



EMPOWERING WOMEN OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES IN PAKISTAN THROUGH SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

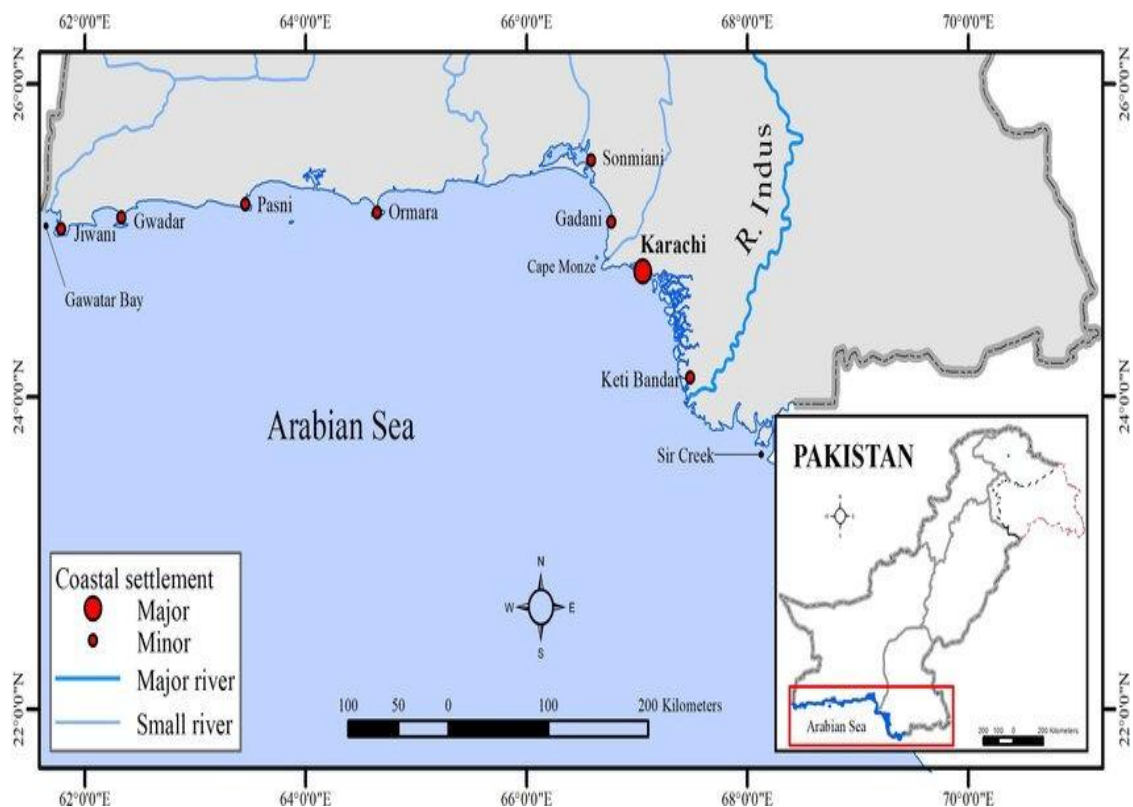


CHAPTER 1

PAKISTAN COASTAL SETTLEMENTS

1.1 Introduction

Pakistan's coastline along the Arabian Sea is shared by two provinces—Sindh and Balochistan — which together constitute the country's entire seaboard. On this coastline, there are several major and minor coastal settlements. These coastal settlements have distinct cultures and economic traditions. The following map shows the location of Pakistan's coastal communities¹.



1.2 Balochistan Coastal Settlements

The Coastline of Balochistan stretches for 760km and is a vibrant mix of cultures². It forms a significant portion of Pakistan's southern boundary along the Arabian Sea, covering two major coastal districts: Lasbela and Gwadar. The following are the major Coastal settlements of Balochistan:

¹ Muhammad Azeem, Muhammad Waqas, Sadia Munir, and Muhammad Awais, "Morphological Change Detection along the Shoreline of Karachi, Pakistan Using 50-Year Time Series Satellite Remote Sensing Data and GIS Techniques," *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites* 39, no. 4 (2021): 1417–1425. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356897259>

² Abid Kakar, "Coastal Tourism of Balochistan," *The Express Tribune*, February 24, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2457396/coastal-tourism-of-balochistan>.

1.2.1 Gwadar

Gwadar District has a 600-kilometre (370 mi) long coastline along the Gulf of Oman³. The majority of its population belongs to the Baloch ethnic groups, and languages include Balochi, Urdu, Pashto, Brahui and a little bit of Arabic. The main livelihood of the Gwadar coastal community is fishing, which has been the traditional livelihood for generations. Almost 70% of the local population is associated with fisheries, relying on the rich marine resources of the Arabian Sea for their sustenance and trade⁴.

1.2.2 Ormara

Ormara is a tehsil of Gwadar district. The majority of its people are Balochis and speak Pashto, Urdu and Balochi. Fishing is the principal livelihood of the Ormara coastal community, with most residents relying on the Arabian Sea's abundant marine resources as their primary occupation. Ormara also has a small port and fish harbour, which support this economic activity. Additionally, some residents find employment related to the Pakistan Navy's Jinnah Naval Base located in Ormara⁵, and a few locals work abroad, especially in Middle Eastern countries⁶. Other traditional livelihoods, such as livestock rearing and small-scale agriculture, exist but are limited due to water scarcity and temperate climatic conditions. Fishing remains the dominant and most reliable economic activity for the coastal community in Ormara⁷.

1.2.3 Pasni

It is located on the coast of Makran, about 450km from Karachi⁸. Pasni is famous for its rustic crimson hills. The majority of people belong to ethnic Baloch groups, Med, Bizanjo, and Kalmati tribes. Balochi language is often spoken, and Urdu is rarely used for communication and education purposes. The primary source of livelihood in Pasni is fishing. Most of the local population is engaged in catching, processing, and selling fish, supported by the Pasni Fish Harbour. Other economic

³ Gwadar Port Authority, "Welcome to Gwadar Port," *Gwadar Port Authority* <https://www.gwadarport.gov.pk/gwadar.aspx>.

⁴ Balochistan's Fisheries Sector Faces Multiple Challenges," *The Nation*, January 2, 2024, <https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Jan-2024/balochistan-s-fisheries-sector-faces-multiple-challenges>.

⁵ *Balochistan Voices*. "Community-Centric Initiatives of Pakistan Navy in Ormara." *Balochistan Voices*, April 2021. <https://www.balochistanvoices.com/2021/04/community-centric-initiatives-of-pakistan-navy-in-ormara/>.

⁶ *Graana*. "Discover Ormara Beach, Balochistan." *Graana Blog*, 2023. <https://www.graana.com/blog/discover-ormara-beach-balochistan>

⁷ *Business Recorder*. "Illegal Fishing Threatens Livelihoods of Local Fishermen." *Business Recorder*, November 2021. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40131594>.

⁸ Pasni," *Google Arts & Culture*, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/pasni/m09hxzz?hl=en>.

activities are limited due to the region's arid climate and lack of industrial development⁹.

1.2.4 Jiwani

Jiwani has a commercial seaport located on the Gulf of Oman in the Gwadar District, nearly 60 kilometres to the east. The majority of its population belongs to ethnic groups like Kalmati and Med, and the primary language is Balochi, and Urdu is the secondary language. The primary livelihood in Jiwani is fishing.

1.2.5 Gadani

It is located in the Lasbela district, about 50 km northwest of Karachi, about 419.0 km¹⁰. Gadani comprises both the Muslim and Hindu communities. People in Gadani speak Balochi and Brahvi languages¹¹. The primary source of livelihood in Gadani has been the ship-breaking industry, home to the world's third-largest ship-breaking yard with around 135 plots, directly employing up to 8,000 workers, serving over 30 downstream industries and accounting for up to 15% of total steel production in Pakistan annually during its peak season¹². This shipbreaking industry is now undergoing a transformation to a ship recycling industry warranted under the Hong Kong Convention 2009.

1.2.6 Sonmiani

Sonmiani is located in the Lasbela district of Balochistan on an area of about 2,616 km². The majority of people speak Balochi as their first language. The coastal community of Sonmiani primarily depends on marine fishing as its primary source of livelihood, with more than 90% of residents engaged in fishing, processing, and related activities¹³. The area is supported by rich marine biodiversity and mangrove ecosystems, which play a crucial role in sustaining fish stocks and protecting local incomes. These mangroves have been actively restored through community-based and NGO-led conservation efforts.

⁹ *The Nation*, "Balochistan's Fisheries Sector Faces Multiple Challenges," January 2, 2024, <https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Jan-2024/balochistan-s-fisheries-sector-faces-multiple-challenges>

¹⁰ Government of Balochistan, "Languages," *The Official Web Gateway to Balochistan*, <https://balochistan.gov.pk/about/languages/>

¹¹ Shahmeer Masood, "Gadani's Beautiful Coastline Is Deprived of Basic Amenities," *The Friday Times*, August 10, 2024, <https://thefridaytimes.com/10-Aug-2024/gadani-s-beautiful-coastline-is-deprived-of-basic-amenities>

¹² Manzil Pakistan, *Ship Breaking in Pakistan* (Karachi: Manzil Pakistan), <https://www.manzilpakistan.org/pdf/Ship%20Breaking%20in%20Pakistan.pdf>

¹³ M. Tahir Qureshi and M. Saeed Khan, "Mangrove Conservation through Community Participation in Pakistan: The Case of Sonmiani Bay," *ResearchGate* (2014), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268431382_Mangrove_Conservation_through_Community_Participation_in_Pakistan_The_Case_of_Sonmiani_Bay

1.3 Sindh Coastal Settlements

The Sindh coastal region is situated in the southeast of Pakistan. This area is threatened due to natural disasters like cyclones, rain, floods, and droughts. This region has two main coastal settlements, one at Karachi and the other at Ketī Bandar.

1.3.1 Karachi

Coastal settlements in Karachi, Thatta, and Badin form a vital part of Pakistan's southern shoreline, offering both ecological richness and economic importance. In Karachi, coastal communities such as Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri Goth, and Korangi Creek are densely populated and primarily depend on fishing for their livelihood. These communities are involved in the small-scale fishery, shrimp collection, boat-making, and seafood processing¹⁴. Further east, in Thatta and Badin, rural coastal settlements like Ketī Bunder, Khari Chan, Shah Bunder, Seerani, and Bhugra Memon are located along the fragile Indus Delta. The primary sources of income in these regions include fishing, agriculture, and mangrove-based activities such as fuelwood collection and honey harvesting¹⁵. These areas are ecologically rich but face serious challenges such as sea intrusion, poor infrastructure, and the impacts of climate change, which threaten both homes and livelihoods¹⁶.

1.3.2 Ketī Bandar

Ketī Bandar, a coastal settlement in Thatta District of Sindh, is located near the Indus Delta about 200 kilometres southeast of Karachi. The town and its surrounding villages are heavily dependent on the fishing industry, with around 90% of the local population engaged in fishing and related activities such as fish drying, net mending, and seafood trading¹⁷. The area's natural location once made it a thriving port, but over the years, environmental degradation — such as seawater intrusion, mangrove loss, and reduced freshwater flow — has severely impacted livelihoods¹⁸. In addition to fishing, a small portion of the population is involved in livestock rearing and informal labour. Despite its economic potential, Ketī Bandar lacks basic infrastructure and services, and many

¹⁴ WWF-Pakistan, *Sustainable Fisheries Management in Coastal Areas of Pakistan* (Karachi: WWF-Pakistan, 2022), https://www.wwfpak.org/our_work/freshwater/fisheries/

¹⁵ CityPopulation.de, "Gadani (Lasbela District, Balochistan, Pakistan), https://www.citypopulation.de/en/pakistan/balochistan/admin/lasbela/21503_gadani/

¹⁶ UNDP Pakistan, *Pakistan's Coastal Ecosystems and Communities: Building Resilience in the Face of Climate Change* (United Nations Development Programme, 2022), <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/coastal-ecosystems-and-communities>

¹⁷ Graana, "Exploring Ketī Bunder: A Hidden Coastal Gem of Sindh," last modified September 19, 2023, <https://www.graana.com/blog/exploring-keti-bunder/>

¹⁸ WWF-Pakistan, "Ketī Bunder – Climate Change Adaptation Project, <https://www.wwf.org.pk/ccap/ketibunder.php>

residents face poverty and poor living conditions¹⁹. However, recent NGO-led projects have started promoting alternative livelihoods, such as tailoring and handicrafts, especially for women, to reduce overdependence on declining marine resources²⁰.

In the coastal talukas of Badin and Thatta, almost 80% of the population lives below the poverty line. Women are most affected due to the cultural norms and trends set by traditional societies. Unlike men with a literacy rate of 50%, only 17% of women are literate in Thatta and 11% in Badin. Women have limited access to healthcare and services; therefore, only 40% of women get prenatal care, while 16% of them get postnatal care. The women in these areas are not allowed to move freely from one place to another, which makes them even more excluded. Sex discrimination is also done in various coastal activities like fishing. For example, regardless of playing an essential role in these fishing communities, women are only involved in activities like cleaning and drying fish; however, men are primarily responsible for catching them. In these coastal zones, women are not given the right to make decisions on their own. They often lack the sense of authority both in the household and the community. Gender inequality is a key barrier to poverty reduction and effective resource management. Women have the least access to natural resources like water and land, which makes it difficult for them to survive. After considering all these issues, reducing poverty in the coastal communities is the primary goal of this project. By allowing women's involvement in decisions about resource allocation, the project can reduce poverty and sustain the environment.

