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Female Leadership and Sustainable Development Goals: Peace, Justice, And Institutional Development in Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan has committed itself to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which asks states to build peaceful, just and accountable institutions, and women hold less than five per cent of senior positions in its public institutions. This research asks what female leaders do inside those institutions to advance the goal, and what decides how far what they do can reach. It draws on one part of a multi-site phenomenological study of sixty women leaders in Punjab: twenty in public-sector universities, twenty in political and policy-making institutions and twenty in the Punjab Police. Interviews of fifty-five to ninety-five minutes were conducted with a single twenty-question semi-structured guide and analyzed through interpretive phenomenological analysis, with themes generated by the six-phase procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis reported here covers sixteen accounts of leadership practice, one from each of sixteen participants, read against the targets of SDG 16 and against three lenses: transformative feminist leadership, social contract theory and role congruity theory. Three results follow. First, the practices that produced accountability gains worked by making the reasons behind a decision open to review rather than by changing any rule; one participant states this directly when she says her promotion rubric did not change the criteria but made visible whether the criteria were being applied. Second, the reach of a practice was set by its authority route and not by the leader's skill or intent: eight of the sixteen practices lay inside the participant's own sphere, four required one named superior's consent and four depended on peers or a collective. Third, eight practices were embedded in an instrument that could outlast their author, five were personal and three fell between, and all four practices that needed a superior's consent were one transfer away from ending. Thirteen of the sixteen accounts report a concrete outcome. Almost all outcome statements rest on what participants reported, and no document was examined, so the findings are offered as propositions for testing against promotion criteria, posting records and case registers. The contribution is a distribution-of-authority account of how female leadership reaches SDG 16, in place of an account based on leadership style or personal values.

Keywords: female leadership, SDG 16, authority route, institutional development, interpretive phenomenological analysis, Punjab, Pakistan, accountability instruments

1. Introduction

Pakistan has a population of over 220 million, and women are almost half of it. Their participation in senior government institutions, universities and the civil service is less than five per cent (Moazzam, 2024). Half the population sits outside the decision-making process, and the result is institutions that are weaker, less trusted and less accountable than they would otherwise be. The United Nations adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda. Goal 16 commits states to strengthening institutions in support of peace, justice and inclusion by 2030. Hope (2020) argues that SDG 16 is not a technical governance target but an undertaking to build institutions that people can trust, that give access to justice and that keep them free from violence, particularly those who are left out. Without that foundation the goals on education, health and economic development cannot be sustained. The link to gender equality is well established. Using data from many countries, Amanuma et al. (2023) found that a greater proportion of women in governance institutions is consistently associated with better scores on social and institutional SDG indicators. Nash et al. (2025) add that when women lead in a transformative feminist way, explicitly challenging unjust power systems, governance outcomes improve in measurable terms.

Pakistan has signed SDG 5 and SDG 16 and is party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. Its measured performance sits elsewhere. Pakistan ranked 145th of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2023, and UN Women (2021) places it near the bottom of the Gender Inequality Index. Formal labour force participation of women is below 22 per cent, among the lowest in South Asia. Women are appointed as deans and directors in the public universities of Punjab but seldom as vice-chancellor (Rafiq et al., 2024). The institutional setting is under strain. Kazma Baqi (2024) identifies lack of financial resources, political instability, poor coordination between departments, weak human resource development and weak monitoring as the main barriers to institutional capacity. Aslam and Muzaffar (2025) identify political instability as the largest single obstacle to SDG 16, and Pakistan has had four prime ministers since 2018.

Against that background this article examines one narrow question. Where women do hold senior posts in Punjab's public institutions, what do they do that bears on peace, justice and institutional development, and what sets the limit on how far it travels? The question matters because the policy response in Pakistan has been to place women in posts, and placing a woman in a post settles nothing about the scope of the authority attached to it.

2. Statement of the Problem

Pakistan's approach to women's leadership has been based on quantity. It reserves seats for women in parliament, increases the representation of women as deans and directors in universities, and sets gender quotas in some ministries. Having women in positions is not the same as having women in power, and the gap between female representation and female institutional power is the problem this study addresses. Gysman (2018) presents the same problem comparatively. In her study of the Southern African Development Community, countries with more women in political positions did not necessarily perform better on SDG 5 or SDG 16 targets, because those women were not genuinely able to decide.

Moazzam (2024) asks the question directly for Pakistan: are women in Pakistani governance making a difference, or is their presence a façade? About 21 per cent of National Assembly seats are held by women, most of them reserved rather than directly won, while legislative power rests with committee chairs and informal political circles that remain male.

The same pattern appears inside institutions. Rafiq et al. (2024) interviewed fifty female deans and directors in the public universities of Punjab, whose participants described being physically present while having to fight continually for their decisions to be taken seriously. They described institutional cultures saturated with patriarchal norms, gender discrimination in decision-making, exclusion from the informal networks where significant university decisions were made, and the additional burden of managing male staff who did not accept female authority. At policy level Sadaf (2025) found gender equity commitments rarely implemented because of limited capacity, the absence of gender-disaggregated data and poor coordination between ministries. The problem is also under research. Pakistani studies have concentrated on women's political representation at national level, or on women's experience in a small number of university settings. No phenomenological study has recorded the lived experiences of female leaders in several institutional settings at once, in a way that shows whether those settings reinforce or contradict one another. For this article the problem narrows further. If the gap between representation and institutional power is real, it should be visible in what female leaders are able to do and in where their actions stop. That is an empirical question about the distribution of authority inside institutions, and it has not been asked of female leaders in Punjab across more than one field at a time.

3. Significance of the Study

This study has four values. Theoretically, it brings together transformative feminist leadership theory, social contract theory and servant leadership in one design, a combination not previously applied to governance and higher education in Pakistan. Methodologically, it uses interpretive phenomenological analysis where most existing Pakistani work uses surveys, policy analysis or document analysis, so that the meaning participants give to their own situation becomes evidence rather than background. Practically, the findings reported here point to inputs an institution can act on without new legislation. If the reach of a practice is set by the authority attached to a post, then widening that authority, or removing the need for one person's consent, is an administrative matter rather than a cultural one. For the localization of SDG 16, the article offers something more specific than a call for more women in leadership. It identifies the conditions under which the presence of a woman in a senior post produces an institutional change that can be inspected. There is also a value in the comparison itself. Universities, legislatures and the police are governed differently, and practice that works in one may be impossible in another. Reading the three together shows which part of the result belongs to gender and which belongs to the way a particular institution distributes the right to decide.

4. Research Questions

The parent study is guided by one central question: how does female leadership contribute to peace, justice and institutional development, as set out in SDG 16, in the public-sector universities, political and policy-making institutions and the Punjab Police of Punjab, Pakistan? Three supporting questions focus on the investigation, and this article reports the analysis bearing on the first of them.

Research Question 1. What leadership strategies and practices do female leaders in these institutions use to promote peace, social harmony, institutional transparency, ethical decision-making and justice within their specific institutional settings in Punjab?

Research Question 2. What socio-cultural, organizational and structural barriers limit female leaders' ability to contribute to SDG 16 outcomes, and how do female leaders navigate those barriers?

Research Question 3. How do the lived experiences of female leaders across the three fields intersect and diverge in ways that reveal the systemic conditions shaping and limiting female leadership's contribution to SDG 16 in Pakistan?

Questions 2 and 3 are answered from a different body of data in a companion article. This article is confined to the practice that answer Question 1 and shares no extract with the companion. One inconsistency in the parent study should be recorded. Its earlier statement of the research questions names education policy bodies as the third field, while its design, its fieldwork and its interview guide name the Punjab Police. The formulation used here follows the design and the instrument.

5. Theoretical Framework

Three frameworks are used, and they do different work. Two are normative and one is explanatory.

5.1 Transformative Feminist Leadership

Nash et al. (2025) define effective leadership not by who holds power but by what leadership produces for the community. Transformative feminist leadership challenges unjust power systems, works towards equality and justice through community development, and places the good of the community above the standing of the individual leader. The framework separates women who challenge patriarchal institutional norms from women who occupy positions without challenging the system, and it explains why institutional context matters: the same woman will achieve less in a highly resistant institution than in a supportive one. It also explains why SDG 16 asks for inclusive institutions rather than simply for women on organizational charts. An inclusive institution is one whose processes are open, accountable and democratic.

5.2 Social Contract Theory

Singh and Singh (2024) hold that institutions acquire legitimacy from citizens' confidence that they will act justly, respect rights and work for the public benefit. Exclusionary, unresponsive and corrupt institutