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northwest Pakistan's rural development sector**

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**A FEMALE . . . WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE HERE”:
GENDERED LABOUR MARKETS IN NORTHWEST
PAKISTAN’S RURAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR**

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ABSTRACT

While Pakistan has legally binding mechanisms to promote gender equality in employment, labour markets are shaped by the highly gender-segregated society they are embedded in. Based on the conceptualisation of labour markets as gendered institutions, I explore how gender generates unequal access to the labour market for social organisers—a term referring to a type of development practitioner—in the Hazara region, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan, making it difficult for women to participate in an occupational field where they are urgently needed to work with village women. Drawing on a comparison of job announcements and employees’ profiles, I argue that social norms generate gendered inequalities of access to jobs as social organisers by regulating access to information, ability to travel, and eligibility for employment. In this article, I contribute to a better understanding of the gendered nature of this specific labour market, the impediments to gender equality in employment, and the need for an improvement in the work contexts of the female labour force in rural Pakistan in order to make it possible for women to do the job.

**INTRODUCTION:
LABOUR MARKETS AS GENDERED INSTITUTIONS**

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including those labour rights stating that everyone has the right to just and favourable conditions of work (United Nations, 1947). Pakistan adopted the

declaration in the same year, and also signed the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which urges signatories, for example, to ensure equality at work, stating that “all individuals should be accorded equal opportunities to develop fully the knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant to the economic activities they wish to pursue” (ILO, 1998). Pakistan included several labour rights in its Constitution, providing a legal framework for the elimination of discrimination in employment:

The State shall: (e) make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensuring that children and *women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex*, and for maternity benefits for women in employment. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Article 37: Promotion of social justice and eradication of social evils; italics added)

Yet we also see that the Constitution itself, like other legislation at the national level (Ali & Knox, 2008), provides a space for normative regulation of the labour force based on sex (see italicized text in quotation from the Constitution). This approach, which is based on the assumption that there are essential differences between men and women, stands in sharp contrast to the equality approach propagated by the UN and the ILO, an approach that considers men and women as equal human beings. It is thus highly likely that women workers and employers will experience tensions when these contrasting approaches to gender meet.

Previous academic research on labour markets shows that people are not simply hired based on their skills, but that they are also hired based on social norms. Social norms have been powerful mechanisms for generating unequal access for, for example, disabled, foreign, and women workers to jobs independent of their skills (Acker, 1990; ADB & ILO, 2006; Ali & Knox, 2008; Bauder, 2001; Brah, 2001; Gottfried, 2009; ILO, 2010; Roos, 2008; Streeck, 2005; Syed, 2008). Feminist scholars such as Diane Elson (1999), Barbara Harriss-White (1998), and Carla Freeman (2001) have highlighted the fact that labour markets are gendered institutions in that they are shaped by locally embedded gender norms and stereotypes. Based on these insights, feminist studies conclude that any market structure is likely to have different implications for women than for men. Women’s employment patterns, for example, are to a major degree dependent on women’s position within the family, which defines what kind of jobs they take, how many hours they work, and in which places they work. Considering this, Elson conceptualises labour markets as institutions that are “bearers of gender,” meaning that not only do the individual’s prejudices against women’s employment play a role, but so also do the social stereotypes inscribed in labour markets. Social stereotypes, for example, associate “masculinity with having authority over others in the work place (being the ‘boss’)” and define “what ‘man’s work’ and ‘woman’s work’” is (Elson, 1999: 611). I use Elson’s concept as a framework because it offers an alternative perspective on labour markets by

giving emphasis to the formal and informal gender norms and practices that are at work in labour markets.

While the relationship between women and employment in Pakistan has attracted some scientific attention, there is only a limited engagement with gender aspects of labour markets, and only a few accounts are based on qualitative approaches. In quantitative studies, researchers probe the impacts of different factors on women's participation in the employment sector: Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002), Gondal (2003), and Sultana, Nazli, and Malik (1994) draw on data from the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey. Azid, Khan, and Alamasi (2010), Faridi, Chaudhry, and Anwar (2009), Arifeen (2008), Ahmed and Hafeez (2007), and Hamid (1991) use their own empirical data collected in different districts and cities in the province of Punjab. While it turns out that income, education, age, and marital status are major determinants of female labour participation, these authors do not explain how and where gender relations play a role in the labour market and how they shape women's workplace contexts. It is thus essential to look at these issues in more detail.

This article analyses Pakistan's labour market with regard to professional rural social organisers. In using the term "social organisers," I refer to those development practitioners who are involved in "social organisation," also called "community mobilisation," but not in the management of a development organisation. Social organisation and community mobilisation in a general sense mean that these workers are responsible for creating of community organisations in villages, registering these organisations with a development project, (usually) opening a bank account for them, and visiting villagers from time to time in order to forward information from the villagers to higher project staff and vice versa.