1.4 Mapping Coastal Settlements and Demographic Landscape in Pakistan

Pakistan has a coastline that stretches more than 1,000 kilometres, separated into the Sindh Coast and the Makran Coast²¹. This coastal stretch is not only crucial for a country's geography but also plays a vital role in maritime trade and economy²². It also supports different habitats like mangroves, wetlands, and coral reefs, which protect the environment and biodiversity.

The coastal areas are home to a large number of people who depend on their resources for their livelihood. About 15% of the global population (over 1 billion

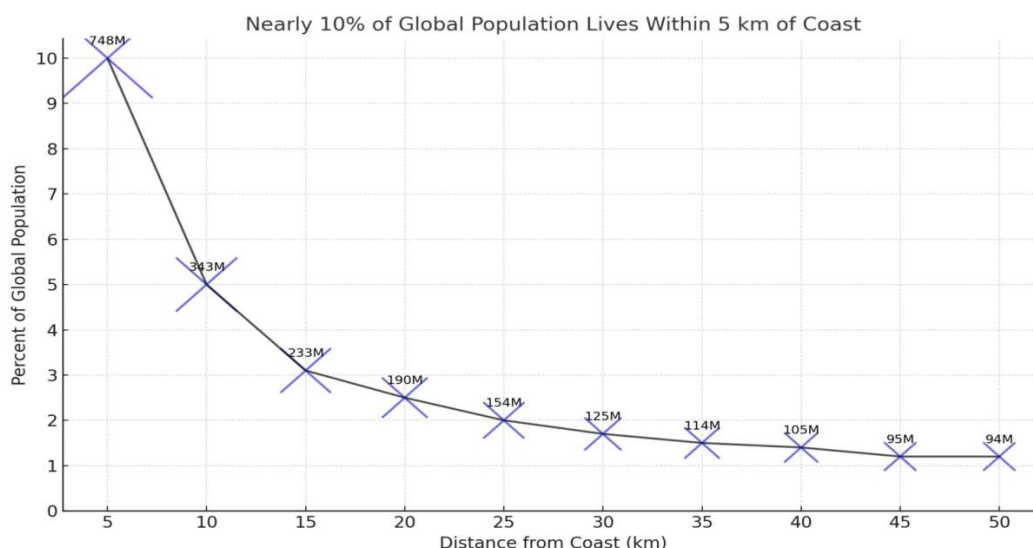
¹⁹ *Pakistan Today*, "Keti Bunder – The Town That Never Became the Third Port of Sindh," July 18, 2011, <https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/07/18/keti-bunder-%E2%80%93-the-town-that-never-became-the-third-port-of-sindh/>

²⁰ Mangroves for the Future (MFF), "Building Resilience Through Skill Development and Provision of Alternative Livelihoods to Women of Keti Bandar," 2020, <https://www.mangrovesforthe future.org/grants/small-grant-facilities/pakistan/building-resilience-through-skill-development-and-provision-of-alternative-livelihoods-to-women-of-keti-bandar/>

²¹ Shamsa Kanwal, *Study of Ground Displacements, Erosion and Sea Level Rise along Karachi Coast, Pakistan* (2022)

²² MFF Pakistan, *A Handbook on Pakistan's Coastal and Marine Resources* (Pakistan: MFF Pakistan, 2016), 78 pp

people) lives within 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) of the coast, and nearly 29% (over 2 billion people) live within 50 kilometres (31 miles) of the shore as of 2018²³.



Pakistan's total population is 255 million, with women making up 49.2% of the total population. The coastal areas support over 10% of Pakistan's population, of which women make up 4.2%.

Provinces	Districts	Population
Sindh	Karachi	2,329,764
	Thatta	1,083,191
	Badin	1,947,081
	Keti Bandar	63,217
Balochistan	Lasbela	680,917
	Gadani	17,540
	Sonmiani	64,392
	Gwadar	25,332
	Pasni	43,494
	Jiwani	25,332
	Oramara	27,832

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Census: Demobase Pakistan.

The Coastal settlements also serve as traditional and social centres, often preserving ancient knowledge and practices connected to the sea. They play an important role in providing resources and opportunities for better livelihood and economic prosperity. Coastal areas are magnets for people for several reasons. These regions often host economic hubs, providing abundant job opportunities, access to trade, and vibrant, diverse communities. Additionally, they offer proximity to natural resources, such as fisheries, and opportunities for recreation.

²³ National Center for Health Statistics, "People Live Near Coasts, <https://nchstats.com/people-live-near-coasts/>

CHAPTER 2

SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN COASTAL SECTORS

Women play an immensely noteworthy part in the production of local products and the maintenance of the economy, as well as the ecosystem of coastal communities. The efforts of women of coastal communities receive relatively little recognition or value compared to the vital contribution they make to economic revenue from coastal resources. Their contributions are made in almost all sectors of marine livelihood, ranging from fisheries and eco-tourism to local exchanges and cultural handmade crafts. Initially, women were confined to homes, but eventually, with the advent of globalisation and modernisation, women have started playing a prominent role in income generation worldwide. Some are even the sole breadwinners of their homes now. However, women of Pakistani coastal communities still lack awareness about their rights and face a restricted working environment. Despite their significant contributions to the marine economy, their work is undervalued. The nature of their work is informal, home-based, and they are producing on a smaller scale. Today, Women are being offered few opportunities for growing their production capacity and for recognising their relative roles. But the existing opportunities are very few, and there are multiple barriers to these opportunities that are discussed in the next chapter. This chapter will focus on the pre-existing socio-economic opportunities that the women of Pakistani coastal communities are availing.

2.1 Fisheries and Aquaculture

Pakistan's coastal regions, particularly in Sindh (Karachi, Thatta, and Badin) and Balochistan (Gwadar, Pasni, and Ormara), are heavily dependent on the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Traditionally male-dominated, this sector nevertheless offers significant socio-economic opportunities for women, particularly in post-harvest processing, small-scale aquaculture, and value-added activities. While men predominantly engage in offshore fishing, women are increasingly active in supporting roles within the fisheries value chain. Their participation includes Net mending, bait gathering, gear handling and Catch collection, sorting, and grading of fish. Such roles, though often informal or under recognized, are essential to the sustainability of local fisheries. In some global contexts, such as coastal and inland communities across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and the Mediterranean, similar patterns of female participation are observed, providing models for empowerment and inclusion²⁴.

Women also play a role in aquaculture, which includes the farming of fish and other aquatic species. Their contributions include feeding, pond maintenance, and harvesting. They also handle hatcheries, monitor growth conditions, and participate in the culture of marine plants and species. In Bangladesh, for example, the fisheries and aquaculture sector is a key livelihood source, especially for rural and coastal communities. Over the past two decades, women's participation in aquaculture has significantly increased. Women's involvement in these sectors offers untapped potential for economic

²⁴ SAGE University, "Role of Women in the Fisheries Sector," *SAGE University Blogs*
<https://sageuniversity.edu.in/blogs/role-of-women-in-the-fisheries-sector>

empowerment, Household income diversification, Improved food security and Sustainable community development. Investing in gender-sensitive policies, training, and infrastructure can help integrate women more fully into the fisheries and aquaculture economy, unlocking their potential as key contributors to coastal livelihoods and marine sustainability.

2.2 Seaweed Collection and Processing

In recent years, seaweed farming has emerged as a promising and environmentally sustainable livelihood option for coastal communities, particularly in developing countries, such as Pakistan. This sector presents a unique opportunity to enhance women's socio-economic participation. Traditionally marginalised in marine sectors dominated by men, women can play a central role in the cultivation and processing of seaweed due to the nature of the work, which is both labour-intensive and accessible within nearshore waters. Seaweed cultivation requires relatively low capital investment, making it suitable for small-scale, community-based operations. The farming process, often involving tying seaweed to ropes or nets submerged in shallow coastal waters, can be easily managed by women, especially those with limited access to land or restricted mobility. Their involvement spans from preparing cultivation materials and monitoring the growth of seaweed to harvesting and post-harvest handling. These activities are typically done close to shore or within community-managed farming zones, allowing women to integrate income-generating work with their household responsibilities.

Beyond farming, seaweed offers significant potential in value-added processing, an area where women have traditionally held strong roles in post-harvest activities. Dried seaweed can be processed into a range of products, including food items such as seaweed snacks and condiments, natural fertilisers, animal feed, herbal supplements, and cosmetics like soaps, scrubs, and facial masks. Women can engage in drying, cleaning, grinding, and packaging processes either individually or through cooperative ventures. These value chains not only enhance the profitability of seaweed farming but also open doors for entrepreneurship and the establishment of microenterprises led by women.

As women gain technical knowledge and confidence, their roles within the household and community are also redefined. Participation in seaweed enterprises contributes to their financial independence, increases their decision-making power at home, and fosters social recognition. In some global examples, such as in Zanzibar and the Philippines, women-led seaweed farming has transformed entire coastal economies and improved gender equity²⁵.

For Pakistan, the development of a women-inclusive seaweed industry could have far-reaching impacts. With support from government programs, marine

²⁵ Kateryna Schroeder, Edmar A. Galing, and Lilia D. Esteban, "Women's Empowerment in Fisheries and Aquaculture: A Review of the Evidence," *Journal of Rural Studies* 97 (2023): 496–508, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016723000918>

research institutes, NGOs, and coastal development agencies, women in fishing communities can be trained and empowered to lead in this high-potential sector. Integrating seaweed cultivation and processing into coastal livelihoods not only enhances women's economic status but also supports the broader goals of sustainable resource use and Blue Economy development.

2.3 Handicrafts and Marine-Based Artisanal Products

Coastal regions in Pakistan offer a rich and diverse marine ecosystem that can serve as the foundation for livelihood development beyond fishing and aquaculture. One of the most promising but often underexplored avenues for women's socio-economic empowerment in these areas lies in the creation of handicrafts and marine-based artisanal products. These activities build on local cultural knowledge, creative skills, and available natural resources, allowing women — who are often excluded from formal fishing occupations — to contribute meaningfully to household income and community development.

Women in coastal communities possess traditional skills in crafting, weaving, embroidery, and design. These can be adapted to produce a variety of artisanal goods using materials sourced from the sea, such as shells, fish scales, seaweed, driftwood, and natural dyes derived from marine plants. Products include jewellery, decorative items, shell-based ornaments, household crafts, and even eco-friendly accessories. In areas like Karachi's coastal villages or the Makran coast, women have begun integrating marine themes into their handiwork, creating items that reflect both cultural identity and ecological uniqueness.

In both Tonga and Fiji, Ministries of Fisheries, aquaculture programs and international development partners play a significant role in supporting and subsidising production and supporting the involvement of women in aquaculture. Coastal areas rely heavily on subsistence fishing, with women typically involved in catching small fish and gathering shellfish. The most significant informal activity involving women is in the production and sale of handicrafts such as tapa cloth, woven mats, jewellery, baskets, and clothing decorations²⁶.

For Pakistan, supporting women in the development of marine-based crafts and artisanal products can be a strategic component of inclusive Blue Economy growth. Government agencies, NGOs, and development partners have a role to play in providing training, infrastructure, and market access to help scale these efforts. By harnessing the creativity and resilience of coastal women, this sector can not only improve livelihoods but also strengthen the cultural and environmental fabric of Pakistan's shoreline communities.

²⁶ Laura Camfield and Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, "Are Women Empowered by Social Protection? Perspectives from Beneficiaries in Ethiopia and Uganda," *Development in Practice* 32, no. 8 (2022): 1106–1121, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09614524.2022.2128721#d1e148>.

2.4 Coastal and Marine Ecotourism

Coastal and marine ecotourism is an emerging sector with vast potential to foster sustainable development and economic empowerment in Pakistan's coastal regions. Particularly in areas such as Karachi, Thatta, Gwadar, beaches, mangroves, and cultural heritage sites, there are attractive opportunities for tourism development. For women living in these communities, ecotourism presents a promising pathway to participate more actively in the economy, generate income, and enhance their social status while contributing to environmental conservation²⁷.

Women's involvement in coastal and marine ecotourism can take multiple forms, ranging from hospitality services and guided tours to artisanal craft sales and cultural performances. Women also have deep-rooted knowledge of local ecosystems, putting them in a strong position to serve as eco-guides, nature interpreters, and educators who can provide guests with engaging and authentic experiences. Women can also provide food services, modest guesthouses, and homestays, establishing microbusinesses that support regional tourism infrastructure while maintaining the cultural heritage of their communities.

In Maharashtra's Sindhudurg region, the Swamini Group (a female-led community) runs eco-tours through local mangrove forests. These tours have become a unique tourism draw, educating visitors about local ecosystems while generating income. Women serve as boat operators, guides, and conservation educators. Other local women's organisations have been motivated by their success to adopt comparable conservation income methods, enhancing ecological awareness and community resilience²⁸.

For Pakistan's coastal provinces, developing gender-inclusive ecotourism can bridge economic development with environmental sustainability. Government agencies, development partners, and the private sector can support this by investing in infrastructure, capacity building, and marketing strategies that highlight the role of women. Empowering women in ecotourism not only diversifies income sources in coastal communities but also fosters greater gender equity and social cohesion, making it a vital component of the country's Blue Economy ambitions.

