

# BEYOND BOUNDARIES VI

Aspirations of Communities Across

## **PAKISTAN AFGHANISTAN**

Border Regions



**Center for  
Research &  
Security  
Studies**

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*Rule of Law - Security - Governance*



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# INTRODUCTION

This study of Pak-Afghan border communities, as proposed in the Feeder Mechanism under Beyond Boundaries VI, is a comprehensive initiative designed to address critical issues impacting border stability, and cross-border affairs including trade and communal ties, socioeconomic landscape, and gender dynamics across the region.

The rationale behind this mechanism was to actively engage with local communities residing on both sides of the border, enabling them to voice their concerns and perspectives. Through in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted by field researchers, this mechanism sought to gain valuable insights into the unique experiences and challenges faced by these communities. By doing so, it aimed to tailor conflict-mitigation strategies and community-driven solutions that reflect the genuine concerns and aspirations of the border context.

This feeder approach acknowledges that direct engagement with border communities is not only essential for incorporating their perspectives but also vital for enhancing the credibility, ownership, and sustainability of interventions. This, in turn, fosters mutually beneficial potential for cross-border tribal and ethnic connections to strengthen overall relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report examines the lives of communities living across the Pak-Afghan border, namely Chaman-Spin Boldak and Torkham-Jalalabad regions, providing key insights into everyday norms, gender roles, cross-border ties, economic activities, state of peace and security, and views on governance and state services. It portrays a society marked by strict gender roles, limited access to education and employment opportunities for women, and a patriarchal system. Men primarily engage in unskilled labor and trade, while women are confined to household duties.

The region's reliance on cross-border trade as the primary income source is evident, and natives express concern over the impact of recent changes and trade disruptions, emphasizing the need for smooth border crossing procedures and trade cooperation.

The status of education is a major concern, with challenges in infrastructure and gender disparities. The report underscores the significance of prioritizing education, particularly for women and girls, to address the complex challenges facing the region.

Cultural and religious dynamics play a central role, impacting women's opportunities. Tribal leadership structures are viewed as effective in dispute resolution, while the government's role in fostering trade and development is deemed inadequate.

The report concludes with recommendations, highlighting the importance of investing in education, promoting women's empowerment, and improving access to cross-border trade. It

emphasizes that addressing cultural norms and tribal structures is pivotal for a more promising future, underlining the link between comprehensive development, gender equality, education reform, and regional peace and security.

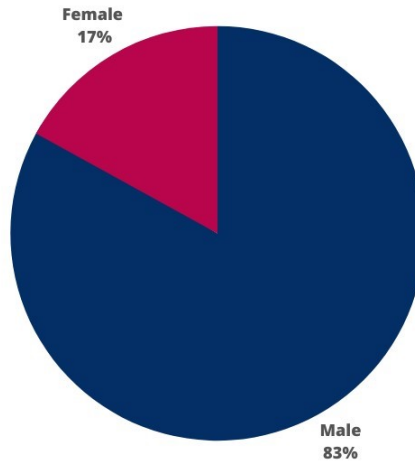
## **METHODOLOGY**

The execution of this study entails a structured and systematic approach, involving the following key steps:

- i) **Contextual Mapping:** this included mapping out relevant issues and stakeholders of the target communities across the border areas of Torkham-Jalalabad and Chaman-Spin Boldak.
- ii) **Researcher Selection:** 4 Researchers (one for each border side) were identified and selected based on their expertise, community connections and acceptance, and relevant work experience. An open call was circulated through official social media platforms.
- iii) **Online Workshop:** Chosen researchers underwent a comprehensive online workshop organized by the CRSS program and MEL team. This workshop equipped them with insights into the assignment's scope and methodology.
- iv) **In-Depth Interviews (IDIs):** Researchers conducted IDIs with local communities in the Chaman-Spin Boldak and Torkham-Jalalabad border areas. These interviews were guided by a set of questions structured to capture the perspectives and perceptions of the community members - hailing from diverse socio-educational backgrounds - on key themes. 27 IDIs were conducted on the Pakistan side and 26 on the Afghan side of the Torkham-Jalalabad border; while 28 were on the Pakistan side and 25 on the Afghan side of the Chaman-Spin Boldak border, totaling up to 106 responses.

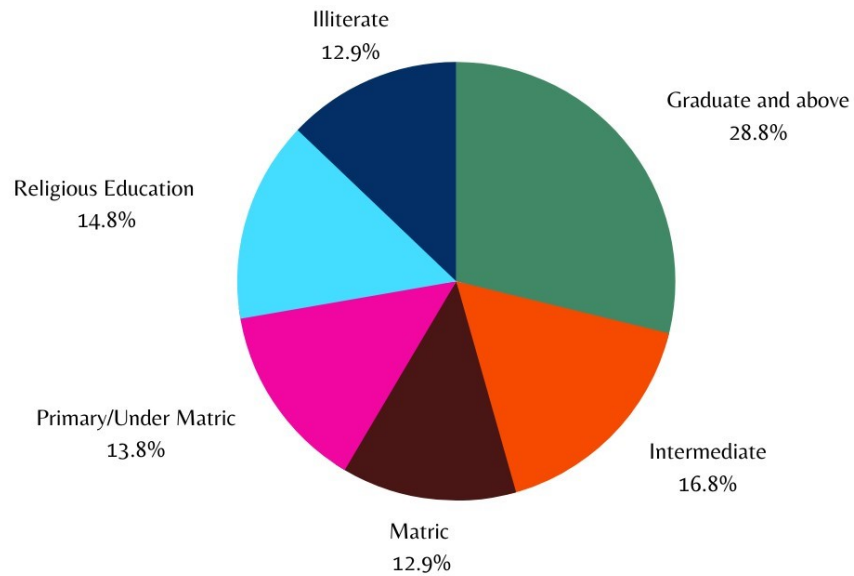
## Demography

### Gender

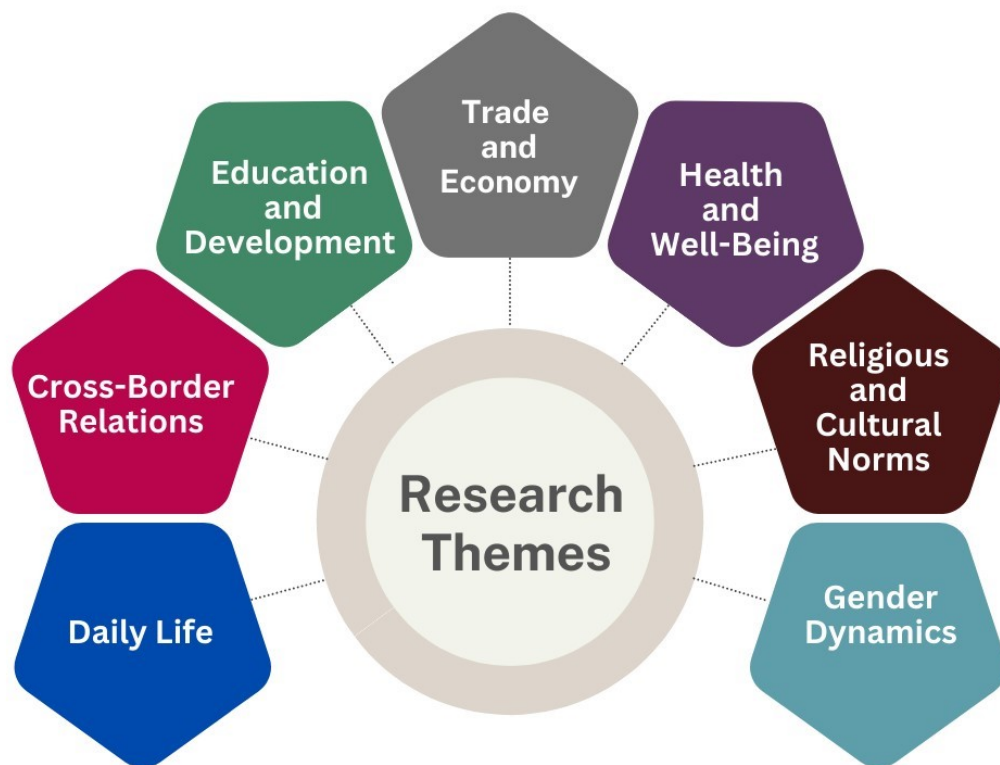


Out of 106 respondents, 88 were males while 18 were females.

## Educational Background



- v) Data Collection: Researchers input the gathered information into a designated online platform created by the CRSS MEL team. This platform facilitated data collection and included provisions for uploading interview transcripts.
- vi) Data Review and Analysis: The CRSS team reviewed and analyzed the collected data, compiling it into a comprehensive research report.



## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The gathered data presents a complex socio-economic landscape. Daily life revolves around unskilled labor, trade, and agriculture, with a stark gender divide that restricts women's participation in economic activities and education, reflecting traditional norms. The prevalence of strict religious practices and religious education further hinders women's access to education and employment, particularly in a patriarchal society.

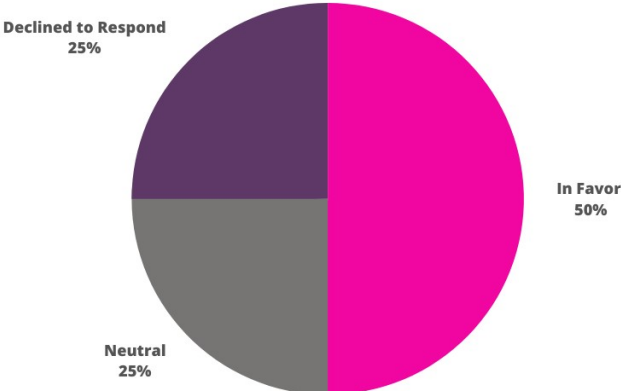
Tribal leadership plays a vital role in resolving conflicts over land, contributing to relative stability. However, recent disputes on the border raise the challenge of balancing tribal dynamics with formal governance systems.

Education faces significant challenges, with unfavorable perceptions about the importance of girls' education and a lack of educational facilities, particularly for girls. Economic stability largely depends on cross-border trade, but unequal distribution of trade benefits and recent disruptions have strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The absence of active terrorist groups on the Pakistan side is promising, but frequent border conflicts and school closures create insecurity and disrupt education. Sustainable peace hinges on prioritizing educational improvements.

Some individuals aspire to empower women, while a majority demand to maintain cross-border trade, ease visa restrictions, and upgrade public infrastructure. The recommendations emphasize the need for expanding educational facilities, promoting women's empowerment, enhancing cross-border trade, and investing in public infrastructure.

