework of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) through interpretations of women about leadership, barriers, and ethical practices. The results indicate that the role of women in governance is still limited by patriarchal institutions and bureaucracies as well as cultural limitations, in every case, female leaders depend on transformational and ethical leadership styles based on empathy, dialogues, and moral justification. The women are tactical, as they redefine gender equality to be about fairness and merit and call upon culturally-grounded discourses as the Islamic teachings to legitimize their power and achieve the peace agenda. This study contributed to the literature through the association between gender, peacebuilding and institutional accountability to transformative feminist leadership. It brings to the fore the reality that women empowerment in politics is not only a gender equity concern, but also a structural provision that is required to enable ethical and sustainable development in Pakistan. The implication of the policies deals with empowering females to make</p> |

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| | decisions, institutionalizing cultures and creating gender sensitive governance in policymaking are the promotion of peace and justice. |
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Introduction

The involvement of women in peacebuilding and governance has become a crucial aspect of sustainable development and institutional change all over the world. Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) of the United Nations focuses on the importance of establishing peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions, whereby the effects of equal participation in decision-making processes are effective (United Nations, 2015). Pakistan, however, the leaders and women still face strong structural and cultural obstacles that limit her access to power and influence politics in peace and development institutions (Ismaeel, 2024; Nash et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the female leaders in government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and peace councils are proving to be new models of leadership that lead to transparency, empathy, and social harmony during governance (Franco & Derbyshire, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2025).

Women still struggle to get access to the decision-making spaces because of patriarchal norms, bureaucratic hierarchies, and gender bias in the institutional cultures (Moazzam, 2024; Sadaf, 2025). Despite women having high leadership positions, the final decisions are usually made by men in high positions, which is evidence of gender asymmetry in the framework of governance (Singh and Singh, 2024). These obstacles restrict the attainment of the SDG 16 objectives of inclusive and accountable institutions. However, a good number of women have reacted using adaptive and ethical leadership strategies and have undertaken the task of promoting peace and justice agendas based on collaboration, dialogue, and moral reasoning (Nash et al., 2025; Munandar, 2025).

The Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory can be applied as an effective way to comprehend how these women address power inequalities and rethink leadership as service, ethics, and inclusiveness (Amanuma et al., 2023). The theory brings out the point that the actual change in leadership will occur when the women leaders can not only achieve a position of formal power but also change the institutional cultures through empathy, fairness and moral uprightness. Within the context of Pakistan, this kind of leadership has been crucial in the areas of conflict mediation and peacebuilding, community involvement as the key features of sustainable governance (Ismaeel, 2024).

The paper, therefore, will examine the experiences of Pakistani peace and development councils, which are filled by women in order to understand how they handle institutional, cultural, and structural problems; embrace transformative leadership practices; and implement peace, justice, and accountability in the context of SDG 16. The comparison of the voices and strategies demonstrates that women leadership might be employed in the facilitation of ethical governance and inclusive and inclusive peace in the socio-political sphere in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Corruption, poor governance and poor institutional transparency is yet another issue that Pakistan has tried hard to overcome in its quest to attain Sustainability Development Goal 16 peace, justice and strong institutions. Even though women constitute close to fifty percent of the population, their representation in leadership roles is minimal and a mere symbol, as opposed to the influential. Women in leadership positions in the government and at the universities have long standing cultural and structural impediments that inhibit their capacity to foster equity, accountability, and sound judgment. Although the world research demonstrates that female leadership brings about peace and inclusive leadership (Franco and Derbyshire, 2019; Nash et al., 2025), few Pakistani studies provide explanations of the actual

impact of women leaders on institutional reform and justice. This gap creates the necessity to study the lived experiences, their leadership styles, and transformational influence of the female leaders in the Pakistani institutions to learn how their leadership can contribute to the SDG 16 goals.

Significance of the Study

The paper is significant because it demonstrates how female leaders can assist in changing the existing state of affairs of peace, justice and accountability in Pakistan governance and development systems. The study provides valuable information regarding the way in which women navigate the hierarchical system, make ethical choices, and initiate an inclusive decision-making procedure through the prism of SDG 16, based on the experience of the female representatives of the peace and development councils. It belongs to the scholarly and policy debate since it proves that not only gender equality but the need to empower women in the position of leadership is required to establish transparent, just, and peaceful institutions. The findings can inform policy makers, nongovernmental organizations, and development practitioners to come up with gender sensitive leadership interventions and institutional changes that will enhance women representation in the peacebuilding and governance process.

Research Questions

1. What institutional, cultural, and structural barriers affect women's ability to exercise transformative leadership within governance and development settings in Pakistan?
2. In what ways do female leaders use transformative and ethical leadership strategies to overcome gender-based challenges and foster inclusive governance and peace?
3. How do women leaders in public institutions, NGOs, and peace councils contribute to promoting peace, justice, and institutional accountability in Pakistan within the framework of SDG 16?

Literature Review

The United Nations sustainable development goal 16 (SDG 16) is focused on peace, justice, and strong institutions. They are a vision of equitable governance and social prosperity that relies on moral and inclusive leadership. It is accepted by various researchers that the leadership of women can actually change the world as they tend to incorporate empathy, sincerity, and collaboration into the government (Nash, Pereira, Smout, Satija, and Ghosh, 2025; Franco and Derbyshire, 2019). Nevertheless, the experience of the world and countries demonstrates that having women in top positions is not sufficient but that the institutions should provide them with power and resources (Haack, 2022; Gysman, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory

Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory is the most appropriate to be used to form the basis of this research on peace, justice, and female leadership in the development of the SDG 16 in Pakistan. The theory describes how women in high positions can disrupt the inequitable systems as well as establish institutions founded on fairness, empathy, and general development (Nash, Pereira, Smout, Satija, and Ghosh, 2025). It does not see leadership as control or authority but as an act of transformation not only in the leaders themselves but in the institutions also that they transform.

Throughout history, the culture of leadership has been patriarchal and dominated Pakistan, where dominance is a norm, hierarchy, and exclusion are favored. Women taking up leadership have been met with resistance, lack of recognition and institutional bias (Moazzam, 2024; Sadaf, 2025). The systems are directly challenged by Transformative Feminist Leadership. It demands a participative leadership style as opposed to a competitive one and a moral leadership approach as opposed to a political one. This strategy is suitable to the objectives of SDG 16 that aims at peaceful, inclusive, and accountable institutions.

Transformative leadership would empower women to make a difference in governance through the promotion of peace and equality by emphasizing on shared decision-making and justice.

Nash et al. (2025) highlight that transformative feminist leaders rely on empathy, care, and a discussion as the means of overcoming the conflict situation and establishing trust in the institution. These principles are of vital importance in the context of Pakistan, where the institutions of a society are usually marred by corruption and mistrust (Hanif and Hanif, 2024; Kazma Baqi, 2024). Women executives who utilize the principles would be helpful to restore confidence and enhance societal peace. This renders the theory relevant but practical in resolving the institutional predicaments of Pakistan.

Structural change is also linked with personal empowerment in the theory. It values that women can be leaders who bring a difference in their organizations in changing the organizational cultures and policies but not the number of women in leadership. Haack (2022) shares this idea, finding out that women in international organizations like the UN do not literally have a voice in the majority of situations unless the systematic obstacles are addressed. Transformative Feminist Leadership does not just end at visibility hence it attempts to show some form of change in the power dynamics that propagate injustice.

This theory has identified that women heads in higher education and governance can be drivers of change in the case of Pakistan. They are able to facilitate a transition between symbolic inclusion and effective change by the use of inclusive decision making, mentor as well as ethical leadership. What SDG 16 needs is their leadership; participative justice, peace based on fairness and institutions which equally cater to all citizens.

Concisely, the theory that would be most suited in this study is Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory because it is associated to gender, justice, and institution reform. It provides a certain insight into the way female leaders can do not merely create better institutions but also more equal societies.

Global and Regional Perspectives

Women leaders have been discovered to influence positively in the governance system across the world. Literature shows that women leaders use the dialogue and collaboration to reduce conflicts and maximize justice (Nash et al., 2025). Women involvement in politics has enhanced democracy, social peace and stability of the communities in countries such as Namibia and Indonesia (Tibinyane & Nakuta, 2025; Munandar, 2025). The same trends are followed in Asia or the Pacific, where women transformational leadership contributes to social inclusion and institutional change (ESCAP & WHO, 2019). The results are highlighted by the fact that the role of women in decision making extends beyond the gender representation to alter the quality of leadership itself.