2.5 Livestock and Kitchen Gardening

In many coastal communities of Pakistan, livelihoods have traditionally been tied to fishing and marine resources. However, with growing environmental pressures, limited fishing rights for women, and socio-economic vulnerability,

²⁷ Fitriana Nur Rachmawati, "The Women's Role in Community-Based Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development," *ResearchGate*, September 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363296045_The_women's_role_in_community-based_cultural_tourism_and_sustainable_rural_development

²⁸ Vikalp Sangam, "A Group of Women Protect Sindhudurg's Mangroves through Ecotourism," <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/a-group-of-women-protect-sindhudurgs-mangroves-through-ecotourism/>

there is a need to diversify income sources for coastal households, particularly for women. Among the most accessible and impactful livelihood options are livestock rearing and kitchen gardening, both of which can be integrated into household routines and offer sustainable economic and nutritional benefits. Women in coastal villages often engage informally in backyard livestock rearing, tending to small animals such as goats, poultry, and cattle. With proper support and veterinary services, this activity can evolve from subsistence-level care to a source of steady income through the sale of milk, eggs, meat, or live animals such as bait.

Kitchen gardening, growing vegetables, herbs, and fruit in home yards or communal plots, is an effective way for women to improve food security while generating supplemental income. In coastal areas where fertile land is limited and salinity is high, raised-bed or saline-resistant gardening methods have allowed women to cultivate crops like spinach, okra, tomatoes, chillies, and local herbs. The produce not only supports household nutrition but can also be sold in local markets or exchanged within the community, enhancing both social capital and economic resilience.

In Kenya's Nyando near Lake Victoria, women-led groups use climate-smart techniques to combine kitchen gardening with small livestock and fish rearing, diversifying income and improving food access²⁹. Livestock and kitchen gardening offer practical and culturally appropriate pathways for women's economic participation in coastal areas. They contribute to diversified livelihoods, improved nutrition, and household stability, while reinforcing women's roles as economic agents.

2.6 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in coastal areas holds a lot of potential for women, particularly in areas where traditional livelihoods such as fishing and agriculture are male-dominated and increasingly affected by climate and environmental challenges. In Pakistan's coastal provinces, women face limited access to formal employment, land ownership, and market systems. Therefore, the expansion of coastal and marine-based entrepreneurship presents a pathway for women to overcome these barriers, achieve economic independence, and contribute to sustainable community development.

Women in coastal areas have the potential to initiate micro and small-scale enterprises based on the resources available in their environment. These include businesses in fish and seafood processing, seaweed cultivation and packaging, marine-based cosmetics, handicrafts made from shells and marine waste, eco-tourism services, and organic fertiliser or compost production. With proper access to training, financing, and technology, women can add value to raw materials, transforming them into goods that can be sold in regional, national, and even foreign markets.

²⁹ CGIAR, "Women's Empowerment and Climate Justice: Three Fish Preservation, Handling and Processing Interventions Improving Livelihoods in Kenya's Lake Victoria Region," *CGIAR*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/womens-empowerment-and-climate-justice-three-fish-preservation-handling-and-processing-interventions-improving-livelihoods-in-kenyas-lake-victoria-region/>.

In Zanzibar's Jambiani and nearby Kenyan coastal areas, women have shifted to sea sponge farming as a climate-resilient pathway. After training in swimming and marine farming techniques, they cultivate and harvest natural sponges and sell them to local and tourist markets. This diversification helps cope with rising sea temperatures, which harm seaweed farms³⁰. This gives an idea to the women in Pakistan to shape value-added marine enterprises from seaweed, sponges, and oysters that offer stable incomes and climate resilience.

³⁰ CGIAR, "Women's Empowerment and Climate Justice: Three Fish Preservation, Handling and Processing Interventions Improving Livelihoods in Kenya's Lake Victoria Region," *CGIAR*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/womens-empowerment-and-climate-justice-three-fish-preservation-handling-and-processing-interventions-improving-livelihoods-in-kenyas-lake-victoria-region/>.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS TO COASTAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN

Women in the coastal region of Pakistan play an important role, yet they lack access to resources and opportunities that contribute to their overall well-being. They face many disadvantages that create a more complex and vulnerable situation for them, like cultural norms, social exclusion, environmental changes, and religious commands. This chapter explains different barriers that affect the livelihood of the women living in these coastal settlements.

3.1 Social and Cultural Barriers

Women are not allowed to go anywhere without the permission of their male family members. Their social activities are very restricted. Patriarchal traditions stop women from moving freely, which makes them even more marginalised³¹. Because of the strict social rules, they are not allowed to work in public places, which stops them from going to markets, visiting farms, or joining training programs. In many coastal areas of Pakistan, strict cultural and religious beliefs say that women should stay at home and not work outside. These restrictions stop them from working out, keeping them away from public jobs and business, even when they support their families³².

Women are expected to do all the house chores alone without any help from the male members. Women in rural areas spend about 65% of their time doing unpaid housework, like cooking, cleaning, and caring for family, which leaves them with very little time or energy to earn their income or take part in outside work³³. Traditional norms view women as caretakers for the house and family. They are expected to raise children and contribute nothing financially, so women lack the motivation to work despite facing financial challenges. People do not recognise and appreciate the hard work women do at home or in small fishing activities. Their work is not considered necessary, which leaves them undervalued in the community. These cultural as well as religious restrictions make families believe that it is unethical or un-Islamic for women to work outside the home, which discourages them from joining cooperatives and income-generating activities³⁴.

³¹ Maira Asif, "Breaking Barriers: Empowering Women's Mobility in Pakistan through Women on Wheels," in *Riding to Freedom: Women Cyclists Reclaiming Public Space in Muslim Contexts* (2024), 42.

³² National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Climate Equity and Economic Justice for Coastal Women in Pakistan: Gender Analysis Report* (Islamabad: NCSW and UNDP, 2023).

³³ Ashwini Deshpande and Naila Kabeer, "Norms that Matter: Exploring the Distribution of Women's Work between Income Generation, Expenditure-Saving and Unpaid Domestic Responsibilities in India," *World Development* 174 (2024): 106435.

³⁴ Sharaf Bibi and Muhammad Usman Tobawal, "Critical Analysis on the Performance of Female Employees under Socio-Economic and Cultural Barriers in Balochistan," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2022).

3.2 ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

3.2.1 Literacy and Education Disparities

One of the most significant problems that women face is low literacy. In Sindh and Balochistan, many women cannot read or write, which stops them from availing many opportunities in life. Illiteracy stops their access to training, market information and civic engagement tools³⁵. Even working women with low literacy miss out on the vital information about the current fishing prices, weather updates and even the new market facilities. Illiterate women are often left out of training programs and business because they require basic education. Low literacy is not only an educational issue, but it also affects coastal women's ability to seek opportunities in various economic sectors³⁶.

3.2.2 Financial Exclusion and Asset Poverty

In the coastal areas of Pakistan, women face economic exclusion, which affects their ability to earn a decent living. Women do not own land, property, or assets, so they are not eligible to take loans. This holds them back from starting and growing their own small business. Most women do not have bank documents, a national identity, or basic digital and financial literacy, which affects their ability to access livelihood opportunities provided by the government and NGOs, such as loans. Financial exclusion restricts women from accessing finance, bank accounts, and ownership of securities. When small-scale loan projects are introduced, women lack the confidence they need³⁷. These financial exclusions also prevent them from accessing the resources for their traditional work.

3.2.3 Informal livelihood

Coastal women's income largely stems from informal labour. It means that they earn money by doing small, low-paid jobs at home or near the coast. The work, such as drying fish, making or repairing fishing nets, collecting crabs or shellfish, and making handicrafts or food items to sell, is done without any written contract³⁸. Women are usually paid significantly less or sometimes nothing at all for their work. Coastal women do a lot of work to survive and manage their livelihood, yet they are mostly not paid and are not officially

³⁵ Saeeda Shahwani, Rifat Tahira, Asia Abbas, and Munawar Khan, "Challenges and Opportunities of Higher Education for the Girls of Balochistan," *Voyage Journal of Educational Studies* 4, no. 3 (2024): 304–312.

³⁶ Attaullah Khan, Humera Jamal, Intikhab Alam, and Muhammad Ismail, "Factors Affecting Rural Livelihood in Pakistan," *Social Science Review Archives* 2, no. 2 (2024): 1941–1951.

³⁷ Mahnoor Altaf, Karim Ullah, and Muhammad Atiq, "Women-Owned Businesses and Access to Finance in Pakistan: A Study of Perceptions, Experiences and Behaviors," *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets* 17, no. 3 (2025): 632–660.

³⁸ Women in Fisheries in Pakistan: A Study of Their Socio-Economic Profile," *The Free Library*, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Women+in+fisheries+in+Pakistan%3a+a+study+of+their+socio-economic...-a0346808866>

recognised, which makes it very hard for them to earn decent money and live a good life³⁹.

3.2.4 Market Access and Price Exploitation

Limited market access affects the livelihood of many coastal women. It is because many coastal women lack access to transportation. They cannot travel due to poor roads and strict gender norms. Most of the coastal women are also not allowed by family and community to go to the fish markets or public places, as a result, they are not aware of the worth their products are sold for. Because of this, they sell their products to the local male middlemen at low prices. This creates a cycle of poverty, where coastal women work hard but continue to live a hard life.

3.3 Governance and Legal Gaps

Women in coastal areas are often overlooked in planning and decision-making, especially in sectors like fisheries and coastal management⁴⁰. Some laws in Pakistan are meant to protect women's rights and empower them⁴¹. However, due to governmental gaps, these laws are often ignored and are not implemented, so women continue to face problems in earning a living, owning land, and working safely.

3.4 Environmental Barriers

Climate change is a complex global issue with serious consequences for coastal communities. In Pakistan, coastal women are the most likely to face these challenges due to the already existing socio-economic and cultural insecurities⁴². Increase in temperatures, due to immense greenhouse gas emissions, warms the oceans and melts ice sheets. This combination leads to rising sea levels, eroding the coastlines, and increased storm surges. These changes destroy the marine habitats and impact the fish population, thus threatening the livelihoods of many coastal women who rely on fishing for food and income. The mangrove's exhaustion due to pollution has also shrunk water habitats, leading to a 30% decline in fish stocks in oceans⁴³. This has a significant effect on women's livelihoods, as most of their income depends on

³⁹ Nosheen Abdul Raheem Abro, Bisharat Ali Lanjwani, and Nazir Ahmed, "Nexus between Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of Women after Disaster: A Case Study of District Badin and Sujawal in Province of Sindh, Pakistan," *Journal of Research in Social Development and Sustainability* 2, no. 2 (2023): 49–69.

⁴⁰ Rida Fatima, Asmat Ali, Hammad Hussain, and Munir Ahmad, "Meeting the Challenges of Gender Equity through Female Land Ownership Rights in Pakistan," in *Effective Technology for Gender Equity in Business and Organizations*, ed. IGI Global (2024), 301–16.

⁴¹ Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020 (Pakistan)," *ADB's Law and Policy Reform Program*, <https://lpr.adb.org/resource/enforcement-womens-property-rights-act-2020-pakistan>

⁴² Wahid Ullah et al., "Unseen Suffering: Social Injustice among Women during Climate-Induced Migration in Pakistan," *Climate Risk Management* 46 (2024): 100663.

⁴³ Qadir Bux Aghani, "Ocean Conservation and Food Security in Pakistan," *Food and Nutrition*, June 5, 2025, *Agri Economist*, <https://agrieconomist.com/ocean-conservation-and-food-security-in-pakistan>

aquatic resources. These environmental shocks intensify poverty, triggering displacement and loss of traditional livelihoods.

In conclusion, women's livelihoods in Pakistan's coastal zones are hindered by a mix of social restrictions, cultural and religious norms, economic exclusion, and weak legal enforcement. Limited mobility, unpaid domestic burdens, lack of access to markets, and exclusion from decision-making keep coastal women in low-income, informal roles. Without targeted policy action and community-level change, these barriers will continue to trap women in cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROLE OF POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN EMPOWERING COASTAL WOMEN

4.1 National Policies and Frameworks

4.1.1 National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002)

The National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002) was an important step taken by the government of Pakistan to support women's rights and their participation in various aspects of life, such as education, health, employment, protection under the law, and politics. The policy did bring some good changes for the women in the urban and more developed areas of Pakistan. This includes more women's participation in local governments, better access to education and health services and better laws to protect them from violence. However, the coastal women, despite playing an essential role in the coastal economy, do not benefit from this policy. They still face many problems like poverty, poor access to clean water and healthcare, lack of education and job opportunities, and limited freedom of movement. While some programs, like Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), have reached parts of the coastal population, their impact remains limited due to factors like male control over resources, poor infrastructure, and cultural boundaries. Over time, this policy has become inactive, and there is no effective monitoring to keep this policy working, resulting in the specific needs of the coastal women remaining unaddressed⁴⁴.

4.1.2 National Gender Policy Framework (2022)

The National Gender Policy Framework (2022) is an important step taken by the Ministry of Human Rights. This policy is more comprehensive than the previous ones as it covers the basic needs of all women. Its main aim is to reduce gender inequality in Pakistan by focusing on supporting women's rights and their participation in various aspects like education, health, and politics. As the policy is not implemented correctly, its actual results are limited. Due to these limitations, this policy failed to benefit the women in the coastal areas. They continue to face many problems and are left out of the decisions on coastal development⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ Government of Pakistan, Planning Commission, *Gender and Women Empowerment*, chap. 9 in *Pakistan Economic Survey* (Islamabad: Planning Commission, 2023), <https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/docs/Ch9-Gender-and-women-empowerment.pdf>

⁴⁵ Government of Pakistan, *National Gender Policy Framework* (Islamabad: Ministry of Human Rights and Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, 2022), <https://pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NGPF.pdf>.

4.2 Political Participation

4.2.1 Reserved Seats in Parliament:

Pakistan has adopted actions that have allowed women to enter into the political space and participate in governance. These actions improve women's political participation by reserving 33% seats in local government, along with 17 reserved seats in the Senate and 60 seats in the National Assembly⁴⁶. However, the involvement of coastal women in politics and legal governance is non-existent due to many barriers, such as a lack of education and political awareness. As a result, the voices of the coastal women are mostly ignored on the platforms where vital decisions about their livelihood and well-being are made⁴⁷.

4.3 Legal Reforms Supporting Women

4.3.1 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2017)

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act was established to reinforce the law against honour killing and rape, closing the loopholes that formerly allowed culprits to escape penalties. This law ensures strict punishments and prevents families from forgiving the culprits. The law is still in force in Pakistan and is indicating progress, but its impact in coastal areas remains weak. Women in these areas often do not feel confident to report the crimes because of societal pressure and low reliance on the legal system. Most of the time, they are unaware that such a law exists, and even when they do know, the fear of not being taken into consideration and retaliation stops them from speaking up for themselves⁴⁸.

4.3.2 Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Law- Provincial Laws

These laws exist to prevent domestic violence against women in all the provinces, like Sindh (2013), Baluchistan (2014), Punjab (2016), and Islamabad (2020). They are still active in many areas, thus offering a proper platform for reporting abuse. While they are active, their implementation is still very weak, especially in rural and coastal regions. Even when the laws exist, social and cultural barriers, lack of awareness and low confidence in the judicial system

⁴⁶ Rahim, Tariq. "Beyond Quotas: Examining Patriarchal Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Pakistan." *J. Pol. Stud.* 31 (2024): 67.

Akmal, Awais, Noshaba Tasawar, and Hina Tariq. "The Role of Reserved Seats for Women's Representation in Pakistan." *Journal of Political Stability Archive* 2, no. 4 (2024): 106-116.

⁴⁷ 사다프. "A Qualitative Study of Implementation Challenges Of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) In Pakistan." PhD diss., 서울대학교 대학원, 2025.

⁴⁸ NATLEX – Pakistan – Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2017 (Act No. IV of 2017) https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=104947.

prevent the coastal women from availing the opportunity to access legal aid and seek justice⁴⁹.

Laws such as the *Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010)* and the *Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act (2021)* also exist to safeguard women's well-being; however, in the case of coastal communities, incidents often go unreported, and there is a noticeable lack of legal outreach and implementation in these areas.

4.4 Institutional Mechanisms

4.4.1 National Commission on Status of Women

The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) is a regulatory body established in 2000, strengthened by the NCSW Act of 2012. The Commission includes a Chairperson and two members from each of the four provinces, along with one member each from Islamabad, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. It also has a representative of religious minorities, a member from each provincial commission on the status of women, and five members from the Ministries of Law, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Human Rights. The Commission's primary role is to protect women's rights, promote gender equality, and support women's empowerment. It is still in force today, and the actions are commendable. The NCSW also provides services to coastal women by addressing their problems and promoting their rights⁵⁰.

4.5 Economic Empowerment Programs

4.5.1 Women Entrepreneurship Programs

This program was introduced by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), the Punjab Women Development Department, and First Women Bank. Its purpose is to offer free loans, support for starting new businesses, and training to youth, including women. This program remains active in 2025. However, their specific offices are not available in the coastal regions yet. However, their rural and provincial outreach is accessible to the coastal women⁵¹.

4.5.2 Kamyab Jawan Program

This program is led by the Prime Minister's Youth Programme and is still active in 2025. Its primary purpose is to provide free loans and training to women, thus

⁴⁹Provincial Assembly of Sindh, *The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013*, Sindh Act No. XX of 2013 (approved March 12, 2013; notified March 19, 2013), PDF, https://www.af.org.pk/Acts_Fed_Provincial/Sindh_Acts_since_2002/Sindh%20%202013/The%20Domestic%20Violence%20%28Prevention%20and%20Protection%29%20Act,%202013.pdf

⁵⁰ National Commission on the Status of Women. *NCSW Conducts 75th Board Meeting Focused on Education, Legal Reform and Women's Inclusion*. February 28, 2024. <https://ncsw.gov.pk/NewsDetail/YzZiZWZlOWEtMTcyYS00ZDQ1LWFiZGltMWRhMDFkYTTFmZjk4>.

⁵¹ Institute of Business Administration, Center for Entrepreneurial Development (IBA-CED), "Women Entrepreneurship Program (WEP)", <https://ced.iba.edu.pk/wep.php>

enhancing women's empowerment and promoting gender equality. However, there is no information regarding these offices in coastal areas that prevent women from seeking opportunities that improve their livelihood⁵².

There is currently no coastal-specific gender policy in Pakistan, which reflects a significant gap in addressing the unique challenges faced by women in these regions. Although coastal women contribute actively to local economies — particularly in sectors like fisheries, tourism, and seaweed collection — their work remains largely informal and undocumented. This invisibility in official records makes it difficult to design inclusive policies or targeted development programs. Moreover, the absence of gender-disaggregated data for coastal areas further hampers effective policy formulation and resource allocation. In this vacuum, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) attempt to support coastal women through microcredit schemes, skill development initiatives, and awareness campaigns. Still, these efforts are often limited in scale and sustainability.

⁵² State Bank of Pakistan, "Incentive Schemes for SMEs & Other Sectors," *State Bank of Pakistan*, <https://www.sbp.org.pk/Incen-others/sme-8.asp>

CHAPTER 5

EXISTING INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD IN PAKISTAN

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the organisations that are already taking initiatives for sustainable livelihood and women's empowerment.

5.1 World-Wide Fund (WWF)

The World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) works to support and maintain the natural world for the welfare of people and wildlife, collaborating with partners from local to global levels in nearly 100 countries. The World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is actively working in Pakistan's coastal communities, thus focusing on ocean protection, sustainable fishing, mangrove restoration, and climate adaptation. It can be expanded in all the coastal areas given the proper support, especially with stronger inclusion of women⁵³. Some of their initiatives include:

- a. **Climate Sheroes Kick Start Mangrove Restoration:** This group of Climate Sheroes constitutes 500 women involved in nature restoration in Pakistan. In 2023, they planted over 1,500 ha of mangroves, generating income for 90 women⁵⁴.
- b. **Tackling Poverty in Pakistan's Coastal Communities through the Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project (2004):** This project focused on reducing poverty in coastal areas of Pakistan by focusing on promoting livelihood. It highlighted challenges faced by the coastal communities, including a lack of support for small-scale fishers and a limited understanding of women's roles. This project aimed to create practical solutions that could improve incomes while protecting natural resources⁵⁵.
- c. **Gender Empowerment & Livelihoods (Food & Agriculture Program):** In this program, more than **20,000 rural women** have been trained in sustainable livelihoods like *beekeeping, kitchen gardening, embroidery, poultry rearing, and running micro-nurseries*. They also learn *financial literacy, digital marketing, and labour rights* to support small-scale income generation⁵⁶.
- d. **Micro-Nurseries & Kitchen Gardening:** In **Southern Punjab and Sindh**, women are empowered through **women-run micro-**

⁵³ World Wildlife Fund. *World Wildlife Fund*. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/>.

⁵⁴ Coastal Community-Led Conservation, *Publications*, <https://coastalcommunityledconservation.org/publications/>.

⁵⁵ WWF Pakistan, *A Brief Analysis of Coastal Policies and Practices for the Project: Tackling Poverty in Pakistan's Coastal Communities through the Sustainable Coastal Livelihood Project (EU funded)*, Jan. 12th – Feb. 27th and March 29th – April 12th, 2004, (Lahore: WWF Pakistan, 2004), https://www.wwf.org.pk/pdf/tp_sp_review_ofcoastalpolicies.pdf.

⁵⁶ WWF-Pakistan, *Gender Empowerment and Livelihoods*, https://www.wwfpak.org/our_work_/food_and_agriculture_/gender_empowerment_and_livelihoods

nurseries, working with partners such as IKEA. They grow indigenous tree saplings for sale, supporting reforestation projects while earning an independent income⁵⁷.

5.2 United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

UNDP works in about 170 countries and territories, helping to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities and exclusion, and build resilience so countries can sustainably grow. It also supports **climate adaptation, renewable energy, and biodiversity conservation**, and as the UN's development agency, UNDP plays an essential role in helping countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals⁵⁸. Moreover, UNDP also aims to empower women and marginalised groups in all areas of development and promotes equal access to education, resources, leadership, and decision-making for the promotion of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Their livelihood projects are:

- a. **Strengthening Disaster Risk Management in Coastal Communities through PDMA-UNDP-Japan Collaboration (2024):** The primary focus of this project was to help people and institutions prepare for disasters. With support from UNDP, the project focused on coastal areas at risk like **Malir, West/Keamari (Karachi)**, and **Gwadar in Sindh and Balochistan**. Moreover, the project ensured that **both men and women were equal and were a part of disaster planning and training**⁵⁹. So, coastal women were a part of this effort both in the practice and in the project's goal.
- b. **Vocational Skills in KP (Kurram & Orakzai):** A Japan-supported program trained **700 youth**, including 375 women, in trades like solar installation, jewellery making, plumbing, and eco-packaging. The initiative is part of a **\$4.1 million multi-year effort** benefiting 200,000 people, prioritising women and youth as agents of economic recovery⁶⁰.
- c. **Living Indus Initiative:** A joint Government–UN stewardship platform launched in 2021 to restore the ecological health of the **Indus Basin**, including coastal, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems. The program includes community-driven projects like **Recharge Pakistan**

⁵⁷ WWF, "The Role of Women in Conservation: An Understated Representation," https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?13670966/The-role-of-women-in-conservation-An-understated-representation

⁵⁸ United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP*, <https://www.undp.org/>.

⁵⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *PDMA's and Coastal Communities Strengthen Disaster Risk Management with Support from the Government of Japan and UNDP*. August 23, 2024. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/pdmas-and-coastal-communities-strengthen-disaster-risk-management-support-government-japan-and-undp>

⁶⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pakistan, "A Transformative Step towards a Resilient Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: 700 Young People Have Acquired Market-Driven Skills," <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/press-releases/transformative-step-towards-resilient-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-700-young-people-have-acquired-market-driven-skills-through>.

and has been recognised as a **UN Environment Programme World Restoration Flagship**.

5.3 Balochistan Rural Support Program

The Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) was established in 1983. It is a major non-profit in Balochistan that works to improve rural livelihoods by empowering communities, especially women, through civic engagement, infrastructure, education, health, and livelihood programs. It can be expanded at both rural and coastal levels⁶¹. Some projects include:

- a. **Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP):** GRASP is a six-year EU-funded project (2019–2024) whose primary purpose is to reduce poverty by strengthening climate-resilient SMEs in horticulture and livestock sectors in Sindh and Balochistan, with BRSP executing it in Khuzdar and Lasbela⁶².
- b. **Interest-free loan:** BRSP's Interest-free Loan programme helps poor families in six districts of Balochistan to initiate their home-based small businesses by giving them loans without interest to support livelihoods and reduce poverty⁶³.
- c. **Women's Economic Empowerment:** The project "Women's Economic Empowerment" (WEE) works directly with at least 750 women workers (WWs) and women-owned businesses (WOBs) in Quetta. It helps them form a functioning group, thus providing them with skills to start their own business and connect to different market trainings⁶⁴.

5.4 Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations plays a pivotal role in supporting vulnerable communities in Pakistan, particularly those affected by poverty, climate change, and natural disasters. FAO adopts a multi-dimensional approach, focusing on food security, sustainable agriculture, and community resilience, with special emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. FAO also enhances the productivity of **small-scale and artisanal fishers** through training, infrastructure, and access to markets. It promotes **sustainable fishing practices** to reduce overfishing and protect biodiversity. They have worked in the following domains:

⁶¹ Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP), *Balochistan Rural Support Programme*, <https://brsp.org.pk/>.

⁶² Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP), *Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP)*, <https://brsp.org.pk/2023/03/11/growth-for-rural-advancement-and-sustainable-progress-grasp/>

⁶³ Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP), *Interest-Free Loan (IFL)*, <https://brsp.org.pk/2023/03/12/interest-free-loan-ifl/>

⁶⁴ Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP), *Women Economic Empowerment*, <https://brsp.org.pk/women-economic-empowerment/>.

- a. **Building Capacities on Food Systems with a Special Focus on Gender and Women's Empowerment:** FAO has worked to make Pakistan's agricultural sector more inclusive by improving women's access to resources, training, and decision-making roles.
- b. **GRASP Programme:** Works in Sindh and Balochistan, empowers over 33,000 rural households, especially women, by enhancing agri-based value chains and connecting small farmers to markets.
- c. **Australia Balochistan Agri Business Program (AusABBA II):** Supports both male and female farmers in remote areas through training and diversified income-generating opportunities.
- d. **Multi-Year Humanitarian Program (MYHP):** FAO has strengthened local food systems and recovery mechanisms, ensuring vulnerable farmers regain their livelihoods in disaster-prone zones.

5.5 Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS)

HANDS (Health and Nutrition Development Society) is one of Pakistan's largest non-profit organisations, dedicated to uplifting marginalised communities through integrated development approaches. Since its establishment, HANDS has focused on food security, livelihood enhancement, and community empowerment, especially for vulnerable women and youth. In 2022–23 alone, HANDS implemented 14 livelihood-related projects across 43 districts and 6,887 villages/urban settlements, reaching over 1.29 million beneficiaries.

HANDS provides **primary healthcare**, maternal-child services, and nutritional support through *Marvi workers* and Liaison Health Workers in remote coastal settlements, ensuring access to essential health counselling and maternal services for women in underserved coastal communities⁶⁵. Moreover, it leads to **disaster risk reduction (DRR)** and flood resilience in coastal zones, including **shelter construction**, **cash-for-work livelihoods**, and climate-adaptive infrastructure focusing on **women-headed households** and vulnerable households during crises.

- a. **Non-Agriculture Interventions:** HANDS promotes women's economic empowerment by providing vocational training and establishing community-based microenterprises, such as sewing businesses, small retail shops, and pushcarts.
- b. **Agriculture Interventions:** HANDS delivers training and support in climate-resilient farming, livestock, poultry, fish farming, kitchen gardening, and organic cultivation, along with agri-inputs and toolkits. In 2022–23, 1,035 individuals received PKR 30 million in agricultural grants.

⁶⁵ HANDS Pakistan, *HANDS Pakistan Blog*, <https://handspakistan.wordpress.com/>.

- c. **Business-in-a-Box:** A social franchise model helps women set up home-based shops offering grocery and hygiene items, improving both income and community access to essentials.
- d. **Interest-Free Loan (IFL) Program:** HANDS supported 4,128 borrowers with over PKR 116 million to start or expand microenterprises.
- e. **Flood Recovery & Model Village Rehabilitation — Essa Rajero (Thatta):** In response to the devastating 2022 floods, HANDS partnered with **Unilever Pakistan** to develop a **model village in Essa Rajero, Thatta. They constructed 90 resilient houses**, improved infrastructure, and gave access to clean water, electricity, and educational facilities.

5.6 Shirkat Gah

The Shirkat Gah, Women's Resource Centre, is a Pakistan-based non-governmental organisation established in 1975. It was initially set up as a resource and publication centre to support women's rights and has since evolved into a feminist organisation engaged in advocacy, capacity building, community empowerment, and policy influence. Shirkat Gah works to promote gender equality, reproductive health rights, climate justice, and women's participation in governance and decision-making processes. It operates through a combination of research, community-based interventions, legal awareness campaigns, and alliances with civil society and government actors to amplify women's voices, particularly those of marginalised and vulnerable groups. The organisation has played a key role in advancing progressive legislation, raising awareness on violence against women, and fostering grassroots leadership through its regional offices across Pakistan.

- a. **Drivers of Change (2017–2020) – Ending Violence Against Women and Girls:** Supported by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, the project was implemented in **40 villages across four provinces** (Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan). **Community Action Groups** were formed to raise awareness about gender-based violence and provide referral pathways for survivors. As a result, over **80% of female respondents** reported increased awareness of rights, and many communities set up local mechanisms for redress.

5.7 National Rural Support Program

The National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) has been promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation in rural and urban Pakistan. Recognising that rural women often lack literacy, identity documentation, financial independence, and decision-making power, NRSP's Gender and Development sector addresses these gaps through a comprehensive approach. Women are integrated into Community Organisations (COs), Village Organisations (VOs), and Local Support Organisations (LSOs), and supported through microfinance, vocational training,

asset transfers, and leadership development. NRSP also promotes gender-sensitive planning across all its programs. Key initiatives include:

- a. **Union Council-Based Poverty Reduction Program**, which doubled women's participation in highly conservative regions.
- b. **Gender Action Learning System (GALS)**, which strengthened women's voice in decision-making in Sindh's coastal areas. NRSP also contributes to disaster risk reduction, digital skills, health awareness, and faith-based education through women-run centres.

5.8 The Indus Earth Trust

Indus Earth Trust (IET) is a Pakistan-based, not-for-profit organisation working in the area of sustainable development. Established in 2000 to aid neglected coastal communities in Pakistan, IET realised the impossibility of pinpointing a single-issue hindering development. IET's approach to planned interventions has thus been of Integrated Development. Its projects target the main underlying issues affecting these communities under the six program areas of Livelihood Employment and Enterprise Development Program and Livelihood Support Infrastructure, Water and Community Physical Infrastructure, Alternative Energy Solutions, Indigenous Housing Systems, Food Security, and Drought Mitigation and Adaptation and tackling these program areas simultaneously uplifts and benefits communities in a holistic manner. IET believes that this methodology results in long-lasting and sustainable change. IET works mainly in six districts in the Sindh and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan, mainly along the coast, covering approximately 900 kilometres, including 13 Union Councils and approximately 392 villages.

- a. **Livelihoods & Training Program (LEED):** IET's LEED program targets marginalised groups, including women, widows, and persons with disabilities, to enhance their incomes through skill development and entrepreneurial support. The program offers microloans, grants, and training in areas such as livestock management, digital skills, and enterprise development. To date, over 10,000 individuals have benefited from this initiative⁶⁶.
- b. **Alternative Energy Solutions:** Recognising the energy deficit in rural Pakistan, IET focuses on harnessing local renewable energy sources. Projects include the installation of solar home systems, solar street lights, and wind turbines. These initiatives aim to provide sustainable energy solutions, reducing dependency on traditional fuels and improving the quality of life in remote coastal areas⁶⁷.

IET operates in six districts across Sindh and Balochistan, covering approximately 900 kilometres of coastal areas. The organisation has impacted over 300,000 beneficiaries in more than 400 villages, addressing challenges

⁶⁶ Pak NGOs, "Indus Earth Trust (IET), <https://pakngos.com.pk/ngo/indus-earth-trust-iet/>.

⁶⁷ Pak NGOs, "Indus Earth Trust (IET)," <https://pakngos.com.pk/ngo/indus-earth-trust-iet/>.

such as floods, droughts, and cyclones through integrated development programs.

In conclusion, these various organisations are deliberately working in one way or another to achieve sustainability and improve livelihood. However, these efforts are not enough; therefore, the government must take a step forward and cooperate with these organisations to achieve the sustainability goals. By sharing the resources, aligning policies, and securing effective implementation, the government can play a crucial role in creating long-term solutions that truly ensure better livelihoods for all.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATION

As discussed, a wide range of sustainable livelihoods, including fisheries and aquaculture, seaweed collection and processing, handicrafts and marine-based artisanal products, coastal and marine ecotourism, livestock rearing and kitchen gardening, and entrepreneurship, all of these present great opportunities that enhance women's empowerment and socio-economic capabilities. A broad approach must be adopted to ensure the active participation of women in these sectors.

Primarily, women must be given awareness regarding livelihood avenues and their potential gains. Language barriers, which often constrain access to training and information, should be addressed by ensuring that all matters and programs are available in local languages. Additionally, the training programs must be adapted to these sectors as they are crucial to developing the technical capacity in women. To enhance women's economic stability, these efforts should be integrated by generating employment opportunities and ensuring women have access to financial support mechanisms such as micro-finance and credit.

To overcome the challenges that women face in the coastal communities in Pakistan, such as socio-cultural barriers, educational and literacy disparities, financial exclusion and asset poverty, informal livelihoods, environmental vulnerabilities, and governance and legal gaps, tangible steps need to be taken. First, community-based awareness campaigns and gender-sensitisation programs should be set in motion to challenge cultural norms and encourage women's participation in decision-making. To construct the educational gaps, it is required to set up literacy programs and flexible skill-based training for adults. To address the financial exclusion and asset poverty, saving groups and women-led cooperatives should be supported, alongside initiatives that enable women to gain land, tools, and other productive assets. To nourish the informal livelihoods, it is required to offer women official recognition, formal agreements, and social protection mechanisms in the various frameworks, such as fisheries, agriculture, and artisanal work. To mitigate the environmental barriers, women must be allowed to participate in climate adaptation programs and trained in sustainable resource management. Lastly, strengthening governance involves prioritising gender-based policies at the local level, ensuring that legal aid services are accessible and establishing community monitoring systems to hold institutions accountable. Suppose these steps are adopted by the private and public sectors and the other grassroots organisations. In that case, it will create a supportive environment for the empowerment and resilience of coastal women in Pakistan.

As mentioned in chapter 4, Pakistan has introduced many crucial policies and legal reforms to support women such as the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002), the National Gender Policy Framework (2022), reserved seats in parliament, domestic violence laws at the provincial level, the establishment of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), and various economic empowerment programs, still it requires a clear need for amendments. It is suggested that these policies must be reconsidered for the women whose needs are often overlooked. The gender policies must be updated with clear execution plans, a monitoring mechanism, and allocated budgets to ensure their goals

are implemented. Reeved seats in the parliament and legal reforms, such as domestic violence laws, should be coordinated across the provinces to ensure that women representatives can meaningfully influence policy. The NCSW should be empowered with greater authority and resources to assess progress and enforce accountability. These amendments will help in bridging the gap between policy and practice, thus making gender equality more achievable in Pakistan.

As discussed in chapter 5, various organisations like WWF, UNDP, FAO, Shirkat Gah, HANDS, the Balochistan Rural Support Program, the National Rural Support Program, and the Indus Earth Trust play an essential role in holding up coastal communities through environmental conservation, socio-economic development, gender empowerment, and capacity-building gender empowerment. It is recommended that the government cooperate with these organisations through formal partnerships, cooperative planning, and resource sharing. The government can ensure more effective implementation of these policies at the local level by aligning the national development priorities with the ongoing work of these organisations. Public-private cooperation and joint programs can balance successful pilot projects, broaden coverage to remote coastal areas, and avoid repetition. Furthermore, the government must develop collaborative hubs both at the national and district levels to engage everyone in these community-led initiatives. Such collaborations will help in encouraging sustainable development outcomes for coastal women and communities in Pakistan.

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DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY DOCUMENT
**INDIAN OCEAN MARITIME NETWORK
(IOMN)**

National Institute of Maritime Affairs
at Bahria University, Sector E-8, Islamabad

 www.nimapak.org  [/nimaib](https://www.facebook.com/nimaib)  dnima@bahria.edu.pk  [nima_pakistan](https://www.instagram.com/nima_pakistan)  [/nimaib](https://twitter.com/nimaib)

Objective

1. Establishing a Pakistani-centric initiative modeled on existing regional frameworks such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) fostering strategic cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states, positioning Pakistan as a key player in promoting regional stability, security, and economic growth & countering growing Indian influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Background

2. The Indian Ocean, the third-largest body of water in the world, holds immense strategic significance due to its role in global trade and security. It is home to vital sea lanes of communication (SLoCs) that account for about 40% of the world's trade and nearly half of global container traffic. The Indian Ocean region is undergoing unprecedented geopolitical shifts. From a historically bipolar world order, the region is transitioning to a multipolar environment, where regional cooperation between nations is becoming increasingly important. Countries with access to the Indian Ocean are realizing that strategic alignment and maritime collaboration are critical to ensuring regional stability, peace, and economic prosperity. The shifting geopolitical landscape, driven by rising powers and evolving national interests, makes maritime cooperation more necessary than ever.

3. The geopolitical rivalry between major powers like the United States and China adds complexity to the maritime dynamics in the Indian Ocean. Both the US and China are vying for influence in the region, as it is a critical juncture for global trade and maritime security. The United States has sought to solidify alliances with like-minded nations, as evidenced by the Democracy Conference in December 2021, which focused on collective security and regional governance.

4. On the other hand, China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its increasing naval footprint, has created tensions with other regional actors, including India and the United States. Pakistan's close ties with China, especially concerning the South China Sea, have strained its relations with some ASEAN countries, which increasingly align with the US in opposing China's maritime claims.

5. India's growing economic and military clout since the 1990s has positioned it as a key regional power within the Indian Ocean. As a counterweight to China, India has sought to expand its influence across the region, leveraging both its naval capabilities and diplomatic initiatives. India's revised naval strategy highlights its intent to safeguard maritime interests that stretch far beyond its immediate borders, with the United States recognizing India as a crucial ally in the Indo-Pacific region.

6. This rising influence has led to tensions between India and Pakistan, particularly in the maritime domain. India's growing hegemonic behavior, particularly its attempts to solidify its maritime control in the Indian Ocean, directly conflicts with Pakistan's maritime interests, especially in the North Arabian Sea. Additionally, India's relationships with other regional neighbors, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the

Maldives, have further diminished Pakistan's strategic influence, as these nations increasingly pivot towards India.

7. For Pakistan, with its extensive coastlines along the North Arabian Sea, accounting for 91% of its total trade volume, ensuring maritime security while countering India's influence in the region becomes an essential component of its broader foreign policy and security strategy. It is worthwhile to mention that Pakistan has trade relations with China, South Korea, Japan, and ASEAN bloc, which accounts for over 40% of total trade by volume handled by sea. The country's maritime strategy must not only address external threats but also foster internal regional cooperation to preserve its sovereignty and influence. Thus, navigating this complex web of alliances and rivalries is crucial in securing its maritime interests while balancing its partnerships with China and the United States. As the country's economic and maritime strategies evolve, it becomes essential for Pakistan to reevaluate its position in the shifting global order.

8. Pakistan's maritime trade is vital to its economy, with imports like crude oil, edible oil, coal, and gas coming primarily from the Middle East and ASEAN nations, while it exports goods to Europe, the Americas, and beyond. The Pakistan Navy (PN) plays a central role in safeguarding these interests, especially in the North Arabian Sea. PN plays a pivotal role in securing Pakistan's maritime interests, particularly in the North Arabian Sea. By fostering cooperation with both regional and extra-regional players, the PN works to safeguard national and international maritime interests. Despite geopolitical challenges, including the rivalry between the US and China, the PN has managed to maintain positive relations with key global powers, reinforcing Pakistan's strategic position in the region.

9. The PN's biannual exercise, AMAN, serves as a platform for enhancing maritime cooperation and peacebuilding among regional and international navies. However, there is a growing need to evolve the AMAN exercise to adapt to the changing dynamics of the maritime environment. The Pakistan International Maritime Exhibition and Conference (PIMEC) held in 2023 and the AMAN Dialogue in February 2025 are examples of Pakistan's efforts to enhance its maritime engagement and build stronger regional ties. As the region becomes increasingly strategic due to its growing economic importance, Pakistan must enhance its regional presence and secure its maritime interests.

Role of Existing Regional Organizations

10. A brief summary of the existing Regional organization is appended below:

a. **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** IORA, founded in 1997, is a forum for promoting cooperation among the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The organization focuses on fostering sustainable development and addressing issues like maritime security, trade, environmental protection, and climate change. It has 23 members and 11 Dialogue partners. Iran, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Oman, India, UAE, Yemen, Australia, etc are its prominent members. Its dialogue partners include China, KSA, USA & UK along with other major players. Its headquarters are in **Ebene, Mauritius**. IORA works on the principle of collective discussions, and veto by one country is taken as a No from IORA. India has opposed Pakistan's entry into IORA on the same principle.

b. **The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS):** It's a voluntary initiative that brings together **navies of Indian Ocean littoral states** to promote **maritime security, stability, and cooperation**. Established in **2008** by the Indian Navy along with 14 founding members, it serves as a platform for dialogue and collaboration on naval issues. India, Australia, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Indonesia, Iran, Maldives, Mauritius, Oman, Sri Lanka, UAE, United Kingdom, Yemen are a few of its members. It presently has 25 members. Pakistan officially became a member of the IONS during the Conclave of Chiefs (CoC) held in March 2014 in Australia.

c. **Indian Ocean Commission (IOC):** The Indian Ocean Commission, founded in 1982, focused on regional cooperation between the island nations of the southwestern Indian Ocean. The IOC emphasizes environmental sustainability, climate change, and regional maritime security. IOC has 5 Full Members) including Comoros, France (Reunion Island), Madagascar, Mauritius & Seychelles. Its headquarters is in Mauritius. Observer States & Partners include, but not limited to, China, European Union (EU), India, Japan, etc.

d. **China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation (CIORFDC):** The China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation (CIORFDC) is a multilateral initiative launched by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) in November 2022. This forum aims to enhance economic cooperation, maritime connectivity, sustainable development, and disaster resilience among the littoral and island states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It reflects China's growing strategic interest in the Indian Ocean and serves as a counter-narrative to India-led platforms such as IORA and IONS. The inaugural meeting was held in Kunming, China, and attended by representatives from over 19 countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Iran, Oman, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand, among others. Notably, India was not invited, reinforcing the forum's alignment with Chinese regional ambitions. The initiative promotes development-oriented cooperation in areas such as port development, maritime infrastructure, blue economy, climate resilience, and capacity-building. It does not function on a binding consensus mechanism but seeks voluntary cooperation and coordination in line with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

e. **China-Africa Blue Economy Cooperation:** The China-Africa Blue Economy Cooperation is a strategic component of the broader Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), focusing on the sustainable development of marine resources and infrastructure along the African coastlines of the Indian Ocean. This initiative supports projects in marine fisheries, port development, maritime logistics, coastal tourism, and marine environmental protection. It reflects China's long-term vision to integrate African littoral states into its 21st-century Maritime Silk Road framework. The cooperation primarily involves Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Seychelles, and Comoros, all of which are located in the Western Indian Ocean. Additional participating countries include South Africa, Djibouti, and island nations with strategic ports. China provides financial, technical, and institutional support through investments and capacity-building programs. While not a formal

intergovernmental organization, this framework functions through bilateral and multilateral agreements, aligning closely with China's objectives to strengthen maritime connectivity and influence in the Indian Ocean Region. Though Pakistan is not geographically in Africa, it benefits indirectly as a strategic maritime partner of China, particularly through shared naval engagement and the development of Gwadar Port.

Objective of Establishing a Pakistani-led Indian Ocean Maritime Network

11. Given this context, establishing a Pakistani-centric initiative modeled on existing regional frameworks such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) would foster strategic cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states, positioning Pakistan as a key player in promoting regional stability, security, and economic growth. It is also important to mention that no state can single-handedly manage the maritime challenges of the 21st century, thus it needs collaboration/ cooperation and friendly working relations to cope with these challenges.

12. Since Pakistan is not currently a member of these organizations except IONS, it is unable to fully leverage these platforms to play a more proactive and influential role in the region. This limitation hinders Pakistan from contributing to or benefiting from collaborative maritime security efforts, trade facilitation, and environmental sustainability initiatives in the Indian Ocean. Given the growing geopolitical importance of the region and Pakistan's strategic position in the North Arabian Sea (NAS), it is imperative that Pakistan models a new platform that allows for greater engagement and leadership.

13. This new initiative, which can be named as 'Indian Ocean Maritime Network' (IOMN), would serve as an inclusive and flexible forum, with membership open to all willing nations. Unlike some existing associations where unanimous consent is required for the inclusion of new members, the IOMN would allow countries to join based on their willingness to contribute to and benefit from the shared goals of regional cooperation, ensuring a broader and more dynamic platform for all stakeholders in the Indian Ocean region.

14. The primary objective of this concept paper is to propose the creation of a Pakistani-led initiative that mirrors the frameworks of IORA, IOC, and IONS to enhance the Maritime influence of Pakistan in the Indian Ocean and particularly the North Arabian Sea (NAS) & Persian Gulf. This new network would serve as a platform for countries surrounding the Indian Ocean to foster cooperation on maritime security, trade, environmental protection, and climate resilience. However, other countries like Türkiye, China, Egypt, etc., can also become members, as this new organization will not restrict membership to only founding countries. By initiating such a network, Pakistan would:

- a. Solidify its Role as a Regional leader in maritime affairs by facilitating dialogue among littoral states.
- b. Enhance Regional Maritime Security by developing cooperative measures to counter piracy, illegal fishing, and human trafficking in the Indian Ocean.

- c. Promote sustainable development through the shared use of maritime resources, ensuring the protection of marine ecosystems and promoting the Blue Economy.
- d. Increase regional trade and investment by promoting connectivity and economic cooperation, similar to the goals of IORA, but tailored to Pakistan's strategic interests in the North Arabian Sea and beyond.
- e. Promote the role of universities, think tanks, media, international working groups, individuals who merit being part of the global maritime campaign, etc.

15. A well-structured Indian Ocean Maritime Network, led by Pakistan, would not only serve the country's maritime interests but also strengthen its relationships with key trading partners, offering a platform for bilateral and multilateral collaboration. By focusing on shared maritime goals, Pakistan can address regional challenges, including the protection of critical sea lanes and the security of energy transport routes that are vital to global trade.

Purpose Statement

16. This concept paper thus aims to propose significant amendments to the scope and conduct modalities of the AMAN exercise to effectively navigate the challenges of the evolving maritime environment and better position Pakistan in the global maritime order. By expanding its maritime engagement, enhancing collaborations, and capitalizing on existing strengths, Pakistan can secure its vital maritime interests in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. The IOMN will:

- a. Strengthen regional maritime security cooperation.
- b. Promote sustainable development and trade in the Indian Ocean.
- c. Increase Pakistan's engagement in global maritime diplomacy.
- d. Utilize academia and maritime professional to guide and provide linkages to the new setup based on their expertise

Proposal Framework /Structure and Governance

17. The broad framework of the proposal is as appended below:

- a. **Establishing of Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN):** Implement the Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN) as a permanent maritime forum led by Pakistan with a focus on contemporary maritime security threats by setting up enhanced bilateral and multilateral partnerships through maritime dialogues and other engagements, while investing in technological advancements for naval operations to support joint exercises and operations.
- b. **Leadership:** The IOMN is envisioned as a collaborative network with a streamlined governance structure to ensure effectiveness and inclusivity. In line with the concept of leveraging experienced maritime leadership, the IOMN will be headed by a senior officer. This leadership role will be filled by either a three-star Serving Naval Officer or a four-star Retired Officer of the Pakistan Navy (Indian Model), drawing upon their extensive operational experience and strategic insights in the Indian Ocean maritime domain. This leadership approach aligns with successful models of maritime institutions that benefit from seasoned naval expertise. The coordination and facilitation of IOMN's

academic and policy initiatives will be overseen by the Naval Headquarters (NHQ), with the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA) serving as the Secretariat for all dimensions of IOMN activities. However, operational and naval exercises-related matters will remain the exclusive domain of NHQ, ensuring a clear division of responsibilities while maintaining strategic alignment across all maritime cooperation efforts.

c. **Secretariat:** The administrative and operational hub of the IOMN will be the IOMN Secretariat, located at the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA). NIMA's research capabilities and focus on maritime affairs make it a suitable location to support the IOMN's activities and facilitate coordination among member states. The Secretariat will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the AMAN Dialogue, AMAN Exercise, IMC, and PIMEC, as well as managing communication and administrative functions. The said secretariat will strengthen maritime cooperation, enhance maritime security, and promote regional stability. It will serve as a platform for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and policy coordination among like-minded nations, contributing to a secure and prosperous maritime future. The key functions of the secretariat are attached as **Annex A**. However, NIMA's existing infrastructure needs to be improved and uplifted to make it a worthwhile Secretariat of IOMN.

d. **Increased Participation:** Encourage participation from a wider array of regional and extra-regional navies and maritime stakeholders to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative training. These include think tanks, universities, academia, media, etc. Actively pursue diplomatic channels to allies and foster relationships with potential participants and stakeholders in the maritime domain & form strategic partnerships with key regional players and global maritime powers to create a unified approach to addressing emerging maritime threats.

e. **Incorporation of Technology:** It is proposed that targeted investments be made in modern maritime technologies to enhance the operational effectiveness of future AMAN Exercises. This includes the integration of advanced simulation-based training, unmanned systems, and smart surveillance tools into the AMAN framework to reflect emerging trends in maritime operations. Simultaneously, a focused effort should be made to build the capacity of Pakistan Navy personnel through specialized training programs, enabling them to lead and coordinate complex, technology-driven maritime exercises and multilateral operations with confidence and competence.

f. **Lessening of PN Financial Liabilities:** With an ever-increasing invitation list, it will be increasingly difficult for PN to continue sponsoring mega events like AMAN DIALOGUE & PIMEC. This concept would facilitate this avenue and ease this avenue. Although events would not be practically conducted in Pakistan, however, they would always be under the umbrella of Pakistan-led IOMN.

g. **Timeline:** The proposed implementation timeline is detailed in **Annex B**. The timeline is designed to facilitate effective planning, monitor progress, and enable timely interventions where necessary to ensure the successful realization of the concept.

Key Activities within the IOMN Umbrella

18. The IOMN will serve as the overarching framework for a series of interconnected activities designed to achieve its objectives (Tabular form of these exercises and propose a calendar of events are enclosed as **Annex C & D**, respectively).

a. **AMAN Dialogue**

(1) This will be a high-level dialogue, not a traditional conference, bringing together Heads of Navy and Coast Guard from participating nations. The focus will be on open and frank discussions to build mutual understanding, identify common challenges, and collaboratively shape the future of maritime cooperation. The AMAN Dialogue will be crucial in finalizing the agenda for the AMAN Exercise and identifying matters of a contemporary operational nature for further discussion and refinement within the IMC. In order to enhance regional maritime cooperation and build sustained momentum towards the AMAN Exercises, maritime dialogue forums will be institutionalized under the umbrella of the proposed Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN). They will emphasize as enumerated below:

a. These forums will focus on key contemporary maritime issues such as counter-piracy operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), the implications of climate change on maritime security, marine environmental protection, and blue economy collaboration. These dialogues will not only foster mutual understanding and interoperability among participating nations but also provide a platform for joint policy development and knowledge-sharing on pressing maritime challenges.

b. In support of this initiative, the IOMN will establish a dedicated network of maritime think tanks and research institutions from like-minded nations that share a common vision for promoting global and regional maritime stability, safety, and sustainability. This intellectual network will enable the generation of thought leadership, strategic research, and policy recommendations in line with evolving maritime dynamics.

(2) The succinct purpose is as below

a. A high-level dialogue forum (not a traditional conference) where Heads of Navies and Coast Guards of AMAN Exercise nations finalize operational and thematic agendas for the upcoming AMAN Exercise and identify key contemporary operational challenges for the IMC to explore through academic and research work.

b. Finalize operational and thematic agenda for the upcoming **AMAN Exercise**.

- c. Identify key contemporary operational challenges and topics.
 - d. Formulate the agenda for the **IMC** to refine and explore these challenges through academic and research work.
 - e. Oversee the reports, past activities and give approvals to be adopted as IOM outcomes.
 - f. It will have sub-committees, i.e., security, training, technology, Blue Economy, International maritime law, environment, maritime trade, etc., under its umbrella.
- b. **AMAN Exercise:** A practical demonstration of regional cooperation and interoperability, the agenda for the AMAN Exercise will be derived from the discussions and priorities identified during the AMAN Dialogue. The exercise will focus on enhancing practical skills, improving communication protocols, and building joint response capabilities to maritime security threats and humanitarian emergencies. The mandate of Exercise AMAN is to promote collaboration and interoperability among friendly navies to strengthen maritime security and foster regional peace. The exercise emphasizes addressing non-traditional security challenges, encouraging comprehensive and multifaceted maritime cooperation. Additionally, AMAN serves as a strategic platform to project Pakistan as a responsible maritime stakeholder and a proactive regional leader in advancing cooperative maritime security within the broader framework of regional maritime organizations. Broadly, it shall be revamped as follows:
- (1) A multinational exercise conducted by the Pakistan Navy, focusing on maritime interoperability, collective security, and humanitarian coordination, with inputs taken from the AMAN Dialogue.
 - (2) Exercise AMAN is to be held biennially under the direct auspices of the Pakistan Navy. Alternatively, it may be organized in a member country under the framework of the Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN). This approach would enhance the Pakistan Navy's image as a regional force and reinforce its presence across the region.
 - (3) The AMAN Dialogue shall be conducted in the year alternate to that of Exercise AMAN. It too will be hosted by a member country under the overarching framework of the IOMN.
 - (4) Focused on maritime interoperability, collective security, and humanitarian coordination.
 - (5) Inputs taken from AMAN Dialogue.
- c. **International Maritime Conference (IMC):** The IMC will serve as a platform for the exchange of maritime information and the refinement of operational concepts. Matters of a contemporary operational nature identified during the AMAN Dialogue will be brought to the IMC for in-depth analysis, discussion, and the development of refined approaches. This will involve the participation of academia, think tanks, and technical experts to provide

analytical support and contribute to research on complex maritime issues. The IMC will not be a decision-making body but rather a crucial element for informed operational planning and strategy development. It can be summarized as below:

- (1) A hybrid maritime policy forum composed of experts, think tanks, maritime academia, and practitioners. It receives prioritized themes/issues from the AMAN Dialogue for deeper analysis, policy formulation, and doctrinal contributions.
- (2) Receives prioritized themes/issues from the AMAN Dialogue for deeper analysis, policy formulation, and doctrinal contributions.
- (3) Outputs include working papers, research journals, and white papers for naval and national policy adaptation.

d. **Pakistan International Maritime Exhibition and Conference (PIMEC)**

: The PIMEC will continue to serve as a platform for showcasing maritime capabilities, fostering business-to-business interactions, and promoting investment in the maritime sector. Within the IOMN framework, the PIMEC Conference will be business-centric, aligning with the expo aspect of the event. This will provide a vital link between the operational and policy aspects of the IOMN and the economic potential of the Indian Ocean's maritime industries. While the AMAN Dialogue focuses on security and operational cooperation, the PIMEC will highlight the economic opportunities and technological advancements in the maritime domain. It can be summarized as below:

- (1) A business-oriented forum held in conjunction with the maritime expo, focusing on maritime industry partnerships, investment promotion in the blue economy, and tech and innovation in maritime domains.
- (2) Focuses on Maritime industry partnerships, Investment promotion in the blue economy, Tech and innovation in maritime domains & oriented toward the private sector, investors, and policymakers.

e. The above has also been formulated in tabular form and is attached as **Annexes F, G, H & J.**

19. The same is depicted in tabular form as below:

INITIATIVE	TYPE	FOCUS	PARTICIPANTS
AMAN Dialogue	Strategic Dialogue	Maritime security agenda setting; not a conference	Chiefs of the Navy, Coast Guard, Observers
AMAN Exercise	Multinational Naval Exercise	Operational execution based on AMAN Dialogue outputs	Participating Navies
IMC)	Research & Policy Forum	Identification and referral of contemporary maritime issues	Academics, Think Tanks, Maritime Strategists

PIMEC Conference	Business Conference & Expo	Maritime economy, investment, blue economy opportunities	Business Community, Investors, Innovators
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Pros and Cons of the Proposal

20. The detailed advantages and potential limitations of the proposed initiative have been comprehensively outlined in **Annex E**. This annex provides a balanced assessment of the proposal's strategic value, operational feasibility, and expected outcomes. It is intended to support informed decision-making by offering insights into both the opportunities presented by the initiative, such as enhanced regional cooperation, strengthened maritime presence, and improved interoperability, as well as the challenges that may arise in its implementation, including resource allocation, coordination mechanisms, and stakeholder alignment

Conclusion

21. The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region cannot be overstated. As global trade increasingly relies on secure sea lanes, Pakistan's position along these routes places it at the center of regional maritime cooperation. By establishing the Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN), Pakistan can serve as the driving force for regional dialogue, enhancing maritime security, promoting economic cooperation, and addressing environmental challenges that affect all nations in the region. This initiative would not only solidify Pakistan's position as a rising middle power in the Indian Ocean but also allow it to play a central role in shaping the future of maritime security and trade in one of the world's most crucial maritime spaces. Through a collaborative and multilateral approach, Pakistan can ensure the sustainable use of its maritime resources while contributing to regional and global stability.

FUNCTIONS OF SECRETARIAT

1. The proposed secretariat will strengthen maritime cooperation, enhance maritime security, and promote regional stability. It will serve as a platform for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and policy coordination among like-minded nations, contributing to a secure and prosperous maritime future. Its broad functions are appended below; however the list is not exhaustive:

a. **Maritime Cooperation**

- (1) **Idea Exchange and Research:** Facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaborative research on pressing maritime issues, such as climate change, maritime piracy, and illegal fishing.
- (2) **Capacity Building:** Promote the exchange of researchers, speakers, and training opportunities to enhance maritime expertise.
- (3) **Policy Coordination:** Develop a common stance on global maritime issues, such as freedom of navigation and maritime security.
- (4) **Strategic Planning:** Review annual progress and set future agendas for maritime cooperation.
- (5) **Knowledge Dissemination:** Publish books, articles, magazines, and journals based on high-quality research.

b. **Event Management**

- (1) **Calendar Development:** Create and maintain a calendar of maritime events, including conferences, seminars, and workshops.
- (2) **Exercise Planning:** Plan and conduct the biennial AMAN naval exercise in Pakistan or even on a rotational basis.

c. **Maritime Security Cooperation**

- (1) **Security Architecture:** Propose and plan the establishment of regional security organizations to address common maritime threats.
- (2) **International Coordination:** Collaborate with international organizations and forums to promote maritime security and stability.

d. **Geopolitical Analysis and Policy Recommendations**

- (1) **Strategic Assessment:** Analyze the geopolitical implications of major power competition, particularly the US-China rivalry, on maritime security.
- (2) **Policy Advice:** Provide policy recommendations to national and regional policymakers on maritime challenges and solutions.

(3) **Technological Trends:** Monitor emerging technologies and their impact on the maritime and naval domains.

e. **Public Diplomacy and Outreach**

(1) **Maritime Exhibitions:** Organize maritime exhibitions to showcase advancements in maritime technology and capabilities.

(2) **Transparency and Accountability:** Publish annual expenditure returns and activity reports.

f. **Miscellaneous**

(1) Identify fields of cooperation in maritime sectors.

(2) Exchange of ideas in maritime fields to propose a solution to new challenges to the maritime sector at the global level.

(3) To carry out joint research on subjects of common interest.

(4) Exchange of researchers, speakers, and training opportunities.

(5) Explore avenues of common stance on global maritime issues.

(6) To review the progress of the previous year and set the agenda for the coming year/years.

(7) Propose and plan seminars, conferences, symposiums, Webinars, and research topics of importance in coordination between think tanks.

(8) To publish books, articles, magazines, and journals based on the quality research output of all think tanks.

(9) Prepare a calendar of events and monitor the progress of the same.

(10) Plan and conduct bi-annual events of AMAN naval exercise in Pakistan.

(11) Plan and conduct "Conclave of Chief" events on a rotation basis within participating countries.

(12) Propose and plan security organizations/ set up at sea to guard against common threats to all participating nations' maritime interests.

(13) To coordinate with international organizations, other forums for the collective good of the global populace.

(14) Sea is the common heritage of mankind. Global economies re-linked to trade and peace at sea. It is therefore imperative to re-emphasize that coordination and cooperation are the only keys to

success for all. Against this backdrop, to propose advocacy of addressing the negative fallout of the US-China rivalry in the Indian Ocean and beyond for peace at sea.

(15) To help policymakers both at the national, regional, and global level to identify maritime challenges, possible remedies, and recommended solutions after a consultative process between think tanks, professionals, and security experts.

(16) To identify modern trends, the impact of technology on maritime and naval sectors and advise partner nations accordingly.

(17) To arrange maritime exhibitions.

(18) Publish annual expenditure returns and annual reports of all activities.

TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Short-Term (0-6 Months)

- a. **Conduct a comprehensive review of AMAN's objectives and current framework:** As an initial step, it is essential to undertake a thorough assessment of the existing structure, strategic objectives, and execution methodology of the AMAN Exercise. This review will identify areas for refinement in line with evolving maritime security dynamics, regional cooperation needs, and the broader vision of the proposed Indian Ocean Maritime Network (IOMN). The aim is to align AMAN with emerging non-traditional threats, technological advancements, and the growing demand for cooperative maritime governance.
- b. **Engage with potential partner nations to gauge interest in expanded participation:** In parallel, proactive diplomatic and naval outreach should be initiated to engage with current and prospective partner nations. This engagement will serve to assess their willingness to participate in an expanded AMAN framework—either through operational involvement, hosting dialogue forums, or contributing to the IOMN network of maritime think tanks. These discussions will lay the groundwork for broader multinational collaboration and ensure a shared commitment to the long-term goals of regional maritime security and cooperative engagement.

Medium-Term (6-12 Months)

- a. **Establish a forum for maritime dialogues and commence initial rounds of discussion on key issues:** During this phase, a dedicated platform for structured maritime dialogues will be formally established under the proposed IOMN framework. This forum will bring together maritime stakeholders, naval representatives, and strategic thinkers from member nations to initiate focused discussions on critical maritime security themes such as counter-piracy, maritime domain awareness, disaster response, and the impact of climate change on regional stability. These dialogues will not only promote shared understanding and interoperability but also help shape the agenda for future AMAN Exercises and related cooperative initiatives.
- b. **Begin necessary technological upgrades and training programs within the Pakistan Navy:** Concurrently, steps will be taken to initiate technological modernization within the Pakistan Navy. This includes upgrading operational platforms, integrating simulation-based training modules, and introducing cutting-edge systems for surveillance, communication, and data-sharing. To complement this modernization, tailored training and capacity-building programs will be launched to prepare PN personnel for leadership roles in complex, multi-national exercises and operations. These efforts will ensure that Pakistan Navy remains at the forefront of regional maritime security cooperation and is well-equipped to lead in the execution of the enhanced AMAN framework.

Long-Term (12-24 Months)

- a. **Execute the Redefined AMAN Exercise:** In this phase, the revised and strategically aligned AMAN Exercise will be conducted, reflecting the updated framework, expanded participation, and technological enhancements introduced in earlier stages. The exercise will incorporate lessons learned from the preceding maritime dialogues, capacity-building efforts, and partner nation engagements. It will serve as a practical demonstration of regional cooperation, operational interoperability, and the Pakistan Navy's leadership in addressing both traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges through a collaborative approach.
- b. **Evaluate the Outcomes of the Revised exercise and gather participant feedback for further improvement:** Following the execution of the exercise, a comprehensive evaluation process will be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the revised AMAN framework. Feedback from participating navies and observers will be systematically collected to identify strengths, gaps, and areas for future enhancement. This post-exercise analysis will help refine planning for subsequent editions of AMAN, ensure the continued relevance of the initiative, and strengthen Pakistan's image as a credible, forward-looking maritime power committed to regional stability and cooperation.

Tabular Representation of Hierarchy/Relationship

Component	Role	Relationship to IOMN	Key Activities/Focus	Participants
IOMN Leadership	Provides overall strategic direction and guidance.	Heads the entire IOMN framework.	Strategic planning, high-level representation.	3-star Serving or 4-star Retired PN Officer
IOMN Secretariat	Manages the administrative and operational coordination of IOMN activities.	The administrative hub of the IOMN.	Activity coordination, communication, logistics.	Secretariat staff (at NIMA)
AMAN Dialogue	High-level forum for dialogue and decision-making on cooperation agenda.	Operates under the IOMN umbrella.	Finalizing AMAN Exercise agenda, identifying IMC discussion topics.	Heads of Navy and Coast Guard from participating nations.
AMAN Exercise	Practical application of cooperation principles through drills and scenarios.	Agenda derived from AMAN Dialogue, conducted under the IOMN framework.	Enhancing interoperability, joint response capabilities.	Naval and Coast Guard assets and personnel from participating nations.
IMC	Platform for in-depth discussion and refinement of operational issues and research.	Addresses topics identified by the AMAN Dialogue, operate under the IOMN umbrella.	Operational analysis, research, development of refined approaches.	Academia, Think Tanks, Technical Experts, potentially operational planners.
PIMEC Conference	Business-focused platform for industry engagement, showcasing capabilities, and promoting investment.	Operates under the IOMN umbrella, complements other activities.	Business-to-business networking, technology showcase, investment promotion.	Maritime industry representatives, businesses, potential investors.