### Views on Girls' Education

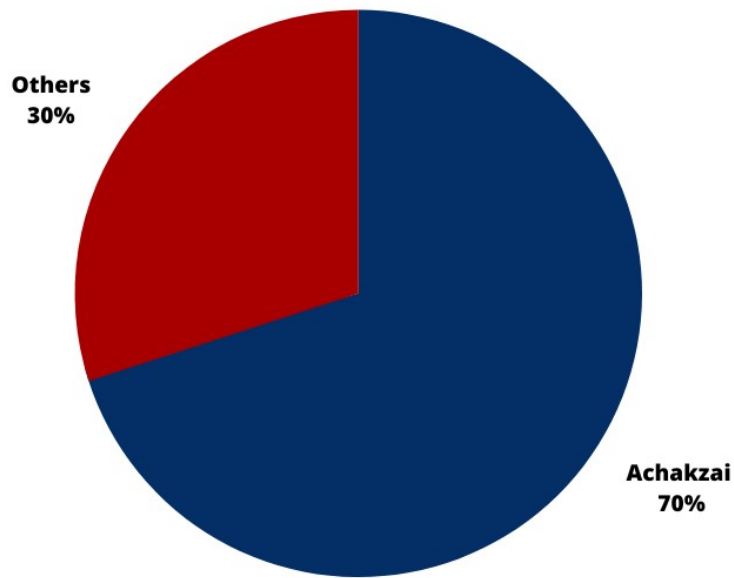


In the broader context, addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts from governments and international organizations to foster socio-economic development, gender equality, and educational reform, while ensuring peace and security. The interplay of cultural norms, tribal structures, and economic dependencies should be considered in crafting policies that uplift the communities on both sides of the border. Additionally, initiatives that enhance cross-border cooperation and dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan can be crucial in achieving sustainable peace and prosperity in the region.

# CHAMAN-SPIN BOLDAK BORDER

## AFGHANISTAN SIDE

### Spin Boldak Region: Tribal Representation



Others include Kakar, Noorzai, Sagzai, Usmanzai, and Hazara

## KEY FINDINGS

### Community Insights (Daily Life, Gender Roles, Cross Border Ties and Impact of Taliban Takeover)

A typical day in Spin Boldak side of the border is characterized by men going out for work, often in shops, markets, or businesses. Children attend schools or madrassas, while women predominantly stay at home, managing household responsibilities. As one respondent describes, "Early in the morning people go for their work and shops. I am a madrassa teacher, I wake up early and go to the madrassa for Islamic teachings."

There are significant differences in daily life for the youth and women in these areas. Youth, particularly young men, face challenges in finding employment opportunities and, in some cases,

aspire to study abroad. In contrast, women's activities are primarily confined to domestic duties, with limited opportunities for work or education. As one respondent mentioned, "A regular day is very different for both the youth and women. Youth (male) are trying to go abroad for further studies or financial settlements while women are at home with nothing to do."

The border communities have strong and deep-rooted relationships, often described as akin to having "family" or "kinship" connections. These relationships are characterized by stability and a lack of disputes. As one respondent explains, "The relationship between the border communities is very sound since decades, they have relationships like 1 brother living in Pakistan side of the border while the others live in Afghan side of the borders."

While some respondents mentioned that opportunities for jobs have reduced for the youth under the Taliban's rule, the general sentiment is that the relationships between communities remain unchanged. There's a perception of improved peace and security in the region after the Taliban takeover. As one respondent stated, "Situation has changed much in the context of peace after the Taliban's arrival. There are fewer opportunities for jobs for youth, but we are hopeful that the government could generate job vacancies."

## **Education**

The status of education in the area appears to be quite varied. Some respondents express dissatisfaction with the education system, with a desire for better quality education. One stated, "Low standard education. We want professional teachers and academicians."

In terms of gender ratio, there are significant imbalances. In some instances, it was reported as "10 boys and 2 girls," highlighting a significant gap between male and female students. Some respondents expressed concerns about the safety of girls and cited challenges, with one stating, "Girls ratio is almost zero in Spin Boldak, but am in favor of girls' education." The Taliban's stance on girls' education is also considered a significant challenge in some areas.

Madrassa education is noted as more satisfactory in some cases compared to regular schools. There is also a mention of a higher female ratio in madrassas, indicating greater female participation in this type of education.

In some areas, there's a severe lack of proper schools and colleges, and education has been compromised for many decades. Respondents from places like Spin Boldak mentioned the absence of proper educational institutions.

Furthermore, in certain areas, such as Spin Boldak, the primary focus is on business, and education receives less attention. This economic focus may contribute to the challenges in the education system. Government policies and restrictions have also affected the status of education in some regions, impacting the male-female ratio and overall access to education.

Opportunities in Pakistan: Afghans have been crossing into Pakistan for educational purposes, and the scale of this cross-border education seems to be increasing. This trend is especially

noticeable when scholarships are available, and some respondents expressed appreciation for this opportunity.

Despite these challenges, there's a strong desire for educational improvement, particularly for girls. In some cases, there's hope for positive changes, such as allowing girls' education in universities.

## **Cultural and Religious Dynamics**

The local approach towards religion and culture is characterized by a strong adherence to Islamic and Pashtun cultural practices, which they consider vital for leading a righteous life. While some aspects may be considered hardline by outsiders, the community members view them as integral to their way of life.

Religion, primarily Islam, is deeply intertwined with their daily activities. One respondent emphasized, "Islam is a complete religion, and Quran teaches us how to live life." They view their religious practices as a source of guidance for leading a moral and just life. Religious values are highly respected, with practices such as maintaining a beard, adhering to Shariah law, and following the sunnah being considered important.

Cultural practices, including Pashtunwali (the Pashtun code of living), also play a significant role. These cultural norms are seen as essential to their identity and community cohesion. However, certain practices related to gender roles and women's education have been subject to criticism within the community. For instance, there are restrictions on women's mobility and work outside the home.

This approach to religion and culture does not necessarily hinder peace or growth in the area, as the community members hold that women staying at home is not a threat to society or development. Instead, they argue that it aligns with their cultural and religious values. They see women as integral to their households, responsible for child-rearing and maintaining the family's honor. They contend that the women's safety is better ensured within the confines of the home.

The community members express a sense of cultural and religious pride, with a strong belief in the positive influence of these values on their lives. They maintain that their practices are not hardline but rather fundamental to their way of life. They resist the label of being overly conservative and believe that these values have had a minimal negative impact on gender dynamics within their society.

### **Efficacy and Nature of Tribal Structure vs Formal Governance; Community Influencers and Agency in Decision-Making**

The tribal structure serves as a reliable mechanism for resolving disputes and providing communal support. As one respondent stated, "Every decision, dispute, or any other misunderstanding is solved under tribal rules and regulations." The tribal structure's influence is not limited to communal matters; it extends to the broader societal and economic issues. The



respondent mentioned that the Taliban government's form of governance closely mirrors the tribal system, highlighting its significance. With the judiciary system in Afghanistan being perceived as ineffective for many decades, tribal leaders have filled the void. Disputes are regularly brought before them for resolution, and they are recognized as key decision-makers in the community.

Regarding the formal governance system, it is acknowledged as effective, particularly under the current Taliban government, where it complements the tribal system. This system is credited with addressing societal and trade-related issues, often enforcing rules strictly. While the tribal leadership structure remains integral, the formal governance system plays a complementary role.

Tribal leaders and religious scholars are highly revered in the community, as they are the primary influencers who teach the community members how to navigate cultural and religious aspects. This dual guidance helps maintain social norms and traditions. In a respondent's words, "Every decision is dependent on these two influencers."

The community heavily relies on Pashtoonwali - an unwritten constitution that prescribes punishments for those involved in disputes or communal violence. Therefore, the tribal leadership structure's resilience is maintained by its efficacy.

Inter-tribal dynamics in these border communities are marked by cooperation and a lack of significant disputes between neighboring tribes on both sides of the border. The respondents emphasize their representation in the cross-border setup, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed. This representation has been a longstanding practice under previous governments and continues in the present.

## **Economy, Trade, and Public Mobility**

The economic landscape of the region heavily relies on cross-border trade. Respondents underscored the significance of these economic activities but expressed concerns that recent policy changes requiring passports and visas would significantly impact trade. Trade across the border is often conducted without official documentation, making the new requirements a potential obstacle for business. A local businessman remarked, "The border is our lifeline. Any restrictions on crossing will affect our livelihoods."

### **Challenges in Trade and People's Movement**

Various challenges are reported concerning cross-border trader and movement. Some of these include the lack of separate paths for men and women to cross the border, overcrowding, and inadequate basic facilities like drinking water. The closure of the border has significant economic repercussions, as expressed by a respondent: "We almost rely on border trading, if the border is closed even for a single day we lose too much." Border closures have immediate and severe impacts on people who depend on cross-border trade for their income, often leading to financial difficulties.

## Household Stability and Cross-Border Trade

The ebbs and flows of cross-border trade have a direct impact on household stability, especially for those heavily reliant on wage labor tied to trade. The closure of the border, even for a short duration, can disrupt daily wage earners and small traders. As one respondent emphasized, "A 1-minute closure of the border can affect our lives very badly." This highlights the vulnerability of those whose livelihoods are closely tied to the rhythm of cross-border trade.

## Varying Benefits for Rich and Poor

Responses indicate that there is a disparity in benefits from cross-border trade between the wealthy and the poor. Wealthy traders with connections to border officials can more easily navigate the system, while those who lack resources find themselves at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, no specific measures or local initiatives have been mentioned to address this disparity or ensure a more equitable distribution of trade benefits.

## Role of Government

Government agencies play a crucial role in regulating and promoting cross-border and local trade. The effectiveness of these agencies varies, and their support can be inconsistent. For example, on the Afghan side, authorities are described as cooperative, while Pakistani officials' behavior is less predictable and can vary between support and aggression.

## Views on Crackdown on Smuggling and Opium Cultivation

This has evoked mixed reactions among individuals involved in cross-border trade. Some express concerns about its impact on their businesses and livelihoods, with one respondent stating, "The recent crackdown is very alarming to our business and trade, we've lost a sound amount of rupees in recent times."

In contrast, others view the crackdown as a necessary measure to curb illegal trade activities. They emphasize the need to legalize border trade, as one respondent noted, "Pak-Afghan trade is all about smuggling. But at the other side of the story we can't refuse the fact that with this smuggling millions of people across the border are linked."

That being said, some respondents appreciate the Taliban government's strict ban on opium cultivation. One of them states, "The Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan have zero tolerance policy towards narcotics cultivation. For 20 years opium and hashish have been growing in large numbers but for now, you'll see nothing growing in the context of narcotics. It's a good step to stop the narcotics because it's a direct threat to human health."

## Political Dynamics; Views on Recent Policy Changes

The study revealed the anxieties stemming from recent policy changes in Pakistan, mandating that Afghan migrants enter with valid passports and visas. These policy changes have created anxiety and uncertainty among Afghans who have lived in Pakistan for decades, some for up to

40 years. The sudden shift in documentation requirements has created challenges for long-standing residents. A 60-year-old Afghan migrant stated, "We've been here for generations, and now they tell us we need passports and visas. It's a big problem for us; we don't know what to do."

