



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women

**MONITORING OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA LOCAL
BODIES ELECTIONS PHASE II - MARCH 31 2022
FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
BY
KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women (KPCSW) is a statutory advisory body established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act XIX of 2009 and reconstituted in 2016 under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Act XXVIII of 2016. KPCSW is the first ever provincial level Commission in the country established with the mandate to oversee the implementation of laws, policies, and programs for women and propose new measures where gaps exist.

LOCAL BODIES ELECTIONS 2022 PHASE II

The second phase of the local bodies elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was implemented by the Election Commission of Pakistan on March 31, 2022 in the districts of Abbottabad, Mansehra, Battagram, Torghar, Upper and Lower Kohistan, Kolai-Palas, Swat, Malakand, Shangla, Lower & Upper Dir, Upper and Lower Chitral and Kurram, Orakzai, and North and South Waziristan Tribal Districts.

ELECTIONS MONITORING by KPCSW

Monitoring of processes and institutions to ensure protection of rights of women in the province being one of the prime statutory functions of KPCSW, monitoring of elections for women's participation was planned and performed by the Commission on and before the Elections day. Following key measures were taken in this respect:

1. Preparation of Charter of Demands and Meeting with Chief Election Commission of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Office

In preparation for the elections monitoring exercise, a delegation from the Commission called on the Chief Election Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 22 March, 2022 to present a Charter of Demands emphasizing exhaustive measures by the Election Commission Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for ensuring smooth participation of women in the local government elections. The delegation was headed by the Chairperson KPCSW, Dr. Riffat Sardar and comprised Commission Members Ms. Nasreen Khattak (former MPA and Member of KPCSW), Professor Dr. Syeda Kaniz Fatima Haider and staff including the Director Program, KPCSW and the Commission's Communication and Gender Officer. Chief ECP for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the concerned team apprised the Commission's delegation on the arrangements that had been made for facilitation of women for the Elections.



2. Establishment of Election Monitoring Cell in KPCSW Office

In keeping with the past practices, KPCSW also set up an election monitoring cell for the polling day for any complaints received from the field related to challenges and barriers faced by women in the polling process. Under the direct supervision of Director Program and the overall guidance of Chairperson KPCSW, the Election Cell operated from 09:00 to 06:00 PM on the day of polling and proactively remained engaged in the identification of issues on the field level, welcoming calls from communities and directly contacting the District Election Commission offices to learn about the issues and to follow up on complaints reported for women during vote polls. The support was provided by CSO partners Blue Veins for managing the Cell and by Aurat Foundation for compilation of findings for the report.

The awareness material for the Election Cell supported by Women's Empowerment and Political Participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (WEPP-KP) Cowater International was prepared and distributed among the District Committees on the Status of Women (DCSWs) before the elections. The DCSWs prominently displayed the material carrying numbers of the complaint cell on visible public places for reporting any issues and challenges faced by women during polling.

The Complaint Cell received only two reports, each from Govt. Higher Secondary School No. 18, Skhakot about non-provision of a lady constable and related discipline issues and the second one from Tehsil Sarki in district Malakand about the absence of female Presiding Officer, causing disruption in the smooth conduct of the polling process. The complaints were taken up with the District Election Commissioner Office in Malakand in a timely manner for redress.



3. Field Level Monitoring

A group of select Members and staff of the Commission undertook visits to the selected districts to first hand observe the polling stations in the province (Annex I List of Polling Stations visited). A brief account of findings is presented as follows:

- a. **Orakzai District:** KPCSW Members, the former MPA, Ms. Nasreen Khattak & Prof. Dr. Kaniz Fatima and Mr. Noor Muhammad, Finance Officer KPCSW formed a delegation and visited selected polling stations in Orakzai and Kohat districts (in Kohat polling stations were

established for the internally displaced communities from Orakzai tribal district) to observe the overall socio-administrative environment of polling stations. It may be noted that this was the very first time that the Commission officially visited any large scale public activity in any newly merged areas. Thus it was a historic intervention implementing the legislative mandate of the Commission for the protection of rights of women in the newly merged areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The delegation returned with critical observations, a brief summary of which is stated as follows:

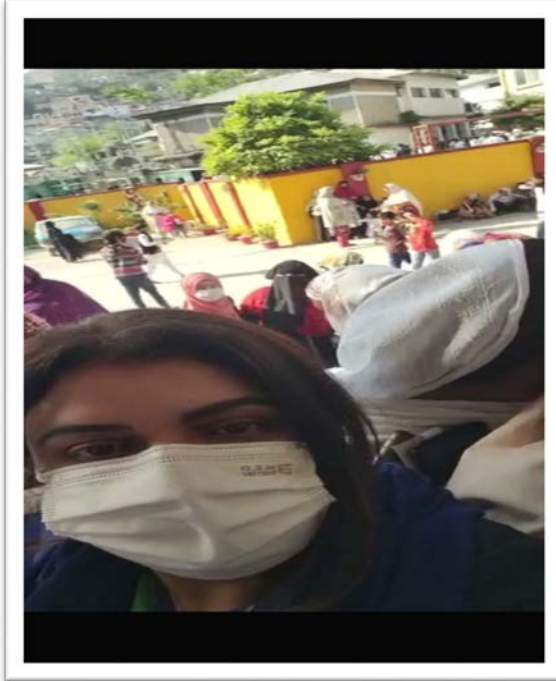
- i. It was encouraging to note that the Polling Stations were set up in spacious buildings with large verandas with seating arrangement and tent partitions for men and women visitors (where the Polling Stations were combined) to wait and all the female polling staff was present.
- ii. The two polling stations visited in Orakzai tribal district were combined and lodged in one building for men and women with a partition. The Polling Station had a male Presiding Officer. Upon arrival of the Commission's team, party workers and supporters of a political party complained to them about interference by the Polling Staff. Their complaints were verified when the KPCSW's monitoring delegation went inside the premises of the Polling Station and found men not only present in the female side of the polling station but also interfering by going with women voters to the polling booth and influencing their choice. The violation was strictly raised with the notice of Presiding Officer and the practice was stopped on the spot.
- iii. The female voters complained that they had received no training on the procedure of casting votes and the practice observed itself indicated great need for training of the women on the procedure of casting vote.
- iv. The men and women Polling Staff at the GGMS Kamal Khel Polling Station which was also combined, were found vigilant and observing all the codal formalities. This Polling Station was comparatively more streamlined and the facilitation was up to the mark and had all facilities including electricity and drinking water arrangements. The Presiding Officer at this Ms. Farida Parveen especially was observed performing her duties commendably and honestly.
- v. In Kohat the delegation visited a combined Polling Station set up in the Working Folks Grammar School & College, Kohat for displaced persons of Orakzai. The Polling Station had great facilities with full range of security staff present to ensure safety. The Assistant Commissioner Kohat present at the Polling Station provided the team with a detailed analysis. The official said that 80 percent of the day went by peacefully except for minor altercations between the candidates of contesting parties. All in all it was a smooth sailing at this Polling Station however at the time of departure, the team witnessed that two opposite political parties created a great ruckus, which was pacified thanks to personal intervention by one of the Commission members.
- vi. In Kurram tribal district, the Commission's delegation engaged the Chairperson, DCSW Kurram to monitor the Polling Stations there. No complaints or issues were reported from the monitoring in Kurram tribal district.



- b. **Swat and Dir Lower:** Ms. Huma Rehman, Member KPCW and a Development practitioner, visited polling stations in district Swat and Dir Lower and reported the following findings:
- i. Polling booths were found arranged in a confusing pattern, for example, many of the booths were lodged in a single block, making it difficult for voters to identify the right booth which led to making the voting procedure lacking in organization and clarity.
 - ii. In Dir Lower Polling Station Shah Alam Bab in Lower Dir, the female polling staff wrapped up and left the stations earlier than the finishing time, likely affecting the vital stage of vote counting, signing, and sealing of the election results envelope and proper handover.
 - iii. In terms of disability consideration, the old and the disabled were observed not receiving due treatment and it was observed that they experienced great inconvenience while attempting to cast their votes.
 - iv. Many polling stations were too small and lacked adequate seating for observers, staff, and party agents. Moreover, voter secrecy was not always ensured, mainly because polling booths were sometimes positioned incorrectly. For example, booths were placed in front of windows or open to public view. Some of the polling stations were overcrowded, and several were mixed.
 - v. In swat and Lower Dir after observing 6 polling stations total 12 women participated as contesters, according to polling station officer in comparison to previous elections, women participation during this election had increased prominently in Swat and Dir Lower.



- c. **Abbottabad:** Advocate Shabnam Nawaz, the Commission Member from Hazara division, covered Polling Stations in district Abbottabad and reported the following key findings:
- i. Majority of women voters in the PSs visited said they were dissatisfied with the arrangement. Some of the key reasons of dissatisfaction among women voters reported directly by women themselves were harsh conduct of polling staff (which was due also to the non-cooperation on the part of the women voters themselves), long distances or lack of transportation facilities to reach the polling stations, discipline issues at the Polling Station related to maintaining queue etc.
 - ii. Where there were pregnant women voters, no special arrangements and treatment was observed to facilitate those (Polling Station GGPS 337). Moreover there was no lady constable or searcher for women which caused ruckus and women pushed each other at the back of the line. Overall this Polling Station lacked safe access due to lack of good road.
 - iii. At the Malikpura and Lora Polling Stations women voters complained of being pressurized into voting for opposite party (PML-N) which made them uncomfortable.
 - iv. Facilities of drinking water, electricity, toilets etc. were noted missing in GGHSS Jhangi. The PS had a difficult access.
 - v. Seating arrangement was one key missing facility noticed across majority of polling stations observed.
 - vi. In one of the Tehsil Lora Polling Station, male Police Constable was found to be constantly convincing women to case vote in favor of a certain party.
 - vii. Overall at the Polling Stations visited in Abbottabad, the need for lady constables was greatly felt.



- d. **Malakand and Dir Lower:** The Admin Officer KPCSW, reported the following findings from his visits to Malakand and Dir Lower Polling Stations:
- i. In GGPS Sarki Bala in Malakand, political parties were providing pick and drop to voters. Due to lack of polling staff i.e. Assistant Presiding Officer, slow polling was observed. Lack of training of Polling Staff in conducting the procedure and lack of ramps for the disabled were also observed along with discipline issues because there was no security staff to manage the crowds. The strairs to the upper portion were steep and dangerous for visitors including for the elderly and pregnant women. The same issues were reported in the GGHS Poling Station.
 - ii. In Polling Station FG College Batkhela women voters faced issues with the procedure of casting vote and guidance was lacking as women also faced attitude issues from the polling staff. Also there was no lady constable in the polling station.
 - iii. In all other Polling Stations observed the issues related to lack of female security staff came up repeatedly.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following key recommendations are made in the light of the findings above:

1. Deployment of female security staff i.e. lady police needs to be ensured in the next elections.
2. Election Commission may consider reviewing the plan and lay out of Polling Stations especially taking into account the hard rocky and mountainous areas of the province to address challenges relate to access.
3. There is a dire and immediate need for training women voters on the procedure of casting vote as this was identified as a critical challenge repeatedly during observation of the polling process. Election Commission and KPCSW should upscale efforts for voters' education and registration to prepare better for next election.
4. The Polling Staff including Presiding Officer need exhaustive training on the procedure of conducting elections in general as well as in managing people and crowds calmly.
5. No special treatment or enforcement of provisions for facilitating older and pregnant women was observed in the conduct of the Polling Staff which needs to be ensured for the next elections. Separate Polling Booths/rooms for old age citizens and vulnerable groups should be ensured. Where this is not possible due to resource constraints, election staff should be provided adequate training on special protocols for dealing with these groups within existing resources.
6. For ECP, all the factors listed in the challenges above causing slow casting of votes need to be considered for redress and the demands presented in the Charter of Demands of KPCSW are recommended to be implemented in letter and spirit.
7. For KPCSW, it was the first ever exercise in merged areas and brought forth the need to have in place proper plan and logistic and security arrangements for the visiting delegations. Terrain in some of the areas visited was rocky and distance between Polling Stations was huge which made access and coverage of polling stations harder in limited time for external observers. Adequate orientation and planning should be arranged for monitors to prepare better.

CONCLUSION

Overall the monitoring exercise brought forth administrative issues such as lack of missing facilities of drinking water and electricity etc. It was also noticed that the deployment of lady Police Constables in general especially in district Abbottabad would have helped with issues of discipline. It was very encouraging to note that no threats, announcements or practice of barring women from voting came to the observation or was reported to the Election Cell of KPCSW which is a matter of positive improvement in community behavior towards women's right to franchise. Higher participation of women contestants especially on the quota compared to previous elections was reported which is another positive development and shall go a long way in empowering women.

All in all the exercise was conducted smoothly and without any major commotions for which the efforts and stakeholders engagement by the Election Commission of Pakistan are highly commended.

Annexure I - List of Polling Stations Visited

S. No	District	Polling Station	Type of Polling Station
1	Orakzai	GMS Kasha	Combined
		GPS Ibrahimio	Combined
		Working Folks Grammar School & College, Kohat	Combined
2	Kurram	Govt. Degree College No. 1 PS 15	-
3	Malakand	FG School Malakand, Batkhela	-
		GGHS VC -18	Combined
		GGHS UC-18	Combined
		FG College Batkhela	Combined
		FG College, VC Marizara, Batkhela	Combined
		GHS No. II, Sakhakot (VC-13)	Combined
		GPPS VC-18 Sirkay Bala,	
4	Dir Lower	GGMD Warsak, Gulabad	Separate for women
		GGPS, Shehsada No. 1	Separate for women
		VC Ziarat Talash	Separate for women
5	Abbottabad	459 GHS No. 4	Separate for women
		480 GGMS No. 1 (UC)	Combined
		GGPS 337	Separate for women
		GPS Jhangi Syedan	Combined
		GGHS Jhangi VC 3	Separate for women
		450 Revenue Office Tehsil Building Upper Malikpura	Combined
		Abdul Qayyum Girls Degree College Malikpura	Combined
		GGHSS Lora	Combined
		GGCMS Lora	Combined
		GHS Sherwan	Combined

Annexure II - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Bodies Election Phase 2, District Swat and Lower Dir Monitoring Visits - 31st March, 2022



INTRODUCTION:

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women is a statutory advisory body established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act XIX of 2009. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly was amended under the new Act XXVIII of 2016. The Commission in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the first ever Provincial Level Commission in the country, established with functions to oversee the implementation of laws, policies, and programs related to women and propose new measures where gaps exist. The Commission organized a monitoring visit in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to monitor women's participation in the Local body election, 2022 phase 2 in Khaybar Pakhtunkhwa.

OBJECTIVE:

Women are catalysts for change, and core women's organizations need respect, recognition, and resources to bring about this change. Khyber Pakhtun Khwa Commission's mandate is to support women's participation in democratic processes and promote the vision of a gender-balanced society so that women can hold key decision-making positions and acquire leadership expertise.

SUMMARY:

A gender-sensitive approach to monitoring elections is critical because it raises the awareness that even if political and legal mechanisms for equal rights for women are in place, there is no guarantee of women's equal access and full participation in democratic processes. Consequently, women's political participation remains lower than their male counterparts. Various issues and challenges restrict the advancement and empowerment of women in Pakistan. The Pakistani elections appeared democratic and were free and fair; however, they were not without some shortcomings. The member of Khyber Pakhtun Khaw Commission Huma Khan, during Monitoring Mission in local body election phase 2, came up with the following findings

OBSERVATIONS.

- **Infrastructure:** Polling booths were arranged in a confusing pattern. For example, many of the booths were lodged in one block, making it difficult for voters to identify the right booth. In short, the voting procedure lacked proper organization.
- **Gender Concerns:** Attention to gender issues turned out to be necessary, as many women were denied their right to vote (disfranchised) in polling station Shah Alam Bab in Lower Dir and female polling staff left stations earlier than their men counterparts, hence making it impossible for them to witness the vital aspect of the voting process: the vote counting, signing, and sealing of the election result envelope and proper handover.
- **Disability consideration:** The old and the disabled were not given due respect in voting arrangements. They experienced much struggle and inconvenience while attempting to cast their votes.
- Many polling stations were too small and lacked adequate seating for observers, staff, and party agents. Moreover, voter secrecy was not always ensured, mainly because polling booths were sometimes positioned incorrectly. For example, booths were placed in front of

windows or open to public view. Some polling stations were overcrowded, and several mixed stations were operated in one room, leading to chaotic conditions and culturally inappropriate situations for women.

- **Positive change:** In swat and lower dher after observing 6 polling stations total 12 women participated as contesters, according to polling station officer in comparison to previous election women participation in this election has increased prominently In swat and lower dher districts.

Recommendations for the Election Commission of Pakistan:

1. Ensure a balance of women and men at all levels of decision-making in ECP.
2. Build the capacity of women in the ECP and appoint a gender officer within the ECP to address and improve women's participation.
3. Deploy capable and adequate polling station staffing. Increase the number of polling staff. Provide sensitization training to all the polling staff and conduct a series of workshops on gender and the importance of women in the electoral process.
4. Declare elections null and void in constituencies where women are barred from voting. Conduct automatic repolling in polling stations where the women's voter turnout is less than 10%.
5. Evaluate and improve present verification procedures of voter identification documents to guard against fraud at polling stations. Update and implement photo ID requirements for all voters.
6. Ensure effective methods of collecting gender-disaggregated electoral data, and publish transparent and gender-disaggregated results to the public from each polling station, including Form XIV.
7. Guard against discriminatory attitudes in media, polling station officials, and parties.
8. Ensure the provision of well-equipped polling stations with competent staff, adequate facilities, and all basic needs for women before voting day. Required materials should be delivered to polling stations before election day.
9. Provide separate female and male polling stations in needed areas.

