

Report For

NCDO



Focus on Pakistan Day
4 October 2006
The Royal Tropical Institute
Amsterdam

Sabra Bano

Gender Concerns International

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- ❖ Sheema Kermani is a peace activist and an active member of many women's organisations.

Musical Performance

- ❖ Sutra Funk is a unique music genre which uses instruments such as the bionic tabla and the spine-tingling sitar to contribute to the Asian underground. The Sutra Funk insurgency is spearheaded by DJ Eagle-I.

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Report- Focus on Pakistan
Gender Concerns International

Organizer: Gender Concerns International
Supported by: NCDO

Introduction:

The Project *Focus on Pakistan* was designed to encourage and recognize the role of minorities in international development cooperation. Gender Concerns International specializes in highlighting the problems smaller minority groups encounter whilst at the same time giving focus to their potential within society. In this context, the role played by Pakistani community during the earthquake 2005 has taken as an example of good practices not only this but by organizing an event where Pakistani community's role is stressed central at the level of international development cooperation. And at the same time it connects them with the main-stream Dutch disaster-assistance to the country of region. For this purpose a carefully designed multi-activity event was planned on the 4th of October 2006 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.

Acknowledgements:

Focus on Pakistan was a unique program which was greatly appreciated not only by the Pakistani community in the Netherlands but also by individuals and organizations interested in development work. I would like to warmly and sincerely thank the following people for their contribution in making the event a success. My special thanks goes out to Mr. Henny Helmich (Director NCDO). Without his understanding and encouragement, this project would not have been developed the way it did. Then again at NCDO my deepest gratitude goes to Ms. Edith van den Akker for her practical support, leadership, guidance and patience with my team. I would also like to thank the Embassy of Pakistan and especially the ambassador Mr. Sibte Yahya Naqvi who from the initial stages of this project idea has assured his support and cooperation to me. Additionally I would like to thank my team of volunteers at Gender Concerns International for tireless dedication and especially the Pakistani youth who contributed greatly to the success of this event. Of course there are many who I cannot name, but I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everybody who made this event possible.

Focus on Pakistan



One year after the Earthquake

Background:

Pakistan

Pakistan as the seventh largest country in the world came into being in 1947 as part of the geographic division of the Indian subcontinent, ending the British colonization period. This division took place on the basis of two nation theory in India according to which Muslim and Hindu religious divide made it impossible to live under one political domination. Thus together with Israel, Pakistan makes it two countries in the world to have been created on the basis of religion. Both of these countries remain close allies of USA. The Pakistani army is generously supported by USA and at present has been the closest Muslim ally of the USA in its war against terrorism.

Pakistani Community in the Netherlands

Despite all of this Pakistan is a quite less known country for the vast majority of Dutch people. That might be a factor in determining the size of Dutch relief and rehabilitation help for the earthquake victims in Pakistan. According to research on the Pakistani community (S. Bano, 1988, 1991) there were fewer than 10,000 Pakistanis living in the three major cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. It has been estimated that altogether, approximately 35,000 Pakistanis are living in the Netherlands. (Gender Concerns International is collecting further information about the actual size of the community)

Earthquake 2005

The commemoration of the horrific **earthquake** in Pakistan is an appropriate time to introduce Pakistan as a progressive, developing nation and a genuinely deserving candidate for Dutch development assistance and public support.

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Gender and Country in Focus

The focus on gender for this day is to stress the growing concern for the situation of women who often are left behind in the development assistance. Gender Concerns International fears that this disaster will have great impact on country's efforts in poverty reduction, conflict prevention in the region and economic development of people in general but particularly for women. This all together is quite an unfavorable situation regarding achieving MDGs. For all these reasons Gender Concerns International organized its first Gender and Country in Focus Event. The Program was supported by NCDO.

The Programme

13.30 – 14.00 Opening

Short movie about Pakistan.

14.05 – 14.25 Welcome

Welcome by Ms. Sabra Bano (Director, Gender Concerns International), Mr. Henny Helmich (Director, NCDO) and Mr. Sibte Yahya Naqvi (Ambassador of Pakistan).

14.35 – 14.45 Twinkle Women Centre

Update about the Twinkle Women Centre, by Mr. Riaz Khan from Pakistan.