The interviews uncovered the unfamiliarity of border communities with official documentation processes, such as passports and visas. This unfamiliarity is rooted in the historical context of Afghans living in Pakistan for over four decades, with limited interactions with mainstream identity systems. A local religious scholar shared, "Most people here don't even have a passport or visa because they've been living here without those documents for generations."

## **Peace and Security**

Though peace and security are established across the region, they remain unpredictable and relative. The respondents gave a variety of views on the two.

### **Safety Concerns Near the Border**

Living near the border has its challenges, especially given the historical conflicts between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As one respondent mentioned, "It's not that safe to live near the border because in previous government we had many challenges while Pakistan and Afghanistan were showering rockets and huge weapons over Durand line disputes." These concerns have prompted some individuals to consider relocating for safety, as another respondent noted, "It is dangerous living near the border... At some point, we even migrated to Qandahar for a safe life."

### **Taliban's Role in Ensuring Safety**

The presence of the Taliban has brought about a change in the perception of safety. One respondent explained, "But now, in the Taliban regime we feel more safe because they punish at the spot those who are involved in illegal activities like theft, murder, snatching, and so on." The Taliban's strict enforcement of law and order contributes to an improved sense of security in the area.

### **Security Measures and Resolution of Disputes**

Disputes along the border are not uncommon, but they are typically resolved through dialogue. As one respondent stated, "These disputes are then resolved with mutual ceasefire and talks." Additionally, security measures are well in place to maintain safety. "All the concerned measures are taken by the Taliban's govt, and right now, there is no need to worry about the security situation," as emphasized by another respondent.

### **Presence of Radical Factions and Terrorist Outfits**

The presence of radical factions and terrorist outfits in the area is reported as minimal. A respondent remarked, "There is no presence of such radical groups in Spin Boldak." This could be attributed to the effective security measures and strict control enforced by the Taliban, as another

respondent highlighted: "There are no such groups like terrorist outfits because they are very much afraid of the Taliban."

### **Community and Government Efforts**

Communities near the border play an active role in maintaining security and promoting peace, especially the religious scholars and tribal leaders. Additionally, the effectiveness of government agencies and the role of informers in each village are significant factors in ensuring security, as another respondent explained: "It's only the government agencies that are responsible for prevailing peace, aside from that, we have some informers in each village who can inform us on time during suspicious activities."

### **Role of Education**

Limited educational opportunities for youth exacerbate the situation, as they may be vulnerable to extremist influences. Education currently plays a limited role in countering extremist activities, as respondents mentioned. A local teacher expressed, "We lack proper schools, and our children often attend madrassas. It's a concern because they might be influenced by radical elements."

## **Views on Governance**

Views on the Taliban within the border communities are diverse, reflecting a range of opinions. Some residents express support for the Taliban's government, emphasizing their cooperative stance. For example, one respondent is described by our field researcher as a "full-time supporter of the Taliban's government." In contrast, others hold more critical views on the Taliban's government structures. A tribal elder said, "In the current Taliban government, appointments are often based on criteria other than educational qualifications, with individuals associated with the jihadis holding influential positions".

## **Aspirations**

The aspirations of the young people living in this area are deeply influenced by their daily struggles and the unique challenges they face. While they dream of better opportunities and a more stable life, they often find themselves constrained by significant barriers.

Economic stability, like elsewhere in the world, is one of those aspirations. As one respondent observed, "Our currency is more stable than in previous governments. We are also making progress in economic development."

But, while some find the stability of currency and economy commendable, stark realities also exist for others. Many young individuals are compelled to engage in cross-border activities from a very early age. "Underage children are also working in cross-border trade, without proper identity cards," highlighted one respondent. This underscores the economic hardships faced by families

and the necessity for young people to contribute to their households' income, which ultimately means that they remain out of schools.

While looking for opportunities abroad is a common sentiment all over Afghanistan, there are a few in this region who remain optimistic about the country's current trajectory of progress. As one respondent emphatically stated, "We encourage them (compatriots seeking refuge elsewhere) to come back because Afghanistan is making significant progress." The hope for a brighter future within their homeland is a prevailing sentiment among the youth.

On the recent policy change for undocumented Afghans residing in Pakistan, some reported that since the news broke, they have observed a considerable decline in local economic activity. "This will be very difficult for us as we are far from such processes (of visas and passports)", responded a trader.

## **Gender Dynamics**

Gender dynamics play have shaped the sociocultural and political milieu of this region. Traditional gender roles often restrict women's mobility and opportunities. The sudden policy changes have raised concerns about increased barriers for women who, due to these traditional roles, might face additional challenges in obtaining passports and visas, or in exercising their rights to cross the border. These dynamics need to be considered in future policy decisions to ensure equitable opportunities for both men and women. A young female respondent emphasized, "We want our voices to be heard, and we want the freedom to cross the border without any additional hurdles."

## **State Services and Challenges**

A majority of natives is not happy with the current services provided by the government. From accessible healthcare, a proper education system to edible food and clean water, poor governance and negligence are evident. Key areas of concern, as pointed out by respondents, include:

### **Access to Basic Necessities**

Challenges in accessing necessities like clean water, hygienic food, healthcare, and education highlight the need for state services. "Government should build hospitals and schools," as suggested by a respondent.

### **Healthcare**

Around 70% of respondents rely on healthcare services outside Afghanistan, emphasizing the dire need for improved healthcare facilities. One respondent highlighted, "Our healthcare system is in shambles," underscoring the challenges in the state's healthcare services.

## Educational Challenges

Access to quality education is limited, emphasizing the need for investment in educational institutions. Respondents stressed the importance of building "schools, colleges, universities, and madrassas at the border region" to enhance state services in education.

## Economic Hardships

Economic challenges, including job opportunities and financial difficulties, are prevalent. The government needs to "generate job vacancies and adjust the unemployment of youth," as per one respondent, to address these challenges in state services.

## Border Crossing Difficulties

Residents face challenges when crossing the border for family gatherings or trade. The demand for easier border crossings highlights the role of state services in ensuring efficient mobility, as a respondent stated, "make the crossing of the border easy."

## Field Notes/Observations

Aside from the IDIs, our field researcher assigned to the designated area also depicted his observations which offer insights into the characteristics, cooperation levels, and stance of the respondents, as well as the context in which the interviews took place.

## Cooperation Levels

The researcher noted that, in general, the respondents displayed a high level of cooperation during the interviews. This is a positive sign for the study, as it suggests that the participants were willing to engage in the research process. High cooperation levels indicate that the respondents were open to sharing their perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for obtaining valuable data.

## Pro-Taliban Stance

It's evident that some of the respondents, particularly in Spin Boldak, held a pro-Taliban stance. This is an important finding as it reflects the complex socio-political dynamics in the region. The pro-Taliban stance of some respondents might have influenced their views on various topics, such as education, women's rights, and regional security.

## Gender Dynamics

There were instances where female respondents required assistance or had their responses facilitated by male family members. This could indicate the presence of traditional gender dynamics, where male family members often take on decision-making and communication roles. This is a noteworthy aspect, especially when discussing topics related to women's rights and education.

### **Tribal and Religious Influencers**

Some respondents held roles as tribal influencers and religious scholars. These individuals are likely to have a significant impact on their communities and might play pivotal roles in shaping local opinions and decisions. Their pro-Taliban stance, as mentioned in the feedback, can also influence the broader community.

### **Nepotism in Governance Structures**

The researchers highlighted that the Taliban's government assigned duties irrespective of respondents' educational backgrounds. This observation provides insights into the governance structure in the area, indicating that educational qualifications may not be the sole criteria for holding positions in government. This information is crucial when discussing issues related to governance and public services in the region.

### **Economic Interconnectedness**

Spin Boldak is described as an economic hub where people have close relations and are interconnected. This suggests that the economic landscape and cross-border trade play a crucial role in the community's livelihoods.

### **Gender and Power Dynamics**

There are instances where family members served as translators or intermediaries for female respondents. This highlights the importance of language, communication, and power dynamics in the region, which can affect the ability of women to express their views independently.

### **Religious Education vs School Education**

One religious scholar and madrassa owner aimed to promote religious education while acknowledging the need to address concerns related to school education. This observation underscores the coexistence of different education systems and the importance of engaging with religious scholars in discussions about education.

## **Policy Recommendations**

An array of issues, as highlighted in the previous sections, calls for the relevant stakeholders to consider interventions in various, but not limited to, areas enlisted below:

### **Engagement with Tribal and Religious Influencers**

- Recognize the influence of tribal leaders and religious scholars, especially those with pro-Taliban stances, in the region.
- Develop strategies for constructive engagement with these influencers to foster dialogue and cooperation.

### **Gender-Sensitive Approaches**

- Acknowledge the traditional gender dynamics that require female respondents to have male intermediaries.
- Implement gender-sensitive approaches to ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes, especially in matters related to education and women's rights.

### **Education Promotion**

- Support and promote both religious and school education for girls and boys to cater to the diverse needs of the community.
- Collaborate with local madrassa owners to bridge the gap between religious and formal education systems and enhance the quality of school education.

### **Economic Development**

- Leverage the economic interconnectedness of Spin Boldak as an opportunity for cross-border trade and economic growth.
- Address trade challenges and explore avenues for improving economic conditions, which can contribute to regional stability.

### **Governance and Public Services**

- Recognize the non-traditional approach to assigning government duties based on educational backgrounds.
- Advocate for transparent and accountable governance to ensure that qualified individuals hold positions in government departments and deliver essential services.
- Immediate efforts should be made to enhance healthcare facilities in Afghanistan, this would reduce the dependence on medical services in Pakistan and other nearby countries.

### **Cross-Border Relations**

- Recognize the interrelatedness of people on both sides of the border.
- Facilitate people-to-people interactions, trade, and cooperation to build trust and strengthen cross-border relations.



### **Security and Peacebuilding**

- Education is key to promoting peace in the region. However, reliance on madrassah solely for the purpose is not enough. Either madrassahs should be introduced to modern subjects and teaching systems or schools should be equipped enough.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to develop community-specific strategies for enhancing security, countering extremism, and promoting peace.

### **Education for Girls**

- Develop targeted interventions to ensure the continuation of girls' education and address any barriers imposed by the current political context.
- Sustain dialogues with the IEA to continue advocacy on the subject.