PROPOSE CALENDER OF EVENTS

Activity	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
AMAN Dialogue	9 -10 Feb 25	Feb/Mar (Abroad)		Feb/Mar (Pakistan)	
AMAN Exercise	7-11 Feb 25	-	Feb/Mar (Abroad)		Feb/Mar (Pakistan)
IMC	4-5 Nov 25	Nov/Dec (Pakistan)		Nov/Dec (Abroad)	
PIMEC	3 -6 Nov 25		Pakistan		Abroad

INITIATIVE	TYPE	FOCUS	PARTICIPANTS
AMAN Dialogue	Strategic Dialogue	Maritime security agenda setting; not a conference	Chiefs of Navy, Coast Guards, Observers
AMAN Exercise	Multinational Naval Exercise	Operational execution based on AMAN Dialogue outputs	Participating Navies
IMC (Indian Ocean Maritime Council)	Research & Policy Forum	Identification and referral of contemporary maritime issues	Academics, Think Tanks, Maritime Strategists
PIMEC Conference	Business Conference & Expo	Maritime economy, investment, blue economy opportunities	Business Community, Investors, Innovators

PROS AND CONS OF THE PROPOSAL

Pros

- (1) Reduces isolation and enhances Pakistan Navy's (PN) leadership role in Indian Ocean affairs at the regional and global levels. PN initiative of "AMAN" will have a global appeal.
- (2) PN will continue to enjoy friendly, cordial, and practical relations with friendly countries.
- (3) Participating navies/ stakeholders/ institutions will share their rich experiences and expertise to deal with maritime challenges.
- (4) Pakistan / PN will not have to take distinctive positions at sea on issues of global importance. Cooperation and collaboration will dictate the outcome.
- (5) PN initiative of AMAN will be upgraded to all-year-round maritime activity & it will expand AMAN's impact to an all-year-round maritime activity, coordinated by a permanent AMAN Headquarters
- (6) "AMAN" Exercise will have a permanent headquarters to look after all year-round activities.
- (7) "AMAN" exercise will continue to be a bi-annual event, but will have the backing of maritime think tanks from around the world. Later, AMAN exercise can also be hosted on a rotational basis, if considered appropriate.
- (8) "AMAN" activities will be research-based, in which ideas will be conceived, discussed, finalized, and then put into action before adopting it permanently.
- (9) "AMAN" at present is only a "Pakistan-specific activity" whereas initializing it through combined Think Tanks will bring in more colours and flavours, ultimately bring more laurels to Pakistan and PN, and make it a global event.
- (10) PN will continue to have a positive/ lead role in setting the agenda for all maritime activities concerning Pakistan and Indian Ocean politics. However, the PN stance will be more acceptable at the global/ regional level, and the issue of isolation will be addressed.
- (11) Although activities under permanent setup will increase in many folds, which will require substantial financial support from the Government, the outcome and impact will be phenomenal on Pakistan's overall interests.
- (12) AMAN logo and the phrase "Together for Peace" will receive international recognition as well as appeal for the common good.
- (13) Will strengthen Pakistan's maritime diplomacy and reputation as a cooperative regional player.
- (14) Will provide a Comprehensive Security Approach to a broader spectrum of maritime security issues, improving regional stability.

(15) Will help in fostering closer ties with regional navies, potentially leading to collective security arrangements. Initially, 8-10 countries may be invited to have navy-to-navy relations. Turkey, Malaysia, Iran, Arab countries, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Japan, the UK, France, Germany, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Russia may be considered.

Cons

(1) Establishing a new maritime network and permanent headquarters will require significant funding. Initial investments in technology and capacity building might also strain existing budgets. The new structure will need a formal setup (building, resources, human resources, funds, transports, etc) to create an impact on a global audience. Establishing a new maritime network and permanent headquarters will require significant funding. Some countries may be hesitant to engage with Pakistan due to geopolitical considerations.

(2) Increased participation may complicate logistics and coordination among diverse naval forces.

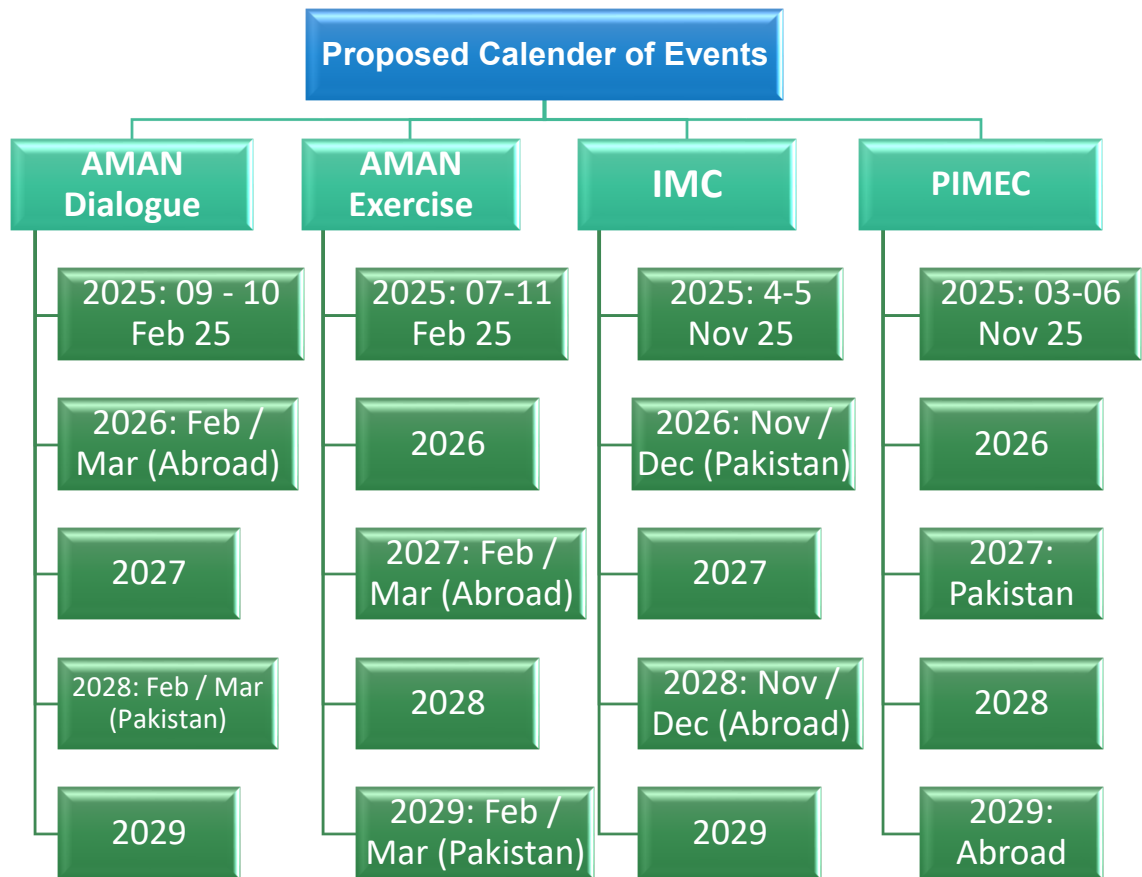
(3) Approval of the Government of Pakistan, including the Foreign Office, Ministries of Finance and Defense. The concept paper may also need the nod of the law ministry before finalization.

(4) JSHQs, sister services, and ISI must be on board; otherwise, the proposal may be opposed.

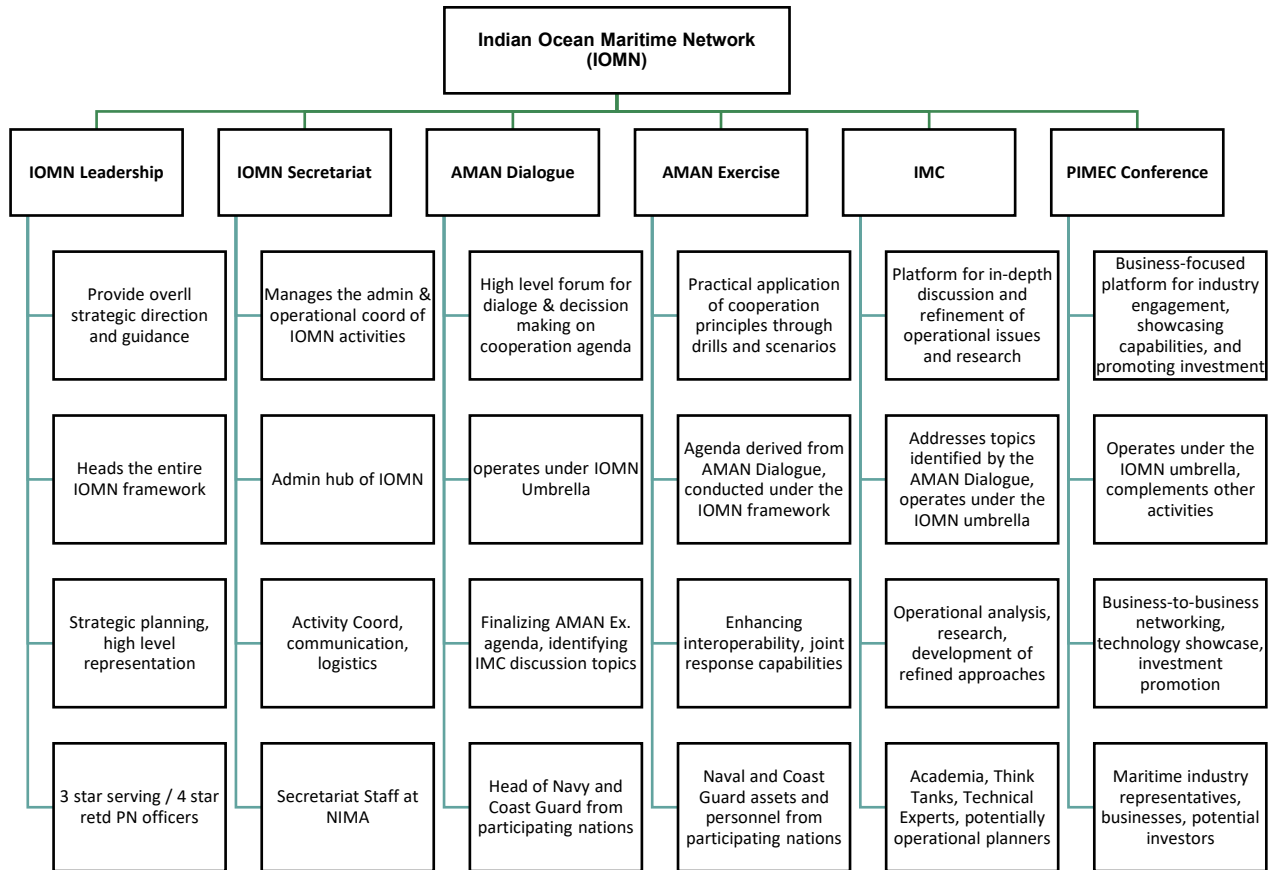
(5) Pakistan will act as host to all activities for the initial settling down period of 5-6 years, for which substantial financial support of the Government will be needed, however, once activities on a rotation basis will be initiated, then the funds requirement will reduce. Expenditure of permanent HQs for the AMAN Secretariat will be needed.

(6) It will be a diplomatic challenge for Pakistan/ PN to strategically balance the interests of both camps, i.e., USA & China and Iran & Saudi Arabia, etc. But the organization will provide a platform to understand divergent points of view and help in formulating the policies at the national level.

(7) To create an impact on national, regional, and global audiences, NHQ / DGPR will have to support the activities of AMAN Headquarters; thus, engaging ISPR will also be mandatory.

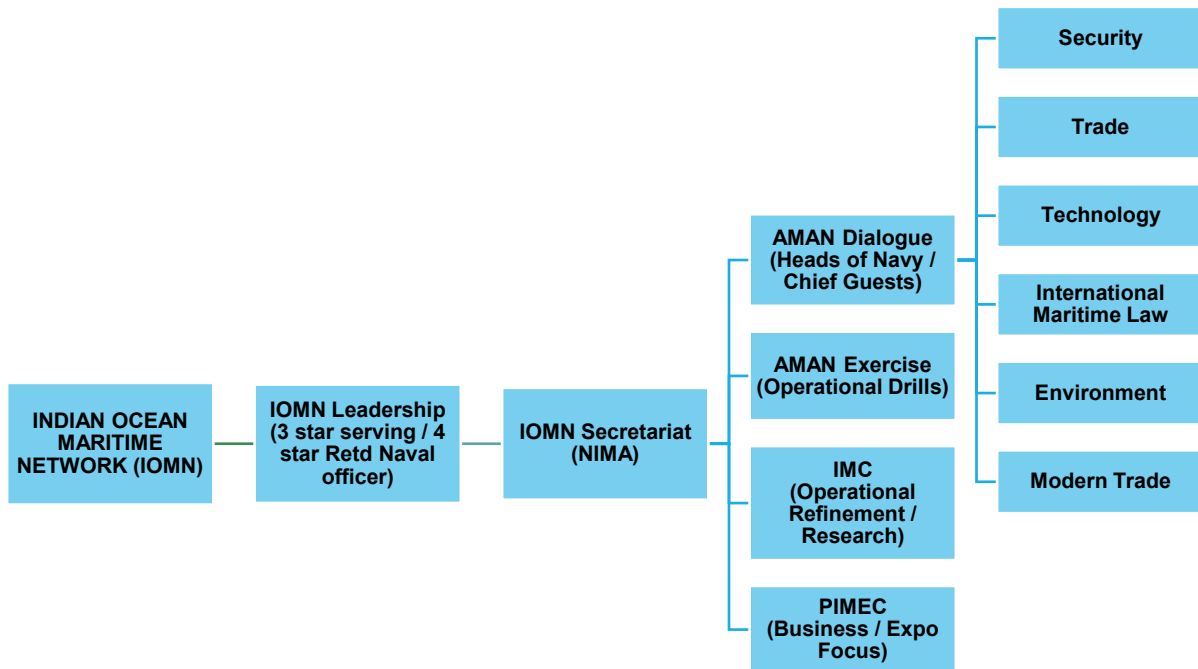


ANNEX G





Annex H



ANNEX J