14.50 – 15.35 Debate

Debate: Pakistan and Gender & Disaster Management. Participants: spokespersons from SHO, the Dutch Military, the government of Pakistan and gender experts.

15.40 – 16.05 Classical Dance Performance

Sheema Kermani has been a peace activist and an active member of many Peace movements. Her organization *Tehrik-e-Niswan* is a cultural action group which promotes greater awareness about women's rights and their status in society. Through the use of dance, drama and music Tehrik takes socially relevant plays to low-income areas for an audience that cannot come to see plays in the city.

16.20 - 16.50 Break

Sutra Funk is about bionic Tabla, spine-tingling sitar, the sound of the Asian underground. The Sutra Funk insurgency is spearheaded by DJ Eagle-I

17.00 – 17.20 Fashion Show

Shazia Naheed Chohan studied Fashion at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. She gradually adapted her designs for South Asian women clothes with western clothes. At the institute she got her first chance to show her skills whilst designing a collection which combined Asian and Western influences.

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17.25 – 17.35 Dutch Business and Commercial links with Pakistan

Piet Heitlager (Dutch oldies in Pakistan 50') and Aamir Khan (Commercial Secretary, Embassy of Pakistan).

17.40 – 17.50 Youth Programme

Three members of the student society *Desi Fusion* will give a short overview of last year's youth activities for Pakistan. Presented by Danish Iqbal, Shabaz Rashid and Zeeshan Khan.

18.00 – 18.30 Alghoza Player

Alghoza is a Sufi musical instrument played in the provinces Sindh and Balochistan in Pakistan. The identifying feature of this instrument is that it involves two paired flutes which are played together. This instrument mesmerises the listeners when played by an expert like the great Alghoza player Akbar Khan. At present Akbar Khamisu is the best Alghoza player in the world.

18.30 – 20.00 Dinner

Pakistani Dinner- Iftari

OVERVIEW



A tribute candle was lit throughout the day as around 300 people gathered to commemorate the first year anniversary of the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, last October 4 at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam.

Gender Concerns International's *Focus on Pakistan Day, one year after the earthquake 2005* focused on remembering the relief and rehabilitation efforts initiated in response to the massive destruction brought about by the earthquake. It also featured the humanitarian aid campaign launched by the government and individuals in the Netherlands and encouraged a continuation of this endeavor. At the same time, it was a venue to celebrate and feature Pakistan's rich culture through various product displays; a fashion show by Shazia Naheed Chohan and cultural performances by the famous dancer/peace activist Sheema Kermani and Alghoza player

Akbar Khamisu. In its attendance was a diverse group of officials from the Dutch and Pakistani governments, people from the Dutch-Pakistani community and members from development organizations and civil society.



Exhibits: Sights of Pakistan



Pakistani products were held on display at the lobby. Items ranged from fashionable shawls and jewelry, to household bedspreads, pillowcases and vases. Various photos and maps helped the guests to visualize the world beyond their own borders. Henna tattooing was also available for those who wished to have a more intimate and lasting encounter with the Pakistani culture.



Opening:

Short movie about Pakistan

Gender Concerns International's *Focus on Pakistan* event opened with a brief promotional film that spun together images of an exotic and ancient Pakistan with one that is modern, urbanizing and on the move. A color-wheel of beaded gowns, a flock of pigeons taking wing through the keyhole window of a mosque, and crowds kneeling in prayer were intercut with shots of massive turbines, neat telecommunications cubicles, and busy stock brokers manning the markets. The catchphrase of the film, "**Pakistan: Committed to Progress,**" makes it clear that rather than fearing or ignoring Pakistan, it should be invested in.

Keynote Speeches

Mr. Henny Helmich, Director NCDO



It was on this positive note that Henny Helmich, representing the Dutch National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO), opened the event. "As this film shows," he began, "Pakistan is not just a country in emergency, but it is a large, dynamic society. In retrospect of the disaster, we don't want to miss the other aspects of Pakistani culture. Sometimes it takes an accident to bring people together." While the motivation behind "Focus of Pakistan" was sobering—a reflection on the 2005 earthquake and especially its impact on women—the atmosphere at the Royal Tropical Institute was both celebratory and hopeful, perpetuating the solidarity between the Netherlands and Pakistan shown during the earthquake.