Nonetheless, the development of the world is unequal. As Haack (2022) demonstrates, although females are in the top ranks, as in the United Nations system, their ability to impact policy change through structural power remains limited due to their powerlessness to overcome institutional inertia. It implies that figures are not enough to guarantee real change. It is important to have meaningful participation and institutional trust. Amanuma, Zusman, and Langlet (2023) also affirm that the more women one has in the legislatures, the more accountable and inclusive the governance is, however, they caution that the representation must be accompanied by institutional change. The lessons can be applied to Pakistan, where symbolic inclusion tends to substitute the actual empowerment.

Governance, Gender, and Institutional Strength

Peace and justice in governance are based on ethics, fairness and transparency (Agarwal, Jain, and Verma, n.d.). But in most developing societies, all these principles are compromised by corruption and poor accountability. According to the South Asia studies, gender inclusion and reforms in governance are two inseparable concepts (Azmat & Zafarullah, 2024). It goes on

to argue that the institutions are incomplete unless the women actively participate in them and are in a position to portray the ideals of equality and justice. In this regard, female leadership is not an incidental matter but an institutional requirement towards accomplishing SDG 16. According to Franco and Derbyshire (2019), women leaders present an untapped potential of sustainable peace since they transform the process of decision-making, namely, in the aspect of fairness, empathic, and long-term thinking. Equally, Goetz and Jenkins (2016) demonstrate that the gender-sensitive governance increases public trust and inequality. Nevertheless, the voice of women in many societies is still symbolic and not substantive. According to Gysman (2018), the same trend is seen in Southern Africa whereby more women in parliaments did not necessarily lead to decision making power. It is a caution to Pakistan, in which quotas are in place, but in reality, power is frequently in the hands of men (Moazzam, 2024).

Women's Leadership and Institutional Barriers in Pakistan

Political instability and corruption coupled with poor institutional capacity has led to slow spread of SDG 16 in Pakistan (Hanif and Hanif, 2024; Kazma Baqi, 2024). Despite some of the reforms implemented in the country, e-government policies and women protection policies; gender discrimination still curtails the influence of women. The author argues that women are usually brought in the institutions of Pakistan as tokens; they are visible but not powerful (Moazzam, 2024). This undermines the connection between leadership and justice since women are unable to properly struggle against institutional bias.

Research indicates that when women are in charge, they are also more likely to enhance inclusiveness, equality and social trust (Nash et al., 2025; Amanuma et al., 2023). But these are the results of the larger institutional climate. Sadaf (2025) emphasizes that leadership by women is hard to exercise due to the patriarchal norms, lack of coordination, and gender-based violence. The same conclusions are drawn by Shah (2024), who believes that leadership in Pakistan should be founded on the community responsibility and the local culture. In the absence of such contextualization's, reforms in leadership are only superficial..

Institutional Reform and Ethical Leadership

The moral aspect of leadership is also pointed out in the literature. Servant and transformative leadership theories emphasize the importance of empathy, ethics, and concentrating on the community (Ahmad, Mustafa, and Nader, 2025; Nash et al., 2025). When women adopt such styles, they will be able to cultivate teamwork, minimize disagreement and enhance fairness in institutions. Ahmad et al. (2025) concluded that servant leadership improves the social justice and empowerment of women. This is in line with the ethos of SDG 16, which appreciates responsibility and justice.

Ethical leadership develops the trust of the population, which is the essential element of the Social Contract Theory (Singh and Singh, 2024). When individuals perceive their leaders as just and accountable, chances of them favoring institutions are increased. With trust destroyed by corruption and exclusion in the context of Pakistan, women leaders that exemplify ethical leadership will recover institutional legitimacy. Ismaeel (2024) reinforces it with the view that the subjects of women leadership are associated with Islamic values of peace, fairness, and the welfare of the community, proving the fact that the issue of gender-inclusive government is in agreement with local cultural and religious principles.

There are significant gaps in spite of the increasing awareness. The majority of the studies relate gender equality to SDG 5 and not SDG 16. There are limited literature that examines the experiences of women leaders in Pakistan in the context of influencing peace and justice in their institutions (Sadaf, 2025; Moazzam, 2024). Quantitative studies bring out correlations without going into the depth of how leadership styles affect the change of institutions. In the meantime, women are not a subject of much attention in qualitative works, particularly in how they live and cope in patriarchal conditions. This brings a strong necessity of localized and experience-driven research, particularly in the areas of the higher education where the

role of women in leading the higher education institutions can alter the culture of the institution.