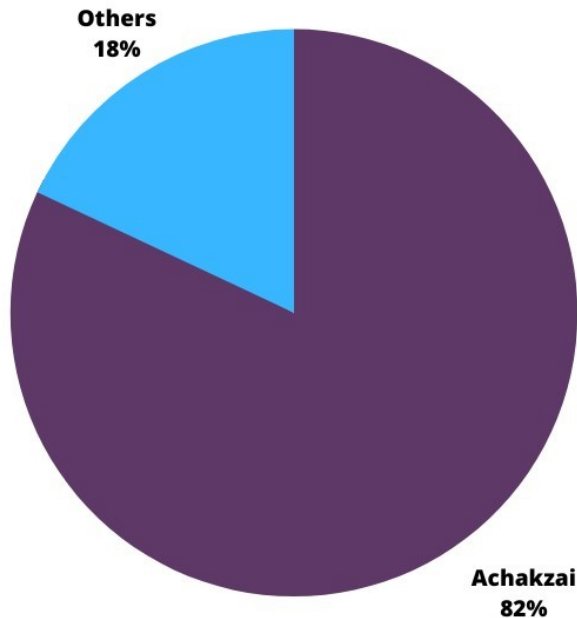
### **Inclusive Dialogues**

- Ensure that the perspectives and concerns of border communities, including those with pro-Taliban views, are integrated into dialogue discussions.
- Foster an environment of inclusivity in policy-making processes to address the genuine concerns of the community.

# CHAMAN-SPIN BOLDAK BORDER

## PAKISTAN SIDE

### Chaman Region: Tribal Representation



Others include Khilji (Tokhi), Noorzai, Gadezai, Tareen, and Urdu-speaking individuals. Among the Achakzais, some individuals identify with subtribes Adozai, Alizai, Ashaizai, Malaizai, Ghibzai, and Shalaizai.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Community Insights (Daily Life, Cross-Border Ties, Economic Activity, and Gender Roles)

Daily life on this side of the border is marked, much like the other side, by distinct gender roles, economic activities, and cultural and familial ties spread across the region.

The majority of men are actively engaged in cross-border trade and business activities, with a significant portion participating in border trade. Some men work in various professions or jobs that primarily focus on earning income to support their families. The youth typically attend schools or colleges, reflecting a growing emphasis on education, but mostly for men.

Women's roles are mainly centered around household chores and childcare, adhering to traditional gender norms. A few women are employed in various professions, including teaching in schools or working with NGOs, indicating a gradual shift in traditional gender roles. Women's mobility is limited, and they typically do not venture outside their homes unaccompanied

99 percent of the people across the border share a single ethnicity and maintain close relations, considering themselves part of one tribe or nation. "People on both sides of the border have been part of one village, one family, even before the creation of Pakistan and the establishment of the border", said a tribal elder.

## **Status of Education**

The status of education in the area is a point of concern for many. Although some acknowledge improvements, the general sentiment is that more enhancements are needed. A common theme is the desire for accessible schools in every village. One community member expresses, "Education is improving, but further enhancements are needed, with a focus on women's education and ensuring schools in every village."

Approximately 65% of respondents consider the education system unsatisfactory, emphasizing the need for more schools and improved infrastructure.

### **Male-Female Student Ratio**

there is a significant gender disparity in education. Approximately 45% of boys are attending school, while only around 20% of girls have access to education. "This imbalance underscores the challenges faced in providing girls with equal educational opportunities", said a female doctor at a local hospital.

### **Girls' Education and Women's Participation in WorkForce**

There are evident gender disparities, particularly concerning access to education and opportunities for women. Girls' access to education is considerably lower, with an estimated 10-25% of girls attending school compared to about 20-45% of boys.

Women's participation in the workforce is limited, with estimates suggesting only around 5-20% of women are employed, while approximately 80-90% of men are engaged in economic activities.

Various challenges are cited as hindrances to girls' education. These challenges include the 'lack of a good educational system, weak educational facilities, and a shortage of schools, particularly for girls'. Poverty is also identified as a significant barrier, preventing families from sending their daughters to school. The tribal mindset and cultural and religious restrictions are mentioned as contributing factors to the 'low enrollment of girls'. Despite the challenges, there is a positive aspiration among parents to educate their daughters and provide them with equal opportunities. Some parents from middle-class households encourage their daughters to pursue careers and aspire for them to become doctors and professionals.

Local attitudes toward women's empowerment vary, with some regions witnessing positive changes and increased emphasis on girls' education and women's participation in different fields. The influence of religious leaders and scholars can affect local attitudes and progress in women's empowerment.

## **State Services and Challenges**

### **Health**

Approximately 70% of respondents expressed concerns about inadequate health services in the area.

### **Education System**

Around 65% of respondents found the education system in the area unsatisfactory. They demanded improvements in the sector, with a specific focus on women's education and the establishment of schools in every village.

### **Lack of Equal Opportunities**

A majority of respondents lamented the lack of opportunities. Female respondents added that while opportunities of employment are already scanty in the region for all, women have to face worse in terms of unequal opportunities within these limited options. A prominent aspiration was the hope for equal opportunities in standard education and employment for both men and women in the future.

### **Complexity of Cross-Border Relations**

In the context of cross-border relations, respondents displayed a blend of hope and skepticism. Approximately 60% of respondents anticipate improvements in cross-border relations, indicating the desire for better ties. Border closures and policy changes enacted recently were quoted as deterrents to cross-border cordiality.

### **Economic and Socio-Political Development**

Roughly 80% of respondents expressed hope for socio-political and economic development.

## **Religious and Cultural Dynamics**

The local approach towards religion and culture varies in intensity in the different descriptions. While some people in the region follow a moderate approach to religion and culture, others have a strict adherence to both. There is a strong sense of religious identity, with a deep respect for religious values and practices. Religion, particularly Islam, plays a significant role in the lives of the local community. It is deeply ingrained in their identity, and the community has a strong commitment to religious values. Cultural practices are also important and have been followed for generations. They can dictate various aspects of life, including dress codes and traditional ceremonies like weddings.

## Impact of Religious and Cultural Norms on the Community, Youth, and Women

**Gender Roles:** The strict adherence to cultural and religious values often leads to the enforcement of traditional gender roles. Women are frequently confined to their homes, with limited rights and educational opportunities. Some cultural practices, such as the wearing of burqas, affect women's freedom and choices.

**Youth:** The impact on the youth varies. While some adhere to traditional values, others are influenced by Western culture, which is seen as a potential threat to local religious and cultural practices. The strict religious and cultural environment may limit the choices and opportunities available to the youth.

**Community Harmony:** In some cases, the community maintains a harmonious relationship based on mutual religious beliefs and shared cultural practices. However, in other instances, strict adherence to religion and culture may lead to division or exclusion, particularly when it comes to women's roles and participation.

**Recent Changes:** Some respondents note that recent changes, such as a growing awareness of the importance of education, are affecting the community positively, especially in terms of education for children.

## Interrelationship of Peace, Growth, Religion and Culture

The impact of religion and culture on peace and growth is a subject of differing opinions. Some believe they don't directly obstruct progress, while others see certain aspects or interpretations as hindrances. Women's exclusion from education and decision-making is a notable challenge, often linked to these practices, limiting opportunities for women. It's emphasized that it's often the interpretation and application of religion and culture, rather than the practices themselves, that hinder progress. Extremist elements are recognized for exploiting these aspects, disrupting peace and progress. Educational initiatives, particularly for girls, are seen as a potential solution to address women's challenges. The Taliban's actions, especially concerning women's education, significantly impact the region. In summary, there's no clear consensus on the direct impact of religion and culture, with outcomes varying based on interpretation and application. Extremist elements, cultural values, and the Taliban's influence are key factors, while education initiatives offer potential solutions for women's challenges.

## Tribal Structures: Nature and Efficacy

The community's views on the tribal leadership structures in the and their inclusiveness reveal a variety of opinions and experiences.

**Inheritance and Wealth:** 40 percent of the respondents say that tribal leadership is based on wealth and family background, with leaders often passing their positions to their children. This approach is criticized for sidelining competent individuals who lack financial resources.

**Historical Influences:** In some areas, tribal leadership is organized according to historical frameworks, such as the system introduced by Ahmed Shah Baba. Leadership is divided between castes and specific individuals within those castes. In some instances, certain families were given leadership status by colonial powers.

**Decision-Making:** Tribal leaders play a central role in decision-making and dispute resolution within the community. They are trusted by the people, and decisions made by tribal leaders are usually accepted and followed without question.

**Inclusiveness:** The inclusiveness of tribal leadership varies. In some cases, it is based on respect, and people, regardless of sect, caste, or family, share equal rights in decision-making. In other instances, tribal leadership may not be inclusive, and women are often excluded from the decision-making process.

Many communities and tribes feel represented in the tribal setup across the border. Some larger tribes with a significant presence on both sides of the border are well-represented. However, there are cases where minority communities or tribes may not feel adequately represented in the setup.

**Comparisons with Formal Governance:** There are mixed opinions about how tribal leadership structures compare to formal governance systems. Some consider the tribal system beneficial for resolving disputes more quickly and fairly than the formal judicial system. Others believe that if Islamic or constitutional law were implemented, the tribal system could be dismantled.

**Community Support:** Tribal leadership structures are often highly respected, with leaders trusted to make decisions for the benefit of the community. They are seen as playing a positive role in peace-making and management.

### **Community Influencers and Agency in Decision-Making**

Community influencers are a diverse group, including tribal leaders, religious scholars, and educated individuals, along with government officials, such as district administration, border committee members, and the police. There is a consensus on the positive impact of religious scholars. These influencers can vary in their temperaments and may sometimes prioritize their own interests in decision-making.

Decision-making processes often involve tribal leaders and religious scholars, especially in dispute resolution, sometimes taking the form of a Jirga. Influential figures, like Ulema, are generally seen as making decisions beneficial to society, although there can be instances of perceived injustice. Many emphasize the need for decisions to align with Islamic values.

The most respected figures in these communities are tribal leaders, revered for their wisdom and role in maintaining order; religious scholars, who are highly regarded for upholding religious and moral values; and government representatives, respected for their role in maintaining security and enforcing regulations. Other influencers include political parties, well-connected individuals,

and respected elders. It's important to note that the influence and effectiveness of government representatives and local authorities can vary among different respondents and communities in the region.

## **Economy and Trade**

90 percent of the economy is dependent on cross-border, as reported by several respondents. Hence, the ebbs and flows of cross-border trade have a profound impact on household stability in the border regions, particularly for those heavily reliant on wage labor tied to trade. This dynamic is marked by disparities in the distribution of trade benefits between the wealthy and the poor, highlighting the economic challenges faced by the vulnerable communities. While the benefits of positive trade developments uplift the majority and enhance their livelihoods, a decrease in cross-border trade negatively affects the population, especially in areas like Chaman, where a substantial portion of the population relies on cross-border trade-related wages. In the words of a local resident, "If the border closes, their income source vanishes, depriving them of essential means." Several key insights include:

### **Disparities in Trade Benefits**

The rich benefit more from cross-border trade compared to the poor. Wealthier individuals often can invest more in trade, leading to greater earnings.

### **Impact on the Poor**

The majority of people in these regions are poor and heavily depend on cross-border trade for their daily income. Any instability or disruption in trade significantly affects their ability to provide for their families, which, in turn, could lead to an increase in poverty levels.

### **Investment-Based Earnings**

The distribution of trade benefits is intrinsically tied to the level of investment. Wealthy traders who invest more tend to earn more. Conversely, daily wage laborers earn meager incomes, barely enough to sustain their families for a day.

### **Impact on Local Communities**

Any restrictions or disturbances in cross-border trade significantly affect the local population, particularly those with no alternative means of income. This can lead to severe economic hardship, prompting some to resort to illegal activities.

### **Influence of Cross-Border Community Ties on Economic Activities**

The ties between cross-border communities and tribes are considered significant factors influencing economic activities in the region. Positive relationships between these communities are seen as crucial for fostering trade and prosperity. As one respondent mentioned, "It matters a lot. The better the relations are between the people, the better the trade is going to be."

## Role of Government in Regulating and Promoting Cross-Border Trade

Opinions on the role of government agencies in cross-border and local trade are mixed. While some respondents express frustration with government institutions complicating trade by occasionally closing borders, others believe that these agencies have not done enough to promote trade. One respondent stated, "Government institutions are complicating cross-border trade further at border crossings by closing border now and then, creating additional challenges for traders."

**Support for Local Trade and Businesses:** Some respondents believe that government agencies can play a vital role in promoting local trade by providing better opportunities and fostering a thriving trade environment. They call for reducing taxes and offering facilities to encourage legal trade activities.

Besides, the government's role is crucial in creating economic opportunities for the poor. While some mention certain government initiatives (like the *Chance* program by FC) these efforts are often limited in scope and do not comprehensively address the issue of equitable distribution of trade benefits.

### **Crackdown on Smuggling and Opium Cultivation:**

Views on the recent crackdown by the Taliban on smuggling and reports of reduced opium cultivation are diverse. Some see the crackdown as a positive development, while others express doubts about its long-term effectiveness, particularly regarding opium cultivation in Afghanistan. One respondent said, "I think it is a very positive move, but genuinely speaking I don't think opium cultivation will stop in Afghanistan."

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**Women's Participation:** The role of women in cross-border trade and local trade in the region appears to be limited. Most respondents indicate that women do not actively participate in trade activities, and their roles are primarily confined to household duties. In some cases, women are unable to engage in trade due to cultural or societal restrictions, such as those imposed by the Taliban. However, a few respondents mention that a small percentage of poor women work as daily wage laborers at the border, particularly widowed women with no other means of support.

## Peace and Security

Peace and security are central concerns here. While instances of terrorism exist, they are not widespread, and the exact motives behind these sporadic incidents often remain unclear. As one



respondent aptly put it, "Terrorism is not a widespread issue here; occasionally, government officials are targeted."

Crucially, the local population plays an active role in maintaining stability. Tribal leaders, religious scholars, and local committees work closely with government security forces, actively contributing to peace and security. This collaborative approach is vital for ensuring a safe environment. Another respondent emphasized, "Government security forces are doing their job impressively. Additionally, political parties, tribal leaders, and religious scholars are contributing to peacekeeping efforts."

The area benefits from strong familial, tribal, and community bonds, which have a positive impact on security cooperation. As one respondent underlined, "There are strong familial and tribal ties between the tribes on both sides of the border."

Approximately 60-70% of respondents express concerns about security and peace, highlighting the significance of local efforts and community bonds. Nearly 80% of respondents underscore the active role of local leaders and committees in peacekeeping, indicating their substantial influence.

Economic development and employment opportunities emerge as vital factors for promoting peace and security. Poverty and unemployment contribute to increased street crimes and insecurity, making it critical for authorities to address these economic challenges. As a respondent pointed out, "For security purposes, security agencies can take some actions: ban unauthorized weapons, cars, and drugs. Drug addicts are the cause of street crimes."

Statistics reveal a strong consensus among approximately 75% of respondents regarding the essential role of robust cross-border community ties in fostering security cooperation.

### **Impact of Peace and Security on Education**

The prevailing peace and security situation profoundly affects education in our area. Without peace, parents are hesitant to send their children to school due to safety concerns. As one community member pointed out, "In a violent and turbulent society, everyone will be afraid to send their children to schools." This is especially true for girls, who are often deprived of educational opportunities due to security concerns.

Approximately 70% of respondents in our community express concerns about the impact of security on education. "A peaceful environment is fundamental for ensuring access to quality education", said a university student.

### **Education as a Tool Against Extremism**

Education is seen as a critical tool in promoting awareness and combating extremist influences and cross-border terrorism. According to one respondent, "Education promotes awareness; when people are conscious, they can distinguish between good and bad. Local involvement in terrorism decreases when education prevails, as educated individuals can discern and distance themselves from terrorist groups."

## Impact of Recent Policy Change

The recent policy change in Pakistan, requiring Afghans to enter with valid passports and visas, is a matter of concern for border communities with shared tribal and family ties. Approximately 55 % of the respondents expressed discontent on this decision.

One respondent noted, "People on both sides of the Chaman border belong to the same tribe. They have relatives on the other side and often visit their families. I believe the recent policy will have a significant impact on the lives of people on both sides." This change is expected to have implications for trade and daily border crossings. Another respondent highlighted that "Poor people whose livelihoods depend on border trade will be impacted the most."

### Impact on Cross-Border Activities

The policy change is expected to have a substantial impact on cross-border activities, particularly trade and the lives of daily wage earners who rely on the border for their livelihoods. As one respondent put it, "It will affect every aspect of people, especially those who are living close to the border." The change may lead to the loss of income for those working at the border, who "cross the border daily to earn money."

### Impact on Law-and-Order Situation

Some respondents expressed concerns that the restrictions could lead to an increase in criminal activities. One participant mentioned that "more people will be compelled to resort to stealing and engaging in illegal activities to earn money." Another respondent was worried about street crimes, stating, "Street crimes will increase in Chaman, which is worrying." The potential for rising criminal activities is a notable concern among the local population due to these new regulations.

On the other hand, some participants were more optimistic, suggesting that law and order may not be significantly affected or that the governments are actively working to maintain it.

## Community Aspirations

### Socio-Political and Economic Development

The aspirations of this border community align with the desires of neighboring areas. While education, employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and government cooperation are highlighted as essential, some perceive these words as mere lip service. A university graduate expressed, "It's as if the government and other authorities are paying lip service to these essential needs while failing to deliver on their promises." A religious scholar stressed the importance of tangible action, stating, "Promoting better relations between border communities requires more than just empty rhetoric; it demands a genuine commitment to addressing the economic, educational, and social challenges."

Approximately 80% of respondents in this community express hope for socio-political and economic development, indicating a strong desire for improved living standards and better opportunities in the region.

### Cross-Border Relations in the Next Five Years

Community members express a blend of hope and skepticism regarding desired changes in cross-border relations over the next five years. While recognizing the challenges currently faced, there's an expectation that easing border trade restrictions could pave the way for better relations. One respondent noted, "The current system offers little hope for improved relationships. Easing border trade restrictions could pave the way for better relations between the communities."

Around 60% of respondents anticipate improvements in cross-border relations, believing that facilitating trade and enhancing communication can lead to stronger ties.

### Aspirations for the Future of Men and Women in the Region

Community members hold positive aspirations for the future of both men and women in the region. They hope for equal opportunities in standard education and employment. As one respondent eloquently put it, "We hope for equal opportunities in standard education and employment for both men and women in the future."

Approximately 85% of respondents in this community express hope for a brighter future where education and employment opportunities are available to all, irrespective of gender.

## Policy Recommendations

Based on the IDI responses, field researchers' observations, and the programme team's analysis, following policy recommendations were extrapolated:

### Education

**Improve accessibility:** Enhance the availability and accessibility of schools, especially in remote villages, to ensure that all children, including girls, have access to quality education.

**Promote awareness:** Launch awareness campaigns to encourage parents to send their children to school, emphasizing the long-term benefits of education in fostering peace and development.

**Support female education:** Implement initiatives specifically aimed at promoting and facilitating female education to overcome gender disparities in schooling.

### Peace and Security

**Strengthen security:** Collaboration among the police and local communities to enhance security in border regions and make schools, markets, and neighborhoods safer.

**Counter extremism:** Develop and implement counter-extremism programs on local and regional level to prevent the influence of radical ideologies and increase community resilience. Include religious institutions in such processes.

**Engage local leaders:** Work with tribal and community leaders to address security concerns and promote cooperation between different tribal groups.

### Policy Regulation and Bilateral Cooperation

**Simplify the visa process:** Streamline the visa application process to facilitate legal border crossings, enabling people to visit their families without excessive bureaucratic hurdles.

**Assistance for daily wagers:** Develop support mechanisms and alternative employment opportunities for daily wage earners who may lose their livelihoods due to policy changes.

**Cross-border dialogue:** Encourage dialogue between Pakistani and Afghan governments to develop mutually beneficial visa regulations and promote cross-border ties.

**Collaborative trade policies:** Foster cooperation between governments to create policies that facilitate and support cross-border trade while combating illegal trade practices. Agreements like APTTA must be revised and put in place.

### Employment Opportunities

**Economic diversification:** Encourage economic diversification by investing in sectors beyond border trade to provide stable job opportunities to the local population.

**Skill development:** Implement vocational and skill development programs to equip residents with the skills needed for various industries.

**Microfinance and entrepreneurship:** Promote microfinance and entrepreneurship initiatives to empower individuals, especially girls and women, to create their businesses and generate income.

### Local and International Engagement

**International support:** Pakistan government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should seek support and aid from international organizations and governments to improve education, healthcare, and infrastructure in the border regions.

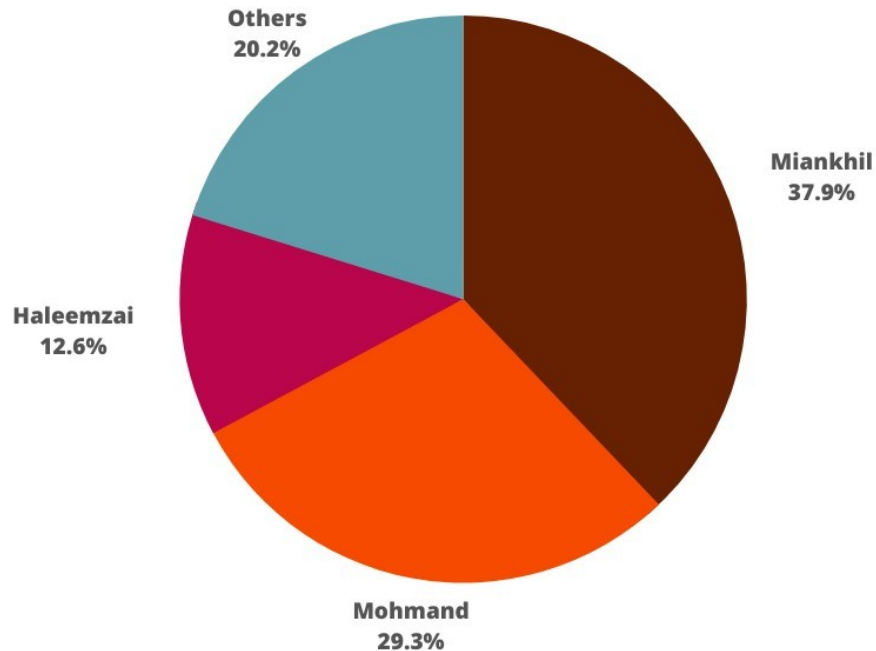
**Regional cooperation:** International actors should foster cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan and engage in regional initiatives to address socio-economic challenges and promote peace.