According to Mr. Helmich, there are some 18,000 Dutch citizens of Pakistani origin living in the Netherlands today. Whilst they are a small minority, in the months following the devastating earthquake of October 8, 2005, the Pakistani-Dutch community pioneered the mobilization effort to help the victims of the disaster. Altogether, the Dutch provided 30 million euros in emergency assistance to Pakistan, 5 million of which went to schools and education. According to Mr. Helmich, the Ambassador of Pakistan to the Netherlands was particularly instrumental in bridging the cultures and securing Dutch commitment to rehabilitation efforts. However, there were also countless moving and low-profile stories behind the millions of euros raised. Take, for example, the four high school girls from Woerden, who appealed to their school, their parents, and their neighbors and ultimately collected 12,000 euros for disaster relief. Many other schools in the Netherlands establishing ties of support with schools in Pakistan to ensure that relief is not temporary but works towards the longer-term development of the country. "So an awful situation," concluded Mr. Helmich, "has made real ties blossom."

One year later, however, the challenge for the Netherlands and for Pakistan is to recognize that while the most urgent needs have been met, the job of recovery is far from over. "Focus on Pakistan," he added, offers an important occasion to reflect on the progress that has been made and to recommit to Pakistan's lasting

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recovery. Where do we stand now? How much progress has been made, and what remains to be done? Where do women fit into the picture of Pakistan's recovery and growth? How can the Netherlands continue to help?

Ms. SABRA BANO, Director, Gender Concerns International



"Humanitarian assistance is a right, not the luxury and it should not discriminate on gender basis", says Sabra Bano, the Director of Gender Concerns International (GCI). This was one of her key messages in her own opening address, following that of NCDO Director Henny Helmich.

As she welcomed and thanked everyone for supporting the event, Ms. Bano also highlighted several pressing issues which she, along with Gender Concerns International, has been involved with for during these past years. One of which was the lack of importance given to gender concerns during emergency crises.

-Gender and Disaster Management

"I was the only gender consultant out of the hundreds of other consultants...What if a gender consultant was not there?" she shared of her experience during the relief and rehabilitation program for Pakistan one year ago. She lamented that despite years of discussion about mainstreaming gender, the focus on gender was still treated with less priority. This recent involvement and alarm with the rehabilitation done in Pakistan led to it being chosen as the first Country in Focus for GCI's series of conference events.

Ms. Bano enumerated several other advocacies which GCI is currently involved in:

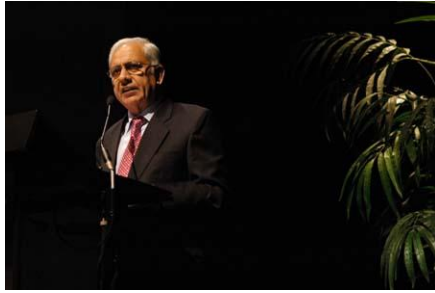
- **Gender and Democracy.**

In an effort to increase women's political participation in governance, GCI has launched a "**Say Yes Now**" (SYN) campaign, an international drive to encourage women to exercise their right to be heard and be involved in the political arena. This was borne out of the conference for women in the Arab & Middle-eastern countries, held in Cairo last April 2005. GCI had also been an initiator of a movement which supported the candidacy of Nawal El Saadawi for the presidential position in Egypt.

- **Gender in Peace and Conflict Prevention.** Horrified by the story of a girl who was killed in a land mine blast in Kashmir, GCI has opted to focus on the conditions brought about by situations of conflict, and address the needs of the women in the affected area of Kashmir.

- **Gender in the Minority.** Jumping off from Mr. Hemlich's opening remarks, "accidents have brought people together" as the Pakistan earthquake forged stronger relations between the Netherlands and Pakistan. She commended that the outpour of aid from the Netherlands was immense and the Pakistan embassy's role in facilitating the organizations was "amazing". However, as a long-standing integrated minority in the Netherlands, the Pakistan community, like other ethnic minorities in a European country, Bano still feels that it is still uninvolved in the decision-making level for policies which affect them as well. GCI feels that there should be a debate on integration at all levels.