It is agreed that the transformational leadership of women can occur with the presence of institutional change through the reviewed literature. However, there is also evidence that structural and cultural formlessness that risks to reduce women leaders to mere symbols is in existence. Pakistan not only has the problem of representation, but also redistribution and redefinition of power and leadership ethics. Study in the world and in the region indicates that it is possible when women are inclusive as well as transparent. Pakistan can also contribute towards this by transferring the same principles to its system of governance by empowering women not as a figure but as a decision maker who can aid in the creation of peace and justice within the nation.

Methodology

The study has a qualitative case study design where it examines the role of female leadership in peace, justice, and institutional development in Pakistan, especially in the context of SDG 16. The most appropriate method is qualitative since it will deal with real life situations, meanings, and views instead of figures and numbers. It gives us a better insight into the way women leaders interpret their positions, their choices, and how they change the institutional culture (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The case study is centered on the women leaders in the public sector universities and institutions or governance in Punjab in Pakistan. These institutions were chosen since they are both learning and administrative areas that leadership has a direct influence on fairness of the institution, its transparency, and peacebuilding.

In the study, purposive sampling will be used to select participants who have a considerable experience in leadership and can provide well-informed and detailed opinions. Out of them Female deans and directors of the universities of the public type, women, who have to work in the institution of the peace and governance, as well as in the NGOs specialized in the field of peace and governance, women who are the members of the peace or development councils will be interviewed approximately 30 people. The diversity of this group makes it possible to make institutional and community level comparisons. The sample is chosen in the way that all participants have their own experience of leadership problems, decision-making and transformation in institutions.

Data will be collected by use of semi structured interviews. It is an open-ended methodology providing leeway on posing open questions and encouraging the participants to share additional information about their leadership experience and challenges, as well as their contributions to peace and justice. The interviews will be grounded on four areas, which include Leadership practices and styles, Challenges faced within institutions, Perceptions of justice, fairness and inclusion as well as Contributions toward institutional transparency and peacebuilding. The interviews will be conducted on a consent basis, tape recorded, and transcribed to be analyzed. It will also be done through the analysis of documents to justify and demonstrate the results regarding the national SDG reporting, gender equality policies, and institutional frameworks (ESCAP & UNAIDS, 2024; Nyakwaka, 2021). This helps in increasing the validity of the research regarding the triangulation of the data.

Thematic analysis will be applied to the collected data and implemented in reference to the six-step model of the analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process will entail reading and familiarizing all the interview transcripts, creating initial codes based on notable patterns, clustering the created codes into overarching themes, revisiting and narrowing those themes, defining and naming the final themes, and Writing a coherent and interconnected narrative of results. This will facilitate the determination of how women leaders conceptualize their role in peace, justice and institutional development. It is anticipated that

the themes will be based on leadership styles, empowerment systems, institutional barriers, and contribution to ethical governance.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section, thematic analysis of the interviews with three groups of women leader's female deans and directors of the public universities, women employed in the public institutions and NGOs engaged in peace and governance, and women belonging to peace and development councils will be described. The analysis aims at examining the role of these women in ensuring peace, justice, and institutional accountability in connection with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. A qualitative method was applied to analyse the data to come up with recurring themes, sub-themes and meanings patterns which portray the experiences, challenges and strategies of women in leadership. All the tables outline major themes that are reinforced by summarized illustrative responses and discussed within the scope of SDG 16. This analytical framework, on the one hand, underlines the potential of women leadership to transform the situation; on the other hand, the institutional and cultural obstacles influencing their engagement in the process of governance and peacebuilding are also revealed.

Interviews with 10 Female Deans and Directors (Public Universities, Punjab) showed that women in all sectors encounter systematic gender barriers of patriarchal norms, institutional bias and social resistance. Academically, female deans reported having minimal decision making capacities: It is rare to make final decisions without involving male vice chancellors who are usually the deans. This reveals symbolic inclusion and not actual authority and goes to demonstrate that the institutional hierarchies remain dominated by structural patriarchy. Women also experience gender stereotyping in NGOs and in state institutions: "Women are to deal with soft projects, not with governance reforms. The role confinement undermines the strategic power of women in decision making. At peace councils, male domination and culture still reign: we are called to meetings, but key decisions are made by male chairpersons. In addition, security and mobility restrictions restrict their reach so their participation becomes more symbolic than substantive. These obstacles show that despite the obvious roles of women, institutional patriarchy often restricts their agency, which compromises the inclusivity and equality, which are core tenets of SDG 16.