Social organisers constitute a social category that entails a multitude of intersections in their full complexities: social organisers represent categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, age, progress, and many more. Yet, in a "reality of multiple identities" (Geiser & Steimann, 2004: 445), gender is one of the most challenging identities that female social organisers have to juggle in their everyday practice. Besides gender, class plays another crucial role in the interface between villagers and social organisers. However, the aim of this article is to look at gender aspects, and thus, the intersections of gender, class, and other identities are not analysed in detail.

Analysing the occupational field of social organisation is interesting insofar as women-only positions demand women employees specifically and positions for social organisers are usually announced as entry-level positions. They offer young adults the possibility of accessing the labour market and having their first experiences in employment. Unless people, above all women, have motivating first experiences, they will be unlikely to remain in the labour market. Social organisers' jobs, however, imply that employees are willing and able to align gender order to job-specific activities, which is regarded as highly demanding

(Ahmad, 2002, 2007; Goetz, 1997; Jackson, 1997). Further, female social organisers are important in working together with village women who are unwilling to discuss their problems with male social organisers. Observing the challenges and opportunities encountered in this occupational field allows us to draw conclusions about the gendered nature of the labour market and to formulate recommendations that support women in remaining active in the workforce. However, I do not discuss how gendered inequalities in access to the job are created because of men's and women's unequal pre-market capital endowment, in terms, for example, of academic degrees and social networks.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. First, I outline the context of gender and employment in Pakistan in general. Second, I explain how social organisation became an occupational field in rural Northwest Pakistan and briefly outline the geographical location in which the study takes place. Third comes an overview of my methodological approaches. Fourth, I delineate the formal requirements for social organisers and the characteristics of the occupational field by examining job announcements. Fifth, based on this examination, I outline aspects of social organisers' profiles in rural Northwest Pakistan. Sixth, I discuss the role of gender by pointing out aspects that hinder or enable people, especially women, in fulfilling job requirements. In the last section, I highlight the key messages of the article and draw a conclusion, including some recommendations.

GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT IN PAKISTAN

Gender plays a crucial role in Pakistan's labour markets, which is not surprising, since labour markets reflect certain characteristics of the larger society. Studies of women and work in Muslim contexts (Khan, 2007; Mirza, 2002; Papanek, 1971; Syed, 2010) stress the importance of *purdah*: the institution of *purdah* is a way of dealing with gender order at a societal level by separating the sexes. It is related to Islamic values and designates a broad set of behaviour patterns rather than a fixed set of rules (Mirza, 2002). While in Pakistan *purdah* has always played a crucial role in the organisation of everyday life (Akram-Lodhi, 1996; Besio, 2006; Fafchamps & Quisumbing, 1999; Siegmann & Sadaf, 2006; Sultana et al., 1994), gender norms have had supportive as well as restrictive consequences for women's participation in the labour market (Cook, 2001; Haeri, 2002; Mirza, 1999, 2002; Papanek, 1971; Weiss, 1984). When, for example, in the years after 1977 under military ruler Zia ul Haq, the concept of gender segregation was strengthened and formalised in several laws, female employees were needed in specific occupations such as medicine or education—even in rural areas—in order to maintain this strict gender segregation. Additionally, new areas for women's employment, such as factory work and office work, have emerged during the last decades. Yet *purdah* has also made it impossible or difficult for many Pakistani women to take up formal

employment (Government of Pakistan, 2009a; Zia, 1998), for example, because women are expected not to interact with men in offices, shops, and buses. In a recent newspaper article and a related documentary for the *New York Times*, Adam B. Ellick (2010a, 2010b) portrays young lower-middle-class women and the challenges they face if they want to take up formal employment in the service sector in urban Pakistan.

Even though in Pakistan the proportion of women in the labour force has increased during the last decades, the labour force participation rate of Pakistani women was still only 21.8% compared with 82.4% of men in the year 2008 (Government of Pakistan, 2009a). The report is based on data from the Pakistan Labour Force Survey (Government of Pakistan, 2009b). The gender gap in labour force participation (for people aged 15+) is larger in urban than in rural Pakistan since limited job opportunities are available for women outside the agricultural sector (Government of Pakistan, 2009a): 28.3% of the female and 84.5% of the male population are currently economically active in rural areas compared with 9.7% and 78.7% in urban areas. In the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, the gender gap in labour force participation is comparable with the national average for people aged 10 years and above (Government of Pakistan, 2009b).

SOCIAL ORGANISATION AS AN OCCUPATIONAL FIELD IN RURAL PAKISTAN

Social organisation (also called community organisation or social mobilisation) as a formal occupation emerged in Pakistan in the 1980s. The rationale behind this new form of activism was at least twofold. First, parts of society were eager to bring change to Pakistan. As in the community organising approach developed by Saul Alinsky for urban neighbourhoods in the United States (and practiced among many others by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama [Obama, 1990]), one rationale was to empower marginalised individuals (e.g., women) and rural communities by organising them as groups of citizens that are able to change the discriminating structures affecting their everyday life (Gittell & Vidal, 1999). Second, previous state-led rural development in Pakistan had focused merely on technical interventions so far and was not likely to succeed in the future without social change on the ground, that is, in villages or communities. In Pakistan, Shoaib Sultan Khan and Akhter Hameed Khan, leaders of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and the Orangi Pilot Project, were two of the earliest and most important promoters and pioneers of social organisation and helped to transform Pakistan's approach to rural development fundamentally (Jan & Jan, 2000; Rasmussen et al., 2007). An increasing number of social organisers have been hired as mediators between projects and local society. International donors' development agendas have further consolidated the occupational field of social organisation. With their discourses of participatory, community-driven,

and sustainable development, international donors have pressurised people who formulated development policies and projects to include social aspects and focus on local people in their proposals (Oakley, 1991; Rauch, 2009). The two rationales are still relevant in Pakistan's occupational field of social organisation today.

In order to discuss the labour market for rural social organisers as a gendered institution, I draw on examples from the Hazara region. The Hazara region is located in the eastern part of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), formerly known as the North West Frontier Province. Until 2000, Hazara Division was the name of an administrative unit; now, Hazara is no longer used in official language but is retained in colloquial language. Hazara refers to the districts of Abbottabad, Battagram, Haripur, Kohistan, and Mansehra. The region is characterised by mountainous terrain and small landholdings of less than a hectare, and it is famous for its mix of Hindko-, Pashto-, Gujjari-, and Kohistani-speaking inhabitants and the diverse ethnic backgrounds of its residents. A major source of income for the people of Hazara is agriculture. Other income sources are remittances, some small-scale industries, and government jobs. Due to a devastating earthquake that occurred in Azad Kashmir and Hazara in 2005, the number of development organisations in the area increased significantly, and employment in the development sector, for example, as social organisers, now offers a further important source of income.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Many studies of female labour force participation have given preference to supply-side factors (e.g., the influence of schooling on employment careers) while neglecting demand-side factors (e.g., workplace and job characteristics). Buchmann, Kriesi, and Sacchi (2004), for example, argue that the dominance of individual-centred theorising and the difficulties of measuring contextual factors have led to a relative neglect of analyses of demand-side-related opportunities and constraints. They identify this neglect as a "serious shortcoming" (Buchmann et al., 2004: 166). The present article takes up this perspective and starts with an analysis of job announcements in order to present demand-side factors. However, since the aim of this study is to uncover *how* gender generates unequal access to the labour market and not to measure certain factors quantitatively, I draw on several qualitative methods to approach the labour market (see below). As well as providing a qualitative analysis of job announcements, I analyse the profiles of employed social organisers. The combination of the two analyses will allow me to discuss how the labour market shapes workers' profiles and how it works as a gendered institution.

For the analysis of job announcements, I selected announcements that were published online on BrightSpyre, Pak NGOs Home, the NGO World, and other

Web sites through regular searches or chance encounters between May 2009 and April 2010. BrightSpyre is an online job portal offering job postings and information on human resources. It was one of the first online job portals in Pakistan when it was introduced in 2002, and has remained—in addition to newspapers and personal communications—one of the most important sources of information for people seeking jobs in the development sector (informal discussions with social organisers, summer 2008). Employers that announce jobs on BrightSpyre include, for example, USAID, OXFAM, Save the Children, ICRC, World Vision, various UN organisations such as UNDP and FAO and many others, and also Pakistani nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Pak NGOs Home is a Google group for individuals working in the development field. A majority of the contributions by its group members deal with vacancy announcements. The NGO World is a homepage dedicated to the NGO sector in Pakistan, providing resources such as articles, calls for proposals, or job announcements for nongovernmental as well as governmental organisations. I collected and analysed 22 advertisements for a total number of 101 positions as social organisers (12 announcements for women only, 9 for men only, and 80 that were gender neutral); 24 of them were in Hazara and 77 were in other regions of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province. The job announcements were analysed based on a qualitative content analysis approach (Mayring, 2010). A coding framework was elaborated inductively with the aim of getting an overview of how the job of a social organiser is described, what skills and qualifications are required, and what the employer can offer to the employee. Examples of the codes are “skills,” “salary level,” and “educational background.”

The profiles of employed social organisers were elaborated based on the coding framework derived from the job announcements. Two additional codes—“family situation” and “plans for the future”—were elaborated inductively from the interviews. Information on the profiles was gathered using a range of qualitative methods such as formal semistructured interviews, informal group discussions, informal talks, and participant observation (Flick, 2005; O’Reilly, 2005) with 15 social organisers during eight months of field research. Interactions took place in English and sometimes in a mixture of English and Urdu. The field research was carried out in the rural Hazara region, Pakistan, in 2007 and 2008. I look at people who already work as social organisers and contrast male and female workers; in this way, I uncover gender-specific aspects that are at work in the labour market. While the small number of informants may not provide a sample representative of a larger group of social organisers, and the convenient sampling (Patton, 1990) may not cover the full range of possible subjectivities, the analysis of these profiles allows me to explore different aspects of social organisers and issues of whose paradoxical nature I was not aware in advance.

JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR SOCIAL ORGANISERS

“Social organisers” are hired and employed under diverse designations, such as “community organisers,” “social mobilisers,” and “village workers.” I use the expression “social organiser” as a generic term since it is a designation that is used routinely among people working in the development sector and associated fields. There, the term “social organisers” is usually used to refer to men, while “female” is added as a prefix for women (as can be seen in one of the quotations below). In this article however, I will use the terms “male social organisers” and “female social organisers” where I refer to a specific group, and “social organisers” where I refer to male and female social organisers. While job profiles have changed over the years, and specific projects offer activities that require specific skills, certain core skills have persisted. Job announcements offer valuable insights into these core skills and, in consequence, offer the possibility of characterising the occupational field and exploring the requirements specific to the profession.

Required Skills and Qualifications

According to the job announcements, there is a specific set of key competencies that are required from potential employees. In the job descriptions, employers do not ask for traditional specialist knowhow (e.g., medical or agricultural knowledge) but rather for a range of different transferable skills. Since these skills are essential for doing out-of-town fieldwork, some of them (such as interpersonal skills or knowledge of culture) can also be considered specialist knowledge in the field of social organisation. Table 1 shows what could be called the key competencies or essential skills that social organisers are required to have.

Further, there are always specifications about required educational qualifications and working experience. It is essential for applicants to be holders of an academic degree. In general, employees are required to have a master’s degree in social sciences, but sometimes a bachelor’s degree is sufficient. Usually, the jobs are announced as entry-level positions (i.e., requiring less than two years of experience) or as mid-career level positions (requiring two or more years of experience). Sometimes, the employer explicitly states that the previous working experience must be relevant to the job a person is applying for. Some organisations have rules about whether “local residents,” that is, people who come from or live in the area where they are supposed to work, are eligible to apply for a job or not. As stated above, there are some announcements containing indications about which gender is eligible to apply.

What the Employer Offers

Potential employees as well as practicing social organisers do not evaluate a job based only on the employee’s responsibilities but also on the package offered

Table 1. Skills Required from Social Organisers
(classification by the author)

Methodological skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Knowledge of local languages</i> (usually specified, e.g., Hindko and Pashto in the case of Hazara; sometimes English is also required) • <i>Writing skills</i> (only sometimes mentioned, language not mentioned) • <i>Computer skills</i> (usually not specified, sometimes related to basic user knowledge of MS Office) • <i>Data collection skills</i> (usually not specified, sometimes related to the collection of villagers' socioeconomic data through a questionnaire)
Social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication and interpersonal skills</i> (only sometimes mentioned in job advertisements, not specified) • <i>Knowledge of the culture</i>; knowledge of the area; cultural sensitivity (not specified)
Coping and self-management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ability to travel</i> on a regular basis; <i>willingness to travel</i> in the field/willingness to go outside of the duty station (for training/capacity building)

(including type of contract, salary, allowances, insurance, pensions, etc.) and the context of the job (including duty station, reputation of the employer, career perspectives, security/safety issues, and available infrastructure such as hostels and means of transportation, etc.). Table 2 gives an overview of the information that is given in the job announcements that were analysed.

The review shows that there is not much information in job announcements about what the employer can offer to potential employees. The type of employment, duration of contract, and location of the office is mentioned in most cases, whereas the salary level is usually not mentioned. Social organisers do salaried work in the formal labour market, but their contracts and thus their legal protection vary considerably. In the case of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, most social organisers are employed in the context of a project, that is, on a contractual basis. Contracts are usually issued for a period of one year or less, which results in temporal insecurity for the employees, and the conditions of these short-term contracts again are diverse in relation to, for example, maternity leave, sick pay, or cancellation periods. Often, protection measures are incomplete, which

Table 2. What the Employer Can Offer to Social Organisers
(classification by the Author)

Type of employment	• Usually <i>contractual</i> , seldom regular
Duration of contract	• <i>One year</i> (sometimes with possibility of extension), or <i>short-term</i> employment of less than one year
Duty station	• <i>Location of office</i> is always indicated, usually also the district(s) where fieldwork will take place
Salary	• Indications of amount are rare but range either between 10,000 and 15,000 PKR/month or between 20,000 and 25,000 PKR/month

leads to welfare insecurity for employees. Since social organisers are employed for specific projects and are not regular staff members, their career prospects are also minimal.

The payment for positions in Pakistani NGOs (which constitute the majority of positions) is low compared with the payment for persons working in freelance consultancies as development practitioners or the payment in office jobs for people with similar educational backgrounds and work experience in inter- or multi-national NGOs. Salaries for social organisers range between 10,000 and 25,000 PKR/month: 15,000 PKR/month (approx. US\$170/month, 135 EUR/month) seems to be the normal salary for one-year contracts with Pakistani NGOs, while 25,000 PKR/month (approx. US\$285/month, 225 EUR/month) is paid for short-term employment and by international development agencies. This is not regarded as very attractive compensation for the tasks social organisers have to undertake. Above all, fieldwork is regarded as strenuous, and people often expect additional per diem allowances for field days. Yet not all employers are able or willing to pay extra.

I assume that in general, transportation and accommodation facilities are not part of the package for social organisers, since they are not mentioned in the job announcements. In July 2009, the Pakistani NGO Khwendo Kor, for example, announced on its homepage four jobs: one position as female senior programme manager, one as female project facilitator, and one each as female and male social organiser. The first two positions were advertised with the following offer:

Khwendo Kor has gender friendly policies, and we also offer pick & drop facilities within 25 kilometres and EOBI [Employee's Old-Age Benefits Institution] for regular employees.

The positions for social organisers—employees who are not classified as among regular employees and are not located in the head office in the provincial capital, Peshawar—were not advertised with this offer. I thus conclude that the two social organisers were able to benefit neither from pick and drop facilities nor from EOBI.

PROFILES OF EMPLOYED SOCIAL ORGANISERS

A comparison of job announcements and male and female social organisers' profiles provides evidence of gender aspects in the labour market that was examined. The data presented in this section are based on interviews and discussions with 15 Muslim social organisers and complemented with insights from discussions with other development practitioners.

Family Situation, Age, and Family Background

It is striking that among the social organisers who were interviewed, only men have children, while I have not encountered a single female social organiser who has children. Women with children are missing from these employees, and in discussions, I found out that it is unusual for female social organisers to be married. In Pakistan, family status is strongly linked with age, and people are usually married between the ages of 22 and 28. The mean age of marriage for women in Pakistan is 23.1 years (UN-DESA, 2008). My female interview participants roughly reflect these statistics, since most female social organisers on the job are not yet married and are in their early 20s. In comparison, male social organisers in general are slightly older.

Comparing different women, it turns out that family composition and position in the sequence of children is much more relevant to women than it is to men. Women with married elder sisters and sisters-in-law tend to experience more freedom regarding their studies and work, because their elder sisters have already shown respect for the dominant social norms, and their sisters-in-law can support the mother in the household. One of the female social organisers experienced major support from her parents because she is an only child and her father is not able to work. Thus, the parents depend on her salary for their living.

Place of Origin and Current Living Situation

Social organisers' places of origins are very diverse, mainly among women, who often come from other, less rural and less conservative areas than the areas where they work. Yet many social organisers say about themselves that they know village life, can interact with villagers, and have personal links to rural areas, and they refer to the "cultural knowledge" that enables them to do their job. Nonlocal women staff face additional challenges. If they cannot commute, they are dependent on either a hostel provided by the employer or a person who

takes them as paying guests. Some women's hostels have been closed due to security problems and threats against working women, which reduces women's options with regard to possible living situations. In any case, it is socially not well accepted in the research area that a single woman should live without any member of her family.

Place of origin, together with family background, is also relevant to the language skills of social organisers. Those coming from distant places may be proficient in local languages due to their family background or migration history, whereas local social organisers may not be able to speak all the languages spoken in the working area (e.g., not all Hindko-speaking social organisers have a command of the Pashto language). I have encountered social organisers who were not able to communicate with all the villagers because of language problems. This occurs not only when social organisers lack local language skills but also when people with nonlocal linguistic backgrounds migrate to the working area of the social organiser. The language problem seems to be more problematic for women because male social organisers can usually communicate in Urdu with male villagers who learned Urdu at school or during their time as labour migrants in the big cities of Pakistan or the Gulf states. Labour migration from KPK to the Gulf states and big Pakistani cities is very popular (Gazdar, 2003; Jan, 2008). Many all households have at least one male member at present involved in migration, and usually they have one male member of the older generation who has returned home permanently from migration.

Economic (and Class) Background

Ahmad (2007: 349) argues that NGO fieldworkers in Bangladesh are "from rural, middle-class families and, because the work requires rigorous physical exercise, most of them are young. They do not join NGOs as field-workers enthusiastically, but rather to have a job and earn money." My observation corresponds with Ahmad's insofar as women and men work as social organisers because they need to financially support their families or are the major breadwinners in the family. While I would categorise social organisers in Northwest Pakistan as middle class or even lower middle class too, I am aware of the intense debates around concepts and definitions of the middle class(es) in Pakistan (Butt, 2008; Husain, 2010; Javed, 2010a, 2010b; Tariq, 2010).

While some define the Pakistani middle class solely on the basis of monthly household incomes, others use political resources or status symbols (such as specific car types) as proxies, most of which refer to urban contexts. Drawing on debates about the Pakistani middle class, I conclude that people of the lower classes usually do not have the level of formal education that is necessary to enter the labour market for social organisers. Azid et al. (2010) found that poverty pushes married women into labour force participation in Punjab Province, and since married women seem to stop working as social organisers,

I hypothesise that female social organisers probably do not belong to at least the poorest segment of society. On the other hand, people from the upper classes prefer to work in jobs involving less physical strain and a higher status, if they work at all.

Educational Background and Job Training

People start working as social organisers after having completed their master's degree (men and women) or their bachelor's degree (women), usually in the social sciences or humanities. The fact that only women are employed with a bachelor's degree reflects the gap that exists between the supply of female workers and the demand for them. In some areas it is not possible for employers to find enough women with a master's degree who are willing to do the job.

Social organisers have degrees in subjects such as sociology, gender and development, political science, and English language and literature. They have theoretical knowledge in a range of topics covered in their studies, but they have not gone through practical training before they are employed. It is the employers of social organisers who are responsible for practical training and coaching. Big NGOs offer training courses for social organisers, but those are not generally held on a regular basis and hardly match new staff members' entry into an organisation. Some social organisers thus work without having received any specific training in social organisation: "My qualification does not match with my job, but I have learned a lot" (Kasim,¹ male social organiser).

An academic degree reveals a person as literate and educated and thus generally capable of doing social organisation. While the subject-specific specialist knowledge acquired during studies (e.g., in English literature) is not always useful on the job, academic education is supposed to develop certain skills that are relevant to work as a social organiser; for example, people learn to work independently, or to move and speak out in gender-mixed environments; or they develop tangible transferable skills such as basic user knowledge of MS Office or writing skills. Unfortunately, Ullah (2005: 35) reports that "students in publicly funded institutions get an education of mediocre quality which does not prepare them to participate effectively in the economic, political and social life of the country." It is questionable whether universities are able to develop all the methodological skills requested by employers of social organisers. In any case, there is a remarkable density of higher educational organisations in the Hazara area, partly based on Abbottabad's historic and current role as army headquarters, which provides a good basis for the development of an educated labour force.

¹ All names are pseudonyms. Quotations are based on transcribed voice records and detailed interview protocols.

Plans for the Future

Bad career prospects within the field of social organisation, dissatisfaction with the job, and low job security are all reasons why it is common among social organisers to look for other job offers on a regular basis. There is an evident difference between men's and women's rhetoric in regard to the plans for the future. When men talk about their professional future, they talk about applying for a better-paid job at an inter- or multinational organisation, about continuing their studies in Pakistan, and about going abroad to study or work. One man also formulates his dream of setting up his own NGO in the development sector in order to pursue his own welfare strategy. Women rather talk about searching for (or making use of) better-paid alternatives within the development sector and about getting a job outside the development sector that promises increased social security. Even though salaries for civil servants are not very high, many young people consider governmental packages (which include social security provisions such as permanent work contracts, pensions, and old age benefits) attractive. In many small towns and rural areas, government positions offer the only possibility of formal paid employment, especially for women.

One female social organiser with a bachelor's degree plans to go on with her studies parallel to her work as a social organiser. She has applied for admission to a distance learning master's course, but has not been accepted so far. Unlike men, some women consider marriage as a desirable plan for the future and/or as a way to quit unfavourable working conditions in the field of social organisation.

Since it is not at all my aim to homogenise the members of one gender, I would like to refer to Mirza (2002), who distinguishes four types of female office worker and, by doing this, offers a more nuanced picture of female middle-class workers: "family supporter without severe economic need," "major breadwinner with severe economic need," "women searching for new perspectives," and "restarter type." Additionally, Mirza discusses the fact that some women office workers orient their education and skills training toward "symbolic education" (i.e., the collection of degrees in the formal educational system that have relevance for the marriage market), while others prefer "market-oriented education" (i.e., learning skills that can be used in the labour market to support the family). These orientations intersect with gender identities and influence people's plans for the future.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE LABOUR MARKET FOR SOCIAL ORGANISERS

Based on the analysis of job announcements and social organisers' profiles, I argue that social values and norms regarding gender play a role in at least three main areas: access to information, ability to travel, and eligibility for employment. In the following paragraphs, I outline how gender works in these areas.

Access to information about open positions is one of the most important preconditions for entering and remaining in a labour market. Yet access to information presents certain difficulties, some of which are gender specific. For people with limited access to the Internet, the distribution of information via online channels is an obstacle. In Pakistan, obviously everybody's Web access has worsened in recent times due to the high frequency of power cuts, yet people working and living in remote places, as a lot of social organisers do, face particular difficulties in using online job portals. Women face the additional challenge that Internet cafés are male spaces and no-go areas for women in small towns (Siegmann, 2009). It is thus even more difficult for women than for men to keep themselves updated about vacant positions. Further, men still occupy most positions in the development sector and elsewhere. Since women are socially restricted from interaction with people of the opposite sex, in general, they also have limited private and professional networks through which they can access information.