His Excellency Mr. SIBTE YAHYA NAQVI, Ambassador of Pakistan



"80,000 lives died... 100,000 injured... 2.8 million left without shelter..." These were some of the figures that Pakistan Ambassador Sibte Yahya Naqvi mentioned to remember the 7.6 earthquake which caused massive destruction one year ago in Pakistan. However, he also took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Netherlands for its significant contribution of cash, kind and personnel during their time of need. Cash donations amounted to €21 million

while material contributions reached a total of 500 tons worth of blankets, tents and other essential supplies. Several Dutch workforces were also sent to assist in the rescue and relief operations, namely 65 personnel and 80 paramedics.

But as Mr. Naqvi adds, the question remains, "where are we now?"

The Government of Pakistan's Emergency Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) has been implementing social sectoral strategies in the form of housing projects, livelihood programs and provision of social-economic infrastructures like social protection. This is especially targeted for the most vulnerable sectors which are the children, women (widows, and household heads), elderly and the disabled. Self-help programs are being implemented in the communities. Roads are being cleared and home reconstructions are ongoing.

"There is still a positive hope for the future," adds Naqvi.

Local village organizations have now developed direct links with the government to voice out their own needs and provide solutions to problems. An example of which is a small village which set up a makeshift school for girls after the earthquake, and who are now demanding that a more permanent one be built for the girls. Other villages are developing ways to fix roads and improve their water, hygiene and sanitation situation among others.

"But reconstruction and rehabilitation is still a gigantic task," laments Naqvi as some 1.8 million Pakistanis are until now, still living in tents. New infrastructures have to be built in mountainous terrain and settlement areas need to be rebuilt and carefully planned along areas away from the fault lines.

The Pakistan government has now launched a sponsorship campaign for organizations or individuals who can sponsor the construction of homes, schools and hospitals; or who can donate for the improvement of other sectors: livelihood, water, among others. Local governments are willing to provide land for the sponsorship packages, with full consultation of the stakeholders involved.

"It is a daunting task," ends Naqvi, "but I feel positive and I have faith that with the help and support of others involved" the efforts for Pakistan will be realized.

Debate: Gender and Disaster Management: Was Gender Taken Into Account During the Disaster Relief Efforts?



One of the main events of the Focus on Pakistan day was a debate about the amount of attention paid to women in the context of the earthquake disaster relief. The panel of experts explored such questions as, why are gender experts needed in disaster situations? Are women's concerns (cultural sensitivities, health needs, and economic development) fully considered in international relief organizations' disaster-preparedness plans? If

gendered, do such plans actually materialize on the ground, or do they become lost in the chaos or hindered by cultural barriers? What more can international organizations and governments themselves do to ensure that in disasters such as the earthquake in Pakistan, women's immediate needs and longer-term development are considered?

The participants in the often heated debate were **Sabra Bano**, the founder of Gender Concerns International; **Kehkeshan Azhar**, Charge the affairs at Embassy of Pakistan; **Hilde van der horst**, from Wageningen University; **Major Haccou**, Royal Dutch Amy who worked with the Dutch Field Hospital in Pakistan last year; and **Eric Van der Lee**, of the Netherlands Refugee Foundation (Stichting Vluchtelingen), who also worked in Pakistan following the disaster last year.

Women in Emergencies: Unseen, Unserved?

Sabra Bano started off the debate with the assertion that, in practice, gender issues rare get adequate attention or evaluation in emergency situations. Referring to her role as the only gender expert on the relief mission to Pakistan after the earthquake, she said, "I was shocked, after 22 years of women's activism, that I was sent to a situation where there was a room full of experts and just one gender expert." Emergency missions offer quick-fix strategies, she said, but usually, women are not part of the need evaluation teams, so there is no comprehensive assessment of women's situation on the ground. Emergency assessments tend to look at water and electricity systems, but they don't ask such questions as, are there enough toilets for women? Are they located in a place where women are safe to go at night? Do emergency supplies include sanitary napkins? Are the camps well lit, and are women safe to walk at night and to their places of work? Thus, in planning the immediate emergency response, stated Bano, there is rarely a space for gender aspects to be incorporated into the plan.

In the Plan: Gender Mainstreaming Is a Strategy in Organizational Management

Several of the participants countered Ms. Bano's statements, taking the line that gender mainstreaming in an organization's planning stage is an effective way of ensuring that women's immediate needs and concerns are taken into account in the aftermath of a disaster. Major Haccou attested that it is a policy of the Dutch military, set in The Hague, to consider gender when laying out emergency plans. After the earthquake, he claimed, "We knew that we had a different audience that we would have to treat differently." Usually, field hospitals are prepared to treat young soldiers, but in Pakistan, the field hospital adapted its organization,

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bringing on an extra female doctor so that women would feel comfortable, providing extra toilets, and adding the capacity to deliver babies by bringing in a midwife from Portugal. "Gender is not a *'concern,'*" clarified Major Haccou, "It is a factor in a strategy." It may not be possible to know ahead of time how many women or men will need assistance in the event of a disaster, he stated, but it is certainly possible to estimate by percentages. In the case of Pakistan, for example, it was possible to estimate that roughly half of the population would need to be treated by female rather than male doctors, for reasons of cultural sensitivity.

Pushing the question further, the moderator challenged, "Is it even reasonable to think of gender in the midst of a disaster?" In response, Hilda von Dijkhorst reiterated that gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming should be incorporated into an organization's planning stage. "Do we have time to think about gender in emergencies? You should be *prepared*. Once a program begins, it is difficult to shift course and add gender awareness later on. It should be incorporated before [the emergency happens], in the emergency preparedness planning stage."

Long-term Development Requires Gender-Sensitive Organizations



There was some consensus among the participants that in the short-term, emergency management teams can effectively address women's immediate hygiene, housing, and safety concerns, if the planning is done properly ahead of time. But can organizations also view disaster situations as opportunities to advance women's social and economic development? How can longer-term plans for recovery be gendered?

In the long term, said Mr. Van der Lee, it is critical to work with implementing NGOs and local organizations that espouse gender equality within their own organizations. Some 85 organizations came into the affected regions in Pakistan, but clearly not all of them will stay. "[In an emergency], the response comes from private organizations, not just professionals. You can't expect smaller organizations to "do" gender in the short term. But in the long run, yes. My question is: How many organizations have the long-term commitment" to development, in order to make gender transformations possible?

Working with local NGOs that are familiar with the project cycle and are able to work with international donors is essential to meeting women's long-term concerns and sustainable development, Mr. Vander Lee believed. The most important thing, he emphasized, is for international NGOs to make sure these local, implementing organizations represent gender equality within their own ranks. Some local NGOs, he suggested, may not have been exposed to the concept of gender mainstreaming and may not have many women members. Or, conversely, the women NGO members themselves may be unable to travel to the remote regions, out of cultural or safety concerns. This gender imbalance within the ranks of local NGOs hampers the effort to assess and address women's needs, both short- and long-term. He noted that SV works through local partner organizations that propose their own programs. "We can *only* approve programs if there is gender balance in the plans."

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Practice Is Different Than Paper

Ms. Azhar, representing the government of Pakistan, rejected Mr. Van der Lee's suggestion that gender equality and gender mainstreaming are alien ideas to Pakistani organizations or to Islam in general. "Gender is a vast topic," she said, "There are misconceptions about Islam. Islamic societies are already very concerned about gender issues." In Pakistan, she pointed out, there are many women working in the military and in the healthcare services, and in fact, she added, there are more female parliamentarians in Pakistan than there are in any government in any European Union. So it is not a question of gender awareness or cultural barriers in the affected country; gender issues are a peacetime concern of the government of Pakistan.

Ms. Azhar agreed with Ms. Bano that women's facilities were inadequate after the earthquake and that concerns *are* often overlooked in disaster management. However, she qualified; the truth is that plans on paper are vastly different from the reality on the ground, particularly in the face of such a massive-scale disaster as the earthquake. The entire map of the country was changed within a few seconds, and the humanitarian relief effort was also massive and often chaotic. Which society or organization, she challenged, is realistically prepared to tackle gender in the immediate aftermath of a disaster?