Thematic analysis of the interviews with 10 Women Working in Public Institutions and NGOs concentrating on Peace and Governance showed that women adopt adaptive, culturally appropriate, and alliance-based approaches in negotiating patriarchal situations and remaining ethical at the same time. Gender advocacy in universities is congruent with moral reasoning in women, who say they view gender equality as equitable and meritocratic, not feministic. It is a strategic framing that enables them to implement reforms without opposition to it. Women also refer to peer mentorship and networking in NGOs and other public institutions: "Women with other NGOs mentor us on advocacy strategies. These non-official coalitions enhance agency and institutional capacity. Women receive legitimacy in peace councils by means of religious and moral discourses: I use Islamic teachings to justify why women must contribute towards preservation of peace. This acts as a cultural practiced methodology in bridging the gender gaps and maintaining peace. These approaches represent a transformative feminist leadership style, and change is achieved by working together, being understanding, and negotiating morality instead of fighting. These results can be discussed in connection with Ismaeel (2024) and Nash et al. (2025) who also pay attention to the efficiency of context-based, ethically-oriented leadership of women in the conservative society.

Interpretive analysis of interviews with 10 Female Members of Peace and Development Councils in each of the three groups, women leadership is discovered to be transformative, ethical and community-oriented and directly addresses the SDG 16 targets. In the case of universities, ethical and servant leadership are exemplified by female deans and directors

who facilitate justice and openness of communication. Indicatively, one of the deans stressed on leadership by stating that leadership is not about telling people what to do but serving them, indicating that she has a moral obligation to serve people through transparent leadership. Women are at the front in dialogue and participatory governance whereby the voice of communities is not left out in the institutions of publicity and NGOs. The director of an NGO said that we collaborate with communities not by directives but by engaging in dialogue, which is a democratic and interactive nature of SDG 16. Women are the local peacebuilders in peace and development councils, where they mediate local disputes and facilitate reconciliation in the community. One of the council members responded that she is the mediator between feuding families before the matters escalate into the police thus demonstrating the role of women in grassroots efforts of bringing harmony and justice to society. These two results combined indicate that women leaders are peacekeepers, transparency, and justice administrators, who use compassion and conversation to develop responsible institutions both at the institutional and community levels.

The Pakistani government structures, the non-governmental organizations and peace councils are overwhelmed with a high level of patriarchal barriers, which limit their leads and decision-making powers. The statistics reveal that even though the position of the women as the leaders, e.g. deans, directors, as well as council members, is real, their influence is not really heavy but in symbolic terms. One such instance is where female deans referred to the fact that in final decision making, it is the male chancellors who make the final decision which highlights male domination in managing institutions. On this point also, women working in NGOs have observed that they are only able to carry out soft community projects but not strategic reforms, which would remain the preserve of men. These are not personal biases but structural and part of the culture of a certain institution where the dominance of men is appreciated and the voice of the woman is oppressed. The women in peace and development councils noticed that the male chairpersons make major decisions and this is a pointer indicating that they are not part of policymaking. These issues are even worsened by cultural norms and demands, whereby lady leaders are generally treated with social suspicion, denied the freedom to move, and are not secure, especially in undertaking peace missions in the society. When put together, these institutional and cultural constraints are suggestive of a gendered hierarchy, which undermines the inclusiveness, transparency, and equality, as envisioned by SDG 16. The findings support the fact that the female leadership possibilities are restricted not by their capacity but by the patriarchal structures that presuppose power, legitimacy and governance in the gender aspects.

Still, women demonstrate their toughness, adaptability and ethical courage in their leadership attributes despite these challenges. They employ change and ethical strategies, which are founded on teamwork, compassion, and cultural intelligence as the tool of combating gender inequality. In universities, female deans are more likely to reposition gender equality as a matter of fairness and merit rather than feminism, therefore, it can be more acceptable in a conservative institution. As one of the leaders has put it, I would not base gender equality on feminism but rather on fairness and merit. This is the ethical paradigm through which women can ensure advocacy of inclusion without opposition.

Mentorship, networking and participatory governance are some of the ways women leaders in the public institutions and NGOs overcome the structural barriers. They are also creating informal networks and peer support networks as one of the NGO workers described: Women in other NGOs tend to provide advice on advocacy strategies. The networks enhance the joint agency and institutional power. The women in peace councils use religious and cultural appeals to justify their roles in governments, in the majority of cases referring to the Islamic teachings to support their women in the peacebuilding process. According to one of the members, she uses the Islamic teachings as a means of justification about why women are

expected to be the brokers of peace. The moral and cultural reasoning will assist them in neutralizing resistance and improving inclusiveness. The strategies signify the ethos of transformative feminist leadership and transformation is achieved by the means of ethical negotiation, compassion and building of alliances rather than confrontation. They also resonate with SDG 16 and its requirement of open responsible and accountable institutions founded on moral uprightness and trust towards a community.

Women presidents make a significant contribution to the peacebuilding, justice, and institutional accountability by implementing the SDG 16 principles at different levels. Women make use of open communication and decisions to bring about transparency and equity in the field of higher education. This may be either through open budget meetings and through the fair evaluation system which was what one of the deans made known to me: Hiring is more open and this has developed a better trust base in my department. Such activities create an institutional trust and heighten governance ethics. Females control the discourse in the NGOs and governmental establishments in terms of dialogue governance, which promotes inter-organizational and inter-community trust. One NGO director emphasized the fact that we do not interact with the communities by telling them what to do. The participatory style is the sole means of making peace and justice premised on the community ownership and not on the top-down domination. The grassroots women in the peace and development councils are the ones that are directly involved in the peace and reconciliation of the society. One of them stated their roles is to mediate local disputes, promote tolerance and to outreach the marginalized as they do: I mediate between arguing families before they turn to the police. Through this, women do not only help reduce the tensions of the community, but also enable the governance to be peaceful and inclusive. All these activities indicate that the role of women as leaders does not just stop at the administrative positions; they are quite alive and they co-exist in providing peace, justice and accountability in the daily activities conducted in the institutions. They enhance institutional legitimacy, increase social cohesion, and ethical leadership, and are in the service of the spirit and aims of SDG 16. They rely on moral power, cooperation, and community trust in order to establish the space of peace and justice even under patriarchal systems. Though institutional and cultural obstacles remain, women transformative and ethical leadership is quietly changing the governance system in Pakistan towards inclusiveness, justice, and sustainable peace, which is the pillar of SDG 16.

This paper examined the overall transformative leadership by women heads of Pakistani institutions of the government, NGOs, and even peace councils in the development and governance contexts. Applying the Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory lens, as well as the SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) framework to the results, one can see the continuation of gendered obstacles, and innovative approaches that women use to facilitate ethical leadership and societal peace.

Through the data, it has been evident that women leadership still functions under structurally patriarchal setups. On college campuses, in government agencies, and in the peace councils, women have official positions but they are still sidelined in making important decisions. Such statements as “Even in times when we are deans, the male vice chancellors make final decisions, we are invited to the meeting, but the major decisions are taken by the male chairpersons, not by us. These trends support previous findings of Moazzam (2024) and Sadaf (2025) that the institutional cultures of Pakistan continue to be male-dominated in terms of gatekeeping. Governance and administration that is marked with patriarchal thoughts results in structural ceilings that restrain women power. Cultural demands also support this hierarchy since they define the role of women as nurturers and not as policy makers. In conflict areas, women do not participate in peace councils due to mobility and social distrust towards women who speak out in their communities. These findings confirm that the major

impediments in the path of transformative leadership in women are still institutional bias and social conservatism. They work against inclusivity and equal SDG 16 of facilitating a situation of gender balance in the decision making process. The presence of such obstacles in continuity, never invalidates the agency of women but on the other hand, it dictates how they will have to be creative and dynamic in their application.

In spite of these systematic problems, female leaders are incredibly strong and tactical. Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory, which considers leadership to be a collective, value-driven and change-oriented process, guides their leadership approach, which is based on empathy, dialogue, and ethical integrity. The possibility of women to redefine gender equality based on cultural and moral arguments is one of the key trends. The feminine deans usually put forward the idea of equality as fairness and merit, but not feminism, so that they can question patriarchy in order to act according to the accepted cultural frames. This is comparable to the observation made by Ismaeel (2024) that advocacy that is made context-sensitive is more convincing in conservative culture.