The required **ability to accept the necessity to travel**, above all to the field, poses specific challenges for women. Women's ability to travel is more restricted by social norms than the ability of men to travel, because women are, for example, still to a major extent responsible for taking care of children and other family members at home, or because women are expected to be chaperoned by a male family member on journeys. The lack of transportation and accommodation facilities may discourage women from taking up jobs as social organisers. The nonavailability of benefits such as transportation and accommodation facilities clearly has different consequences for men and for women, and it is mainly social norms that restrict women from fulfilling the requirement of being able to travel. Restrictions on women's mobility imply severe practical consequences if a female social organiser tries to avoid travelling, for example, by not going to the villages or not going to the office. In such situations, the female social organiser is not available to the village women who may want to contact her.

Social norms have gendered effects on the workforce by imposing definitions of **who is eligible to be employed** and who is not. While people with diverse geographical, linguistic, and educational backgrounds work as social organisers, women with children are not found among the employees. It is usual—not only in the area of social organisation—that women quit their jobs after getting married (Azid et al., 2010), and if not at that point, then at the latest after giving birth to a child. "Being married" functions as an accepted explanation of why women are not doing—or are not eligible to do—a job: "being married" does not primarily indicate marital status; it stands as an equivalent to professions and studies. Bringing "being married" into relation with (professional) activities gives it an exclusionary character: it appears impossible that "being married" can be combined with another occupation, for example, with paid formal-sector jobs. Social norms, insecure forms of employment, and a lack of childcare facilities are the main reasons making it unlikely for women with children to work as social organisers.

Although forms of employment in general are precarious for both men and women, the individual attitudes of employers may imply a number of specific consequences for women. Alima, a female social organiser, reports the following:

Although my one-year contract would only expire in the end of the year, it was cancelled by September. The employer argued that I did not fulfil the requirements, meaning: I do not have a master's in education. This is contradictory to what he said during the job interview. At those times, the employer was very satisfied with me and said that experience was more important than an academic degree in education. I assume that the true reason for the dismissal is my pregnancy. I am pregnant in the 5th month, and there is no rule about pregnancy and maternity leave in my contract. I am pregnant, and they did not want to bear my medical expenses. The management thinks that I cannot manage my duties properly. And I also need at least two months maternity leave.

The example of Alima illustrates how difficult it is for women to continue in their jobs when they are pregnant or have a child, among other reasons, due to the prevailing prejudice that women are responsible for childcare, but they are not able to manage both childcare and paid work. Even if Alima's pregnancy is not the only reason for the termination of her contract, the situation has greatly discouraged her, and she may not take up another job.

Short-term employment can have either positive or negative effects on women. On the one hand, it may discourage women from doing such a job because they need to make a considerable investment in establishing accepted relationships with non-kin men (Mirza, 2002)—be they male team colleagues or government officials. On the other hand, flexibility before marriage or childbirth is appreciated, and thus, short-time employment may encourage women to enter the labour market after completing their studies, instead of staying at home.

The need for women employees in the occupational field of social organisation provides a regulatory mechanism that is essential to increasing women's chances of entering the labour market. On the one hand, women are needed to approach female villagers and group them into women's community organisations, because gender norms restrict most local women from having contact with male social organisers. On the other hand—although the recruitment of staff is left to the employer's discretion—national and international donors often pressurise employers to hire women on terms equal to those of men, based on a gender-equality approach. While an employer's negative attitudes led to discrimination against a woman worker in Alima's case, employers' positive attitudes in other cases establish women as a social group eligible to access this labour market. In this way, they contribute to more equitable opportunities for women in the occupational field of social organisation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Finding women who are able and willing to work as social organisers in Northwest Pakistan is difficult, despite the demand for women workers in the development sector. The qualifications required of jobholders are high (e.g., regarding language skills and willingness to work in a gender-mixed working environment) and the rewards (e.g., in payment and social recognition) are low. The media, the government, and NGOs point out that, despite constitutional provisions and legislative frameworks, Pakistan is far from providing just and equal employment opportunities to its citizens (Government of Pakistan, 2009a; Hisam, 2007; Zaidi, 2010). This study has shown how these difficulties are an expression of the conflicting values and norms that female Pakistani development workers are confronted with regarding their employment.

This research on social organisers in Hazara region, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, supports Naqvi and Shahnaz's (2002) and Azid et al.'s (2010) findings by showing that age, education, marital status, and parenthood status—which they identified as factors relevant to married Punjabi women's access to the labour force—regulate access for women in different ways than they do for men. Yet my analysis enables me to add two points: I discuss additional factors, and I show *how* the labour market for social organisers is subject to gendered social norms that make it difficult for women to access the labour market and remain in it. First, women are, more than men, restricted in their mobility and social interaction, which makes it more difficult for women to access information about available jobs. Second, mobility restrictions based on social norms challenge women in fulfilling the requirement of “willingness to travel.” Third, social norms and values define who is eligible to be employed. Since in this definition of eligible persons, mothers and sometimes even all women are not included, these people face severe obstacles in accessing and remaining in the labour market. In conclusion, local values and norms have gendered impacts on the workforce, resulting in different challenges to the guaranteeing of equal chances to women and men.

The finding that ability and willingness to work as social organisers are gendered bears consequences that go far beyond the obstructions facing women who wish to enter and remain in the labour market. Due to the bad reputation of the occupational field and the shortage of potential female workers, competition for these jobs is weak, and it is difficult to find good candidates, or any candidates at all. Statements by several social organisers and employers suggest that turnover of female employees is high in positions that are regarded as unattractive, for example, because of the low salary or the remoteness of the workplace. Female-only posts even remain vacant from time to time, as the following quotation illustrates:

We have [three] Social Organisation Units. . . . In [location A and B], there were two female social organisers working with us. And there is also [a] social

organiser. They're independent unit[s]. But [the] female social organisers have resigned. They have joined other NGOs for [a] good salary. We are giving 15,000 [PKR], [while] other NGOs are giving 25,000 or 30,000 [PKR]. So naturally they will . . . [leave,] otherwise they will work with us. . . . So, [a] female social organiser will not be available here. (Male district director of a governmental development programme)

This corresponds with observations made in the governmental forestry sector by Shahbaz and Ali (2009), who states that there is a lack of female social organisers despite the availability of specific positions for women. Yet precisely in these rural areas in Pakistan, it would be highly necessary to have female social organisers working in development projects, since in this highly gender-segregated context only they, as women, have access to female villagers (Idrees et al., 2008).

In this article, I use a case study from a labour market in rural Northwest Pakistan to show how a policy of treating men and women “equally” puts working women and employers in a double-bind situation that, in many cases, is disadvantageous to women. Working women are put in a double bind because they are, on the one hand, expected to work as professional experts while, on the other hand, they are expected to act as decent women complying with certain gender norms. As we have seen above, professional expertise consists of the ability to travel to the field in order to interact with villagers, and to share and obtain information in villages, offices, and other places. Gender norms however, as we have also seen above, restrict women’s mobility, their interactions with non-kin males, and their eligibility to work. Women, being confronted with different expectations, find themselves in a dilemma, being forced to choose between either disrespecting professional standards or disrespecting gender norms.

This raises a number of questions about policy implications. First, how can politically active individuals and organisations, donors, and employers work toward encouraging women’s employment in the field of social organisation by changing formal workplace rights? The evidence presented in this article shows that formal regulations are most needed in two areas: contracts and accommodation. Based on an equality approach, employers must urgently integrate protective measures, such as maternity leave, into contracts to enable people, especially women, to continue work irrespective of their wish to become parents. Preventing employers from hiring female social organisers on short-term contracts without guaranteed social security will remain one of the greatest challenges. I see the main responsibility of fighting for these rights as resting with politicians, workers’ organisations, and women’s organisations. Further, innovative concepts for supporting women with regard to their accommodation needs are required, for example, the provision of women’s hostels in small towns where several development organisations work, or lists of trustworthy families who take women as paying guests. If female staff can live close to their workplace, this can also reduce their problems with commuting. A right to adequate accommodation

could be incorporated into work contracts. However, the main challenge to the provision of adequate accommodation is the reluctance among local residents to accept working women. A feeling of insecurity, caused by several attacks on women's hostels, has led to the closure of women's hostels. Recalling the reluctance of employers to take measures with financial implications, I argue that the responsibility has to be taken by donors, including foreign donors. Donors should take seriously the complex field realities, especially for women, and supervise budget allocations accordingly, for example, forcing employers to budget money for social security schemes, adequate accommodation, and travel arrangements.

Second, to what extent can professional women support one another? To my knowledge, there are no women professionals' networks or mentoring schemes active in rural Northwest Pakistan, although I have found that many young women would appreciate the moral and material support of other professional women, especially at times when they are the only women working in a remote field office. While informal networks have been established at particular times and places, for example, between female social organisers within one organisation working in different offices, I recommend the formalisation of a professional network including women at all career stages. Such a network could provide crucial support for the exchange of information about jobs, professional training, and career options. However, the setting up of women's networks should not excuse male work colleagues and superiors from their responsibility to support women's career advancement.

Third, what can be done to advance gender equality beyond "women's empowerment"? Gender equality in Northwest Pakistan is not only about improving the situation of women but also about changing the relationship between men and women. I have observed that many development interventions on gender issues organised for villagers focus on women only and do not include men, which I consider to be a weakness. Debates on gender equality at work with both female and male potential and actual employees and employers could be one means of working toward more gender equality. Discussing gender equality in a broader framework could maybe help to challenge the prevailing norms about who is eligible to do which type of work. However, feminist movements in Pakistan have had limited outreach beyond urban centres, and it will be difficult to raise consciousness within society that "willingness to travel" and "eligibility to work" are constructed in a gendered way and to mobilise a critical mass to change gender relations.

These suggestions are clearly intended to support Ali and Knox's (2008) call for more "teeth" in implementing existing legal frameworks and removing the discriminatory practices that inhibit women's employment and economic activity. Yet they also call for more awareness of the two approaches to thinking about gender: the one that perceives women and men as essentially different, and the one that perceives them as equal human beings.

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