For Ms. Azhar, a larger problem in the gender question is that the aid provided by the international community is limited, and it can be difficult for local agencies and organizations to compartmentalize completing and overlapping priorities. International organizations may talk about gender-mainstreaming, she suggested, but they must be more forthcoming with the aid they have promised, and they must allow this aid to be channeled through the governments. The total commitment to Pakistan was around 5 billion euros, but only 20 % of that has been received so far. "The fervor [of donors] is not depleting," asserted Azhar, "But aid is trickling down through NGOs and INGOs, not through the Government of Pakistan. "We need hard cash, not scattered NGO help."

What (more) can be done?

All participants agreed that attention to short-term and long-term women's needs should be an important consideration in any emergency response situation and in disaster-preparedness planning exercises. But, Major Haccou stressed, the long-term approach is not the role of the military: "I want to highlight that the military is very good at immediate response. But we need to hand over the longer-term issues to longer-term organizations." As a civilian-military cooperation officer, it is Major Haccou's job to establish links with the NGO community and the UN organizations to address just such issues.

Taking up the question of international organizations' commitment to women's long-term security, Ms. Azhar ended the debate with a challenge to the audience: "In times of crisis, we have international norms to take care of children first. Do we have such a system for women? **I am grateful to Gender Concerns International to organize this debate on such an important issue. It's time we established universal norms for addressing gender concerns in emergency situations.**"

TWINKLE WOMEN CENTRE (TWC)



Mah Jabeen in Green and Robina left behind in black and orange dress December 2006



Riaz Khan, Project Coordinator TWC Balakot, graced the event from Pakistan to introduce the Twinkle Women Centre and to update the individuals and organizations in the Netherlands that are either partners or helping the Twinkle Women Center Project Balakot. When asked what he felt one year ago during the earthquake, he shared that "it was a very collective feeling... one that you cannot just write down with all the pain and suffering." He ended by thanking the Dutch military for its rescue & rehabilitation aid, the Netherlands communities who gave aid and the Gender Concerns International for setting up the Twinkle Women Centre.

Following programs are planned in this regard.

- Provide health and reproductive health services to women.
- Assess the needs of the local women and facilitate service accordingly.
- Provide skills development and capacity building training to literate and educated women.
- Encourage entrepreneurial talent and arrange for micro credit facilities.
- Train women to manage administratively and financially their twinkle centres.

Background

Last October in the early days after the earthquake disaster director Gender Concerns International visited Balakot and Kashmir in relation to a gender consultancy mission. She was touched by witnessing the helplessness and harsh living situation of the young and bright women sitting in their thin tents with dirty cloths on and not much even to eat. Thus she **felt the need of highlighting the potential of these bright young and educated women as community leaders and as the catalyst for hope and change.**

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In this context Gender Concerns International found a local organization SWERA that was dedicated to help women in rural areas. In the Netherlands, since November 2005, Gender Concerns International has been lobbying to draw attention for this specific group of women. Through digital ways of communicating, debating and later on in early 2006 by opening up a special Giro Account to help these women, some funds were collected through the efforts of a few private donors as Suzanne Pereira and Winifred Moll, who organized a beautiful concert in Amsterdam and selected Gender Concerns International as an organization to hand over the donation.

Encouraged by this support, at the Occasion of 6 months after the disaster, a half year Commemoration Day was organized with the support of OxfamNovib in The Hague and Three women tent dwellers were invited to the occasion. Mah-Jabeen, The first Twinkle woman from Balakot was among them. Slowly TWC started to take shape and by July NCDO 2006 gave final approval to double the donations collected by Gender Concerns International. This fundamental support assured the creation of TWC Balakot. Mah Jabeen heads the project in Balakot. SWERA as local partner takes care of the need provision of TWC in Balakot. The centre is operative from a tent now which is put up on the ruins of a house after clearing the debris. From here it is hoped to be shifted to a half damaged house beneath which is being repaired at present.



Construction is not allowed but repairs can be done

Temporary suspension of the project

Heavy rains in July and massive evacuation of residents from Balakot:

In Balakot 40 women were registered before rains disrupted the function of the center. The project was suspended due to the unusual heavy rain falls started in the late July when again Mahjabeen and her family were evacuated to Mansehra city. Apart from natural constraints there were social issues and a mounting criticism of local groups against NGOs increasing involvement in the area and its impact on socio-cultural values in Balakot. Despite the opposition of some of the close relatives of Mah Jabeen her father's support has been defiant for Mah Jabeen and her local support group.