The agency is enhanced by the peer mentorship and networking of women within the NGOs and public institutions. The informal networks help them to bypass bureaucracy and share advocacy strategies. Religion, peace council members use the religious discourse to justify their efforts in preservation of peace- I use the Islamic teachings to demonstrate why women should also engage in the efforts of preserving peace. The examples of transformative leadership at work are these changes of strategies since ethical persuasion, alliance-building and empathy are employed instead of confrontation. Such practices are how women are able to exercise servant and collaborative leadership and encourages teamwork, fairness and moral integrity. Their approach creates trust and transparency, which is in accordance with SDG 16 to have accountable and inclusive institutions. The findings affirm Nash et al. (2025) and Ahmad et al. (2025) who hold the view that ethical people-centred leadership is one of the drivers that result to social cohesion and institutional legitimacy.

The women leadership may not only be the transforming force in the institutions, but it is also closely associated with the peacebuilding and social justice. The female leaders take the initiative to transform the ideology of SDG 16 into the practical use to enhance the confidence and communication. Open budget meetings and open recruitment are among the projects that are applied in universities as a measure of demonstrating the answerability of the institutions. NGOs use participatory governance to ensure that the communities would feel heard and respected- We work with community not orders. At the grass-root level, the women in the peace councils meddle with the conflicts within the community so that the conflicts do not escalate to violence or even legal battles. Through such initiatives, a range of peace leadership is created: administrative openness in institutions of higher learning to local peace in rural councils. The trend indicates that the moral and cooperative leadership approach of women is innately consistent with the aspect of peace and justice of SDG 16. Not only are they engaged in the procedure of representation, but also altering the institutional ethics, the culture of governance and the local power relations. Better still, women virtuous governance is contrary to the corruption and marginalization culture that is the order of the day in most institutions. They increase social trust that is a very important component of sustainable peace and good governance by improving fairness, open communication, and empathy. The findings can be compared with the authors Singh and Singh (2024), who underline institutional legitimacy on transparency in formation of democracies.

The findings present solid empirical data to Transformative Feminist Leadership Theory that describes feminine leadership as the break to the standard power with ethics, collaboration, and inclusion. Rather than imitating the hierarchic structure of the power, the female leaders reconstruct the ruling as the ethical and group activity.

In the real life situation, the results show several policy and institutional modifications. Universities, Non-Governmental Organisations and government agencies should devise visible pathways of women in decision making as opposed to tokenism. Gender-sensitive policies and open promotion systems can be used in order to dismantle structural bias. To enhance female negotiation and leadership skills, institutionalized training, mentorship and cross sectoral networking ought to be carried out. Gender equality can also be authenticated by inclusion of local cultural and religious stories to make reform acceptable by the conservative societies. Women efforts to construct a peace at community level must be institutionalized in the national governance systems to sustain an inclusive peace. The combination of these steps in the institutional practices will aid Pakistan to get closer to the vision that SDG 16 is concerned with inclusive, accountable, and peaceful societies.

In conclusion, it can be said that women in the arena of governance in Pakistan are not just spectators but participants of changing the state of things. They are working in oppressive systems and in the process, they find ways to provide transparency, justice and peace, through moral and co-operative ways. Particularly, the compassionate leadership approach of the women shaped by the concepts of dialogue and cultural intelligence escape redefining the institutional ethics despite the existing problem of structural patriarchy. Their work can also be a good illustration of the fact that without empowering women to become leaders of integrity and inclusion, peace, justice and strong institutions will be impossible.

Conclusion

This study has been concluded, despite the rising number of women in different institutions of peace and governance, women leaders in Pakistan are still faced with institutional, cultural and structural barriers, which limit their transformative abilities. Some of the greatest impediments include patriarchal underlying causes, gender inequality in decision making and inaccessibility to financial or policy authority. These are obstacles that not only make it hard to have women in the leadership positions, but also institutional inclusiveness and accountability. However, the findings reveal that transformative and ethical leaders who are female are numerous. They promote the institutions in terms of communication, justice and sympathy. They build trust and a conducive environment that fosters peace and justice in cooperation, mentorship and servant leadership. In order to gain broader backing, women leaders tend to address gender equality in culturally agreeable forms- based on fairness, merit and common good in general. They play a direct role in the peacebuilding process and institutionalizing SDG 16 because they are able to mediate conflict, build transparency and guarantee a wide participatory strategy. By and large, the study has demarcated the fact that female's presidents in the peace and development councils are not merely representatives of the people, but also the chief actors to ethical leadership, social cement, and institutional change in Pakistan. Their practices of transformation demonstrate that the empathetic, just, and inclusive leadership can address the systems of inequalities and support democracy.

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