**Civil society participation:** Encourage the active participation of local and international civil society organizations in advocating for the rights and needs of border communities.

# TORKHAM-JALALABAD BORDER

## AFGHANISTAN SIDE

### Jalalabad Region: Tribal Representation



Others include Morchakhil, Sultankhil, Sarghani, Zakhilwal, and Khawazai

## KEY FINDINGS

### Community Insights (Daily Life, Gender Roles, Cross-Border Ties, Economic Activity and Taliban Control)

On the Torkham side of the border, the men of the town work primarily in unskilled labor, trade, transportation, agriculture, and vending. While they work from morning to evening, women are confined to their houses as their participation in labor and economic activities is restricted by cultural and societal norms. However, they do actively contribute to agriculture and livestock-related occupations.

This region primarily adheres to a patriarchal society, where men make most decisions, and women's opportunities for work are limited.

Cross-border trade is the sole source of income for those living near the border. According to one respondent, *“Daily life activities on both sides of the border have been disrupted, but our people have been most severely affected, particularly at the Torkham border point, where most daily wage earners and laborers are banned from crossing goods or traveling without visas.”*

There is a mixed perception of the communities' strong relationship since the Taliban regime, with some believing it has remained unaffected, while others say it has weakened since the Taliban assumed leadership on the Afghan side.

One of the respondents stated, *“We are currently in the worst position possible, with youth unemployment at an all-time high, women not being well-skilled or educated, and a lack of revenue options due to trade barriers.”*

## **Status of Education**

The present education sector in the area is far from developed, and while the female education ratio is significantly lower than men's, the education system overall is below par. Due to financial restrictions, men also leave their education and seek employment.

### **Girls Education and Participation in the Workforce**

Majority of the community does not consider education for girls crucial for socio-economic growth. Unfavorable perceptions persist regarding women empowerment, contributing to limited access to education and work opportunities for women.

According to respondents, young girls wish to continue their education and contribute to the society.

As per one of the female respondents, *“Most of the girls want to be a doctor or a teacher.”*

However, the education system faces significant challenges, particularly on this side of the border, where the new policies by the government have restricted female education. Girls are allowed only to attend primary school and are not permitted to pursue higher education.

Around 60% of the respondents believe that the school system has been gravely neglected due to instability and poverty in the area.

One of the respondents, a tribal leader stated, *“Education can play a vital role in promoting peace in the region.”*

## **Cultural and Religious Dynamics**

Pashtuns on this side of the Torkham border share a strong sense of unity based on their shared identity, language, and cultural heritage.

Strict religious practices are followed across all age groups, and sending children to madrassas from a young age for religious education is common. This high level of religiosity and conservatism

may be viewed as a hardline approach, disproportionately impacting women, particularly in terms of education and employment opportunities.

Religious leaders are revered and ultimately hold moral authority among different sections of the community.

While the society respects and prioritizes religion in every aspect, women, in particular, have expressed their discontent with the extreme mindset, that has practically marginalized women.

One of the female respondents, a religious scholar stated, *"This rigid attitude toward religion has had a significant impact on women's education on our side."*

### **Tribal Structure vs Formal Governance; Community Influencers and Agency in Decision-Making**

Tribal leadership holds sway on both sides of the border, with the Jirga system settling conflicts over land swiftly.

Although recent disputes between tribes have been minimal, the tribal leadership structure is still frequently viewed as the most effective mechanism in resolving peace in the community, as stated by 70% of the respondents.

According to one of the respondents, a religious ulema, "Religious scholars, tribal Leaders and government members are the ultimate influencers in decision making."

However, the interplay between tribal leadership and formal governance systems, as well as the involvement of security agencies, makes the region's dynamics complex.

While tribal and religious leaders exercise significant influence in decision making, the government is ultimately in charge.

### **State Services and Challenges**

Poor governance and instability have hindered developments in the region especially in the education and healthcare services.

The area has poor infrastructure in terms of schools and hospitals. The elderly and those in need of urgent care prefer to cross the border for treatment.

One of the female respondents stated, *"Better health care is available across the border, particularly in Peshawar, which is just 30 minutes away. We are more satisfied with the facilities provided there."*

### **Economy, Trade, and Public Mobility**

The majority in this province profit from Torkham Point since thousands of families rely on cross-border trade as their principal source of income. However, economic dependence on trade has implications for economic instability.

## People's Movement, Household Stability and Cross-Border Trade

Due to trade restrictions and frequent border closure, the travelers remain stranded by the border for weeks. Furthermore, the new border restriction policy has had a detrimental effect on households.

According to one of the respondents, a local businessman, *"The border is tied to our bread and butter, and whenever it closes, there is a massive food crisis."*

While another responded, *"Implementing visa policies for access to local markets across borders has disrupted our daily business. Closing the border is an unwelcomed action, and no one is favoring it."*

## Disparities in Trade Benefits

The wealthy and poor profit differently from trade, with the affluent holding more power and continuing to manage their businesses smoothly. The disadvantaged, on the other hand, are reliant on the actions of the authorities.

## Role of Government

Around 60% of respondents state that the government agencies are enforcing trade restrictions aggressively, with no flexibility or support for the local community. Both governments should work together to strengthen bilateral trade cooperation.

*"The government is unsupportive and fails to acknowledge that cross-border trade enhances regional economic growth,"* stated one of the respondents.

## Views on Crackdown on Smuggling and Opium Cultivation

The majority of respondents claimed that there is no opium cultivation in the border region, although they do believe smuggling occurs secretly without the knowledge of the local people.

## Political Dynamics; Views on Recent Policy Changes

Recent policy changes, including stringent trade regulations and border restrictions, have affected the daily activities and interactions of individuals on both sides of the border, disrupting all economic activities.

The policy has had noticeable effects on trade and business ties. Cross-border activity has fallen by 60%, according to the majority of respondents.

Not having the proper documentation has made it increasingly difficult for the elderly and disadvantaged to cross the border and visit their families.

*"It has impacted us all,"* one tribal elder responded, *"People on both sides of the border are unhappy with this decision."*



## Peace and Security

Increased security concerns have strained relations between the two sides, impacting the economy and daily lives.

### Safety Concerns Near the Border

Frequent border conflicts and lack of peace in the region have directly affected education, as schools close for weeks.

“On this side of the border, there can be no sustainable peace until the education system is prioritized,” according to one of the respondents.

While another respondent, a tribal head, stated, “We want to live in peace but are constantly concerned about the safety of our women and children as we encounter cross-border incidents.”

### Taliban's Role in Ensuring Safety

The majority of respondents believe that the Taliban government has been proactive in assisting people, particularly tribal leaders, in maintaining peace in the area through the enforcement of rigorous measures. As per one of the respondents, “Attacks have occurred on numerous occasions in the region, and have been handled by the Taliban government.”

### Security Measures and Resolution of Disputes

Local tribal elders' hold Jirga meetings to intervene in internal disputes to resolve internal conflicts.

### Presence of Radical Factions and Terrorist Outfits

Terrorist groups do not have a strong presence, and respondents believe that the present government has ensured that such groups have no place in the community.

*“Their presence would have an impact on cross-border trade and business, and the bulk of the districts rely on this region, therefore it is a concerning threat for all of us”*, according to one of the participants.

### Community and Government Efforts

As locals, including tribal groups, cooperate to ensure security in this region, there is a sense of solidarity and trust within the community.

One of the male respondents stated, *“Ties are more important than trade and business, if we trust each other, no one can harm or influence us.”*

## Local Aspirations

The community aspires to provide women with more opportunities for education and work, combating deeply ingrained cultural norms. Collaboration between both governments,

prioritizing peace, and improving the economy and employment opportunities, is crucial. The local community looks to strengthen ties with the Pakistan border community and improve conditions for women and girls.

### **Socio-Political and Economic Development**

The majority of respondents agree that initiatives aimed primarily at building new infrastructure, as well as capacity building programs for Afghan youth, should be implemented to enhance employment opportunities.

*"We only demand a strong economy, employment opportunities, and an improved education system,"* one responder emphasized.

### **Relations in the Next Five Years**

Around 60% of respondents expressed optimism, seeking improved bilateral trade and less stringent rules. They also voiced hope in governments being able to collaborate and ensure peace and security on both sides, which can lead to easy trade flows and enriched livelihoods for border communities.

As per one of the respondents, *"We are optimistic that we would have a brighter future."*

### **Aspirations for the Future of Men and Women in the Region**

Some respondents expressed concern about what the future holds for them, particularly women, who lack representation in all sectors. However, almost 80% of respondents favored supporting women empowerment and establishing education centers.

One of the respondents stated, *"We want equal opportunities for men and women."*

While another respondent stated. *"The majority of the girls want to be doctors and teachers, and their dream is to serve the community, but poverty has become a barrier for them."*

Men prefer long-term financial security by gaining access to better job prospects in the area. The majority of them aspire to be business owners, while a few are interested in pursuing their education further.

## **Policy Recommendations**

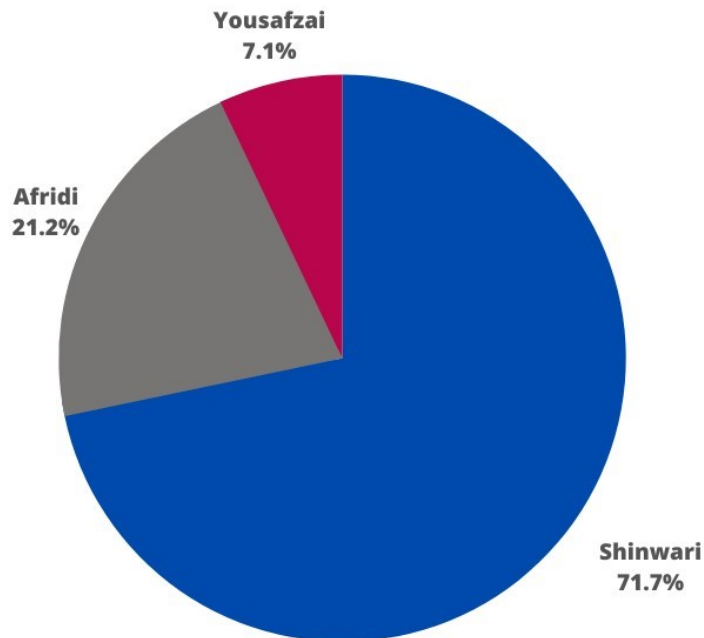
1. Ease visa restrictions for locals traveling from Afghanistan to Pakistan via the Torkham crossing to facilitate cross-border trade and movement.
2. Establish a mutual bilateral cooperation committee between Pakistan and Afghanistan to enhance cooperation and dialogue.
3. Increase police patrolling and security checkpoints to address smuggling, illegal activities, and security threats.