Constraints

Full time paid instructors can not be employed there as the qualified instructors can come only occasionally. Also there are no local female instructors available. Those who have been engaged come from cities as far as Islamabad, Abbottabad and Mansehra.

Hopes

Evacuees are returning to Balakot, October Update

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On 2nd October national coordinator for twinkle women center visited Balakot. It was observed that the people are returning to Balakot since the monsoon season has stopped. Project coordinator is determined to start all over again immediately. Thus the arrangements have been made to restart the center immediately. Now that project has financial support from GCI and NCDO, it is much easier to be decisive to invest some money in repairing the centre building. In the month of October repairs will start so that before real winter falls in November, there is a place for women to come together and learn new skills.

Conclusion

Due to natural calamities and lack of regular staff the program could not take off in early July according to plans as the whole area was evacuated by the government. Our project coordinator had to leave Balakot and stay in Mansehra. But the season of Monsoon is over; people from Balakot are back to the ruins of their city. They are destroyed twice within a year but would like to make Balakot as their home once again. It is also true for the women in Balakot. The lost of tent-homes broke their hearts but did not take away the dedication of Mah-Jabeen and other effected young women from the area to restart their life and a decent existence one time more.

Latest Update



TWC is operational now. It is a slow but a gradual progress story plan

Before the compilation of this report Sabra Bano was able to visit and monitor the progress of TWC in Balakot last December. The Centre is shifted from a tent-base to a newly repaired a two rooms facility that also has a veranda. Some 30-35 women are visiting the centre regularly.

The Dance by the Feminist Artist Sheema Kirmani A memorable Performance

The audience was treated to an enchanting solo performance of traditional Pakistani dances by Peace Activist Sheema Kermani. She also gave introductions to the three dances which she performed, enlightening the viewers to the stories and depth behind the beauty of her movements.

The first performance was a Khayal dance. It was a trance-like piece which starts off dramatically slow and builds up into a state of jubilation. As Kermani explains, it is a dance which states that today is a celebration and conveys a sense of ecstasy at being in the house of the beloved.



The second dance could best be described as poetry in motion as Kermani gave interpretation to the poem of famed Pakistani Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, entitled Yaad or Memory. Through this expressional dance, she conveys the lyric through her face, her hand gestures and her overall body. The audience is brought along the story of one who is remembering the breath, the sounds and the fragrance of his beloved. They are treated as well to the joyful end when "the days of separation are over and the night of union is here".

The finale dance, Tarana, is a musical genre in itself. Its lyric was composed of rhythmic sounds which gave way to an elaborate series of footwork and pirouettes. It is a kind of dance which brings the diverse people of the subcontinent together, as they would likely share movements in the beats. Its message was that "there is beauty in the moon and stars, the universe is in motion and my heart is singing".

Sheema Kermani's organization, Tehrik-e-Niswan, is a cultural action group working to create gender awareness about women's rights and their status in society. Through the use of dance, drama and music, Tehrik takes socially relevant plays to low-income areas for an audience that cannot come to see plays in the city.

Fashion Show



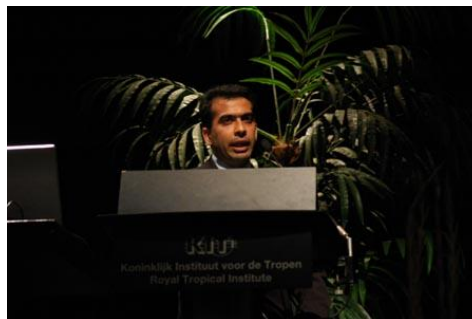
One popular part of the conference was the fashion show which showcased about 20 stylish creations by Shazia Naheed Chohan. Each piece of clothing featured the South Asian influence on western attire. The trendy clothes had intricate designs and beadworks reflective of the traditional patterns of Pakistan. It was highlighted by playful dancing among the models, and the ceremonial recreation of a wedding with the bride and groom modeling the beautiful gowns worn for such an important event. Shazia acquired her designing skills at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. She is also currently studying Social Studies, but she still plans to continue fashion designing as her hobby.



Strengthening Netherlands-Pakistan Business and Trade Links



Although the horrific earthquake of 2005 was the motivation for the *Focus on Pakistan* event, the theme of the day was that even in tragedy there is scope hope and the possibility for new beginnings. While the humanitarian outpouring from the Dutch community in response to the earthquake was moving, Pakistan does not wish to be a recipient of western goodwill. 'On the contrary', said Aamir Khan, the Commercial Secretary for the Embassy of Pakistan, 'Pakistan is a country with which the Netherlands has increasingly significant business and trade relationships'. Strengthening these commercial ties with the Netherlands is a top priority for the Embassy of Pakistan and is good business for the Dutch.



Until 2005, the economy of Pakistan exhibited remarkable growth. In 2005, just before the October 8 earthquake, the GDP growth rate of Pakistan was 8.6%--the highest in the world, after China. Yet just one year after the crippling disaster, Pakistan's economy has rebounded impressively, with a GDP rate of 6.6%. Thanks to its central location between India, China, and Central Asia, and thanks to the favorable reforms implemented by its government, Pakistan is well-positioned to continue its economic expansion in the coming years. Despite high oil prices and the continued recovery from the earthquake, a GDP growth rate of 7% is projected for fiscal year 2007. This positive projection has much to do with the government's efforts to improve the climate for business and investment. Presently, many state-owned enterprises are being privatized, which translates into an unparalleled opportunity for businesses.

From 2005 to 2006, Dutch investment in Pakistan took a huge leap forward. Presently, the Netherlands is the fifth largest importer of Pakistani goods in the EU, and it is the second largest investor in Pakistan. Some of the main areas of trade between the Netherlands and Pakistan are textiles, oil, and machine parts, but possible industries of future cooperation include outsourcing, agriculture and dairy production and consultancy, water management, and engineering. Dutch companies such as Shell, Unilever, and Philips are currently operating in Pakistan, and MOU's (memoranda of Understanding) have been signed between Dutch and Pakistani engineering organizations. SHV has opened

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three Makro stores in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad and is looking to expand to other areas. Pakistani business delegations—including groups of female entrepreneurs—have been making exploratory visits to the Netherlands, as have Dutch business delegations to Pakistan.

In short, Aamir Khan explained, investing in Pakistan is good for Pakistan and good business for the Netherlands. For businesses interested in exploring the opportunities presented here, the Overseas Pakistani Investment Conference will be held in December 2006. Mr. Khan urged those interested in attending to contact the Embassy of Pakistan

Youth Program



Three students from the student society Desi Fusion gave a poetic presentation and recap of the work that the youth did for Pakistan relief following the *days of darkness*. Danish Iqbal, Shabaz Rashid and Zeeshan Khan shared how students and young professionals in the Netherlands came together “in a time when action was required, and help needed in a country hundreds of miles away”.

Desi Fusion was among the organizations that collaborated with other sponsors in distributing money cans in universities, companies and stores. Others collected clothes, blankets, medicines and supplies, and sorted them out in collection areas, sometimes working many hours. Major student organizations planned various fund-raising events and concerts and collected an overall amount of around €70,000 in just 46 days.

Now, one year after, they stand astonished at what they have achieved, and the conference participants applauded them as well.

Alghoza Player: Ustad Akbar Khamisu Khan



The culmination of the event was the mesmerizing cultural performance by famous Pakistani Alghoza player Akbar Khamisu.

The Alghoza is a Sufi musical instrument that involves two paired flutes that are played together. It is performed in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan in Pakistan. The colourful and breathtaking performance of Akbar was accompanied by a rhythmic and motivating percussion. The music motivated members of the audience to dance along to its music, rounding of the conference with a feeling of festivity and solidarity.

Gender Concerns International

Laan van Meerdervoort 70

2517 AN, The Hague

Director: Sabra Bano

Email: Sbano@genderconcerns.nl

Site: www.genderconcerns.nl

Phone: 00 31 (070) 4445082

Fax: 00 31 (070) 4445083

Direct: 00 31 (070) 4445084