4. Promote women-led initiatives to enhance the capacity building of women, encouraging their participation in Small and Medium Enterprise Skills (SMEs) with support from national and international NGOs.
5. Invest in upgrading public infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and industries, to improve the well-being of local communities and generate more job opportunities. Prioritize the economic development of border communities.

# TORKHAM-JALALABAD BORDER

## PAKISTAN SIDE

### Torkham Region: Tribal Representation



Others include Morchakhil, Sultankhil, Sarghani, Zakhilwal, and Khawazai

## KEY FINDINGS

### Community Insights (Daily Life, Gender Roles, Cross-Border Ties, Economic Activity)

On the Pakistan side of the border, a significant proportion of the community is engaged in unskilled labor, trade, transportation, agriculture, and vending. Women in this region predominantly focus on household chores, reflecting traditional gender roles.

As per one respondent, *“A typical day in our community differs for men and women since men must work endlessly to make a living, whereas women must look after their household tasks and caregiving.”*

Women's participation in labor and economic activities outside the home is limited due to cultural and societal norms. The prevailing patriarchal society limits women's opportunities for education and employment, with a majority of them lacking basic education.

Children, particularly boys, are encouraged to pursue higher education and are given the option to travel for better prospects, whereas girls have limitations in terms of mobility and are discouraged from studying beyond primary school.

According to the majority of respondents, the residents living near the border rely only on cross-border trade for an income, so the border crossing procedure should be simple and accessible in order for the region to prosper economically.

One of the respondents stated, *“People seek to maintain friendly relationships with one another. They wish to continue engaging in mutual trade.”*

## **Status of Education**

Around 80% of respondents expressed disappointment over the education sector being neglected, and believe the government should take considerable steps to invest in high-quality educational institutions.

While the male:female ratio is roughly 40%-20%, most schools have very few resources and staff present.

“Education should be the top priority in the area,” according to one of the respondents.

As per another respondent, “More awareness campaigns, particularly among families residing near the border, should be initiated to emphasize the importance of education.”

### **Girls Education and Participation in the Workforce**

The majority of the community on the Pakistan side does not view girls' education as a critical instrument for socio-economic growth. Unfavorable perceptions regarding women empowerment persist, leading to limited access to education and employment opportunities for women.

Inadequate educational facilities are a significant concern, with only two primary schools for girls and a lack of secondary schools in general.

One of the female respondents stated, “Women have no platforms to study or work, all opportunities are given to men.”

## **Cultural and Religious Dynamics**

Pashtuns living on this side of the Torkham border strongly identify with their identity, language, and cultural heritage. The local community upholds strict religious practices, impacting all age groups, including children, women, and elderly.

As per one of the respondents, “Men and women are devout Muslims and strictly adhere to the teachings of Islam.”

The emphasis on religious education is evident as children are sent to madrassas from a young age. This adherence to religiosity and conservatism has consequences, particularly for women, who face significant challenges in education and employment.

According to a Youth Representative, “Religious and cultural constraints imposed on women are impeding sociopolitical and economic prosperity.”

### **Tribal Structure vs Formal Governance; Community Influencers and Agency in Decision-Making**

Tribal leadership plays a dominant role, with the Jirga system effectively settling conflicts over land. Recent disputes between tribes on this side have been minimal.

According to a few tribal elders, “The most effective way to settle disputes is through tribal leadership. It plays an active role in upgrading the socio-economic conditions of the people.”

While the younger generation appears to oppose the age-old custom of tribal structure.

One of the respondents, a student, stated, “In my opinion, the formal governance system is preferable to tribal leadership structures because it has a formal process and allows you get justice through the legal system.”

The border-related conflicts are primarily managed by security agencies, including the army and Frontier Corps (FC). The Torkham Committee, tribal elders, and religious ulema are the most influential community figures in the area.

### **State Services and Challenges**

There is a lack of government schools for girls, with only below-par standard schools available. Additionally, healthcare facilities are limited, and patients often have to travel to other areas for proper treatment.

### **Economy, Trade, and Public Mobility**

Cross-border trade is the primary and often sole source of income for communities on this side. Recent disruptions in trade and security concerns have strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, increasing security risks on both sides of the border.

### **People’s Movement**

Due to border restrictions, the process of clearance is very slow, and there are multiple checkpoints for travelers to pass through. Moreover, many families who used to visit their relatives on a regular basis now have to deal with the burden of always carrying visa documents, which many of them especially the poor struggle to process.

## Disparities in Trade Benefits

Economic dependency on trade has several implications, including the unequal distribution of benefits from trade. Rich and poor community members experience trade differently, with the wealthy taking full advantage.

As per one of the traders, *“It is apparent that there is a benefit imbalance between the wealthy and the poor as the poor are on the ground for daily wage labor while the wealthy sit peacefully and enjoy 90% of the advantages through their investments.”*

## Household Stability and Cross-Border Trade

Around 80% of the respondents believe that any hurdle or closure on the border directly impacts house hold income stability.

As one of the respondents emphasized, *“Continuous flow of trade directly stabilizes the economy of communities on both sides.”*

While another respondent added, *“Cross-border trade has the greatest impact on the border community as our entire livelihood is linked to the border.”*

## Role of Government

According to the majority of respondents, the role of government in fostering trade has been underwhelming.

## Views on Crackdown on Smuggling and Opium Cultivation

Around eighty percent of those interviewed had no knowledge of opium cultivation in Afghanistan. They did, however, applaud the government's recent crackdown on smuggling and implementing strict surveillance measures.

## Political Dynamics; Views on Recent Policy Changes

Recent policy changes, including stringent trade regulations and border restrictions, have impacted daily activities and interactions, affecting economic activities in the region.

## Peace and Security

### Safety Concerns Near the Border

Frequent border conflicts and school closures have created a sense of insecurity, and residents often feel at risk. Ensuring sustainable peace in the area requires prioritizing the education system.

One of the respondents stated, *“There was a security risk a few weeks ago, and a dispute arose between both forces at the border, frightening all the families who resided nearby.”*

### Security Measures and Resolution of Disputes

The Jirga system, involving local tribal elders, plays a crucial role in maintaining internal peace.

One of the respondents emphasized, *“Local elders always assist the security agencies in maintaining a peaceful atmosphere.”*

### **Presence of Radical Factions and Terrorist Outfits**

As per 90% of the respondents, there is no active terrorist group operating on the Pakistan side of the border.

### **Community and Government Efforts**

The Torkham committee and local elders cooperate in maintaining peace via mutual dialogue with the other parties.

## **Community Aspirations**

### **Socio-Political and Economic Development**

The community aspires to address gender disparities and empower women by providing them with more opportunities for education and employment.

*“I hope economic activities gain momentum in the future and are accessible for men and women,”* stated a respondent.

### **Relations Between Border Communities in the Next Five Years**

The community strongly values maintaining cross-border trade, easing visa restrictions, and developing stronger ties between the two countries.

One of the respondents stated, *“I wish to see an amicable and brotherly relationship on both sides, as it will be beneficial for both communities.”*

### **Aspirations for the Future of Men and Women in the Region**

Enhancing economic opportunities, and upgrading public infrastructure (schools, hospitals) to improve the lives of the community.

One of the female respondents stated, *“Men have always played an important role in all of the community’s activities. While due to religious and social constraints, females are not permitted. I hope moving forward women will work side by side with men.”*

## **Recommendations**

1. Improve educational facilities, with a focus on expanding girls' schools and establishing secondary schools in the vicinity.
2. Enhance government investment in education to provide quality education for both girls and boys.



3. Promote women's empowerment through education and employment opportunities, challenging traditional gender roles.
4. Prioritize cross-border trade and dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, including easing visa restrictions to facilitate trade and movement.
5. Invest in public infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and industries, to improve the well-being of local communities and generate more job opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

The gathered insights underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by the communities on both sides of the border. They reveal the stark gender disparities, deeply rooted cultural and religious norms, and economic dependencies that characterize daily life in the region.

Critical issues surrounding education, economic stability, and security persist. The region's stability remains fragile, with frequent border conflicts impacting education and daily life. The data underscores the imperative of prioritizing education as a foundational tool for addressing these challenges, particularly for women and girls, who face significant barriers to access.

Empowering women, fostering gender equality, and enhancing educational opportunities must be central to any development strategy. Investment in public infrastructure and measures to promote cross-border trade can lead to economic growth and improved well-being for the communities.

Moreover, initiatives aimed at easing border restrictions, strengthening cross-border cooperation, and fostering dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan are pivotal to achieving sustainable peace and prosperity in the region. It is evident that addressing the complex interplay of cultural norms, tribal structures, and economic dependencies is crucial for crafting effective policies to uplift the border communities and create a more promising future. Ultimately, the well-being of these communities is intrinsically tied to the efforts of governments and international organizations to promote socio-economic development, gender equality, and educational reform, while ensuring peace and security.

# ANNEXURE I

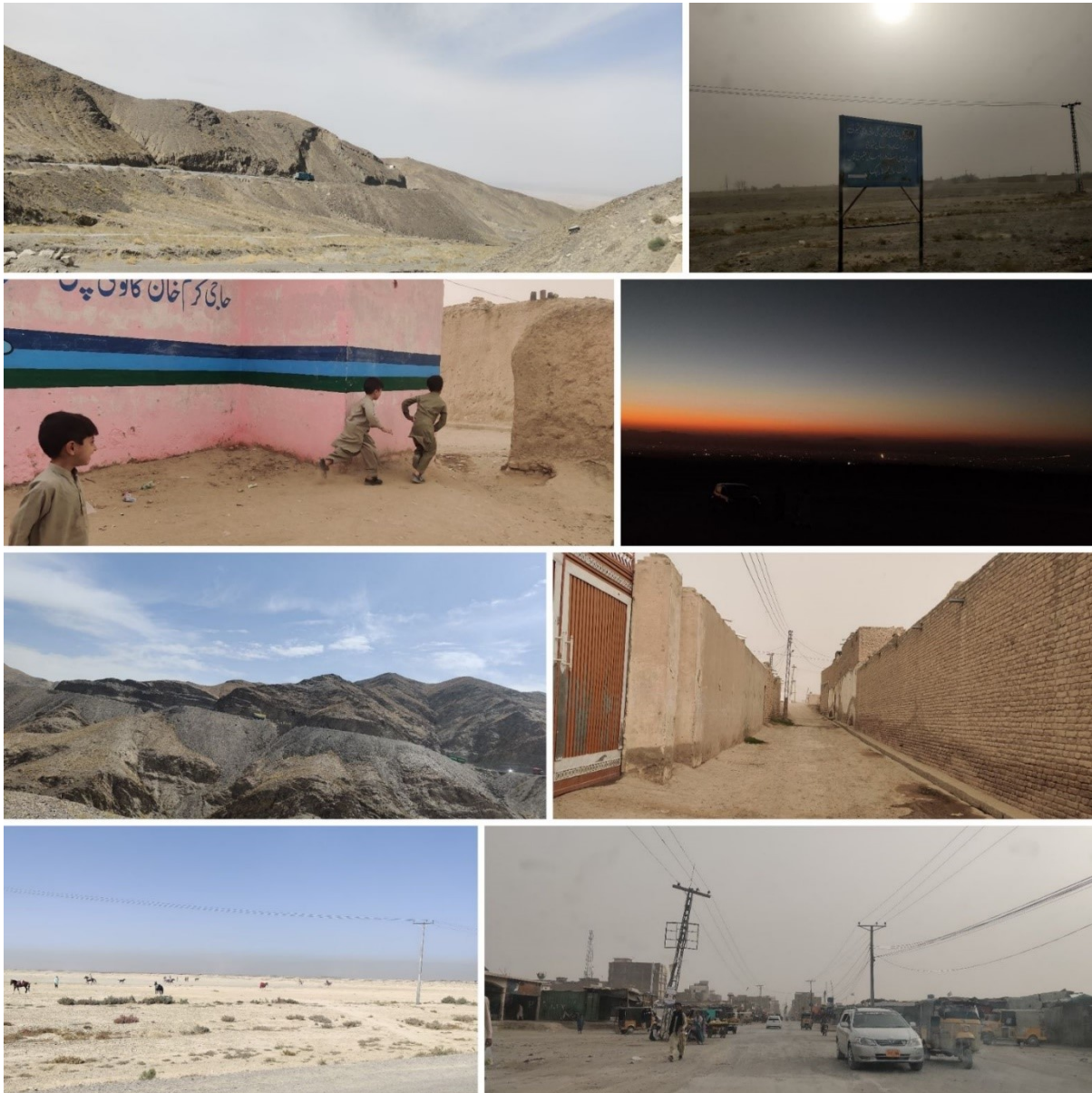
## Pictures - Torkham



**Pictures - Jalalabad**



## Pictures - Chaman



*Note: The field researcher in the Spin Boldak region could not take pictures due to security reasons and local sensitivities.*

# ANNEXURE II

## Research Questionnaire

### General Questions/ Community Life

- Can you describe a regular day in your community? How is it different for youth/women in the area?
- Can you briefly describe the relationship between the communities across the border? Has the life/ relationship been affected after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan? If yes, can you explain what exactly has changed?
- Broadly speaking, what can be done to improve:
  - i) Lives of the communities at the border regions?
  - ii) Relations between the communities at the border regions?

### Cultural and Religious Aspects

- It is believed that religious and cultural practices are common on both sides of the border. Do you agree with this? If yes, can you share a few examples of commonalities of culture?
- Can you briefly describe the local approach towards religion and culture? Is it moderate or hardline? How do the local religious and cultural practices affect the community, especially youth and women? Please give examples
- Are they causing any hurdles in establishing peace or are hindering growth in the areas? (e.g. women's exclusion)?

### Power Dynamics, Disputes, and Challenges

- How do you find the tribal leadership structure in your community? Are these structures inclusive? How do you compare them with the formal governance systems, in terms of communal support and service delivery?
- Are there any disputes between tribes on both sides? What is the nature of these disputes?
- Does your community/tribe feel represented in the setup across the border? [to probe inter-tribal dynamics]
- What about community influencers? What sort of decision-making are they involved in? (agency of tribal leaders, religious scholars, academicians, local authorities, police, govt reps, members of border committees, etc.)
- Which out of these is the most revered group and why?

- Are there any other community influencers? Local civil society organizations?

### **Economy and Trade**

- What are the challenges or barriers in the cross-border trade? How do border closures affect border communities?
- For a good number of people living at the border region, cross-border trade is a direct source of income, can you elaborate on how the ebbs and flows of this trade impact household stability, especially for those heavily reliant on wage labor tied to trade?
- Reports suggest a disparity in benefits from cross-border trade between the wealthy and the poor. Can you provide more insights into this?
- Are there any measures or local initiatives aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of trade benefits?
- What is the role of government agencies in regulating or promoting cross-border and local trade? Are they supportive? (Any examples of best practices and malpractices)
- How do you look at the recent crackdown on smuggling? How do you look at the reports of cuts in opium cultivation in Afghanistan?
- How do the ties between the cross-border communities/ tribes influence the economic activities in the region?
- What is the role of women in the cross-border trade/ local trade?

### **Peace and Security**

- How safe do you feel living so close to the border? Do you have any security concerns at the moment? Have there been any skirmishes/attacks along the border? How was that resolved?
- Are there any measures that you believe should be taken to improve security?
- How would you describe or look at the presence of radical factions, and terrorist outfits in the area? What insecurities/issues are caused by their presence? How do you perceive authorities' response in tackling them?
- Aside from government agencies, who else in this community is acting/ can act to prevent insecurity, and promote peace? How do/can they do it?
- How do the ties between the cross-border communities/ tribes influence peace, and security cooperation in the region?
- How does peace and security affect education in your area?

## **Future Aspirations**

- What are your aspirations about the socio-political and economic development of border communities?
- What changes or improvements would you like to see in terms of cross-border relations in the next five years?
- How do you envision cooperation between communities on both sides of the border in the coming months and years? How do you think it will impact the life and livelihood of the bordering communities?

## **Gender**

- Can you describe the traditional roles of men and women in your community, and have you noticed any shifts or changes in these roles over recent years?
- Are there any opportunities or platforms for women in your community to voice their concerns or participate in decision-making processes? How do they compare to those available for men?
- What are the impediments in the way of socio-political and economic participation of women?
- How do cultural or religious beliefs in your community shape gender roles?
- What are local attitudes towards the socio-economic and educational empowerment of girls and women?
- What aspirations or hopes do you have for the future of men and women in your region?

## **State Services - Education | Health**

- Do you think there are sufficient state services along the border, and across the border? [example: health, education]
- What is the status of education in your area? If the respondent describes it as unsatisfactory, ask how he/she would like to see it change.
- What is the male and female ratio? Your views on girls' education? Challenges to it?
- Have Afghans crossed into Pakistan for schooling? What's the scale, and level compared with the past?
- Have Afghans crossed into Pakistan for medical services? What's the scale, and level compared with the past?
- What is the role of education in the border communities as a protection against extremist influence and cross-border terrorism?



## Recent Policy Developments

- How do you think the recent policy change in Pakistan, where Afghans are now required to enter with a valid passport and visa, will impact the daily lives and interactions of people from the border regions on both sides, especially those with divided tribes and related to each other?
- How might this affect their cross-border activities such as trade and personnel who have to travel often for business purposes?
- How will the regulation of the movement of people impact law and order?

# ANNEXURE III

## RESEARCHERS PROFILE



Muhammad Ayaz belongs to Chaman, Pakistan. He has worked with renowned organizations like RIZ Consulting, Islamic Relief, and Chip Training and Consultancy. Currently, he spearheads the implementation of the Geographic Coverage Support System for polio eradication. His diverse experience includes freelancing for the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), showcasing his adaptability and research skills. Ayaz's contributions have earned him appreciation awards from UNICEF and WHO, highlighting his impactful presence in the field. He has over a decade-long experience of field research on themes such as education, health, socioeconomic issues, etc.



Shah Faisal Shinwari, hailing from Torkham, is an accomplished professional with expertise in monitoring, evaluation, and research skills. Holding M.A. degrees in Journalism and Mass Communication, Political Science, and Islamyat, he has a diverse educational background. Faisal has excelled in roles such as District Coordinator for Contech International, where he led the District Covid-19 Vaccination Activity, and Torkham Border Polio Supervisor for the District Health Department. His rich experience also includes roles as an Enumerator for Human Development and Welfare Organization and District Field Monitor for PAIMAN Alumni Trust's UNWFP-funded project.



Mirwais Khan, a dedicated researcher, writer, and intersectional artist hailing from Ziarat, Balochistan, holds a Master's degree in International Relations, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Sociology from the University of Baluchistan. Passionate about shedding light on the issues faced by marginalized and unheard communities through research and art, he strives to amplify the voices of those often overlooked, working towards inclusivity and social justice. His research interests align with these goals, and he has been actively working with refugees for the last 5 years.



Our fourth researcher is a native of Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. Due to security concerns, he has requested anonymity. He has a Master's in International Relations. With a background in program coordination and social inclusion, Khan has effectively contributed to projects promoting education, employable skills, and gender equality. He has experience with organizations like UNDP and holds certifications in B-SAFE, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), and Harassment Prevention. He is dedicated to fostering positive change and has a strong network with professionals in the international development sector as well as key tribal figures in the Nangarhar region.



# The Center

## CRSS Background

The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) is a think tank/advocacy center launched in September, 2007. Founded by noted security expert and media personality Imtiaz Gul, it is committed to the cause of independent research, nonpartisan analysis, and informed advocacy.

As an advocacy center, CRSS is dedicated to trigger critical thinking through discourse anchored in global democratic values such as socio-political diversity, rule of law, equal citizenry, and acceptance of diversity, fundamental human rights, all at the intersection of empirical research in security studies.

## Core Values

CRSS strives to embed the national conversation in constitutionalism, and rationalize it over extremism and sectarianism. CRSS believes the path to peace is through embodying fundamental human rights, specifically:

- strict adherence to the rule of law, and stringent implementation
- informing the public on civic education, especially good governance and public accountability
- promoting equal rights for all citizens of Pakistan
- championing women empowerment
- providing training and opportunities to youth to veer them away from radicalization through critical thinking

CRSS' programming reflects its core values, which CRSS believes can, along with time-tested methodologies in strategic communications, impactful message development, research and advocacy result in a more tolerant and cohesive Pakistan.

### **Center For Research & Security Studies**

14-M, Ali Plaza, Second Floor, F-8 Markaz, Islamabad

Tel: +92-51-831-4801-03 | Fax: +92-51-831-4804

E-mail: [info@crss.pk](mailto:info@crss.pk), web: [www.crss.pk](http://www.crss.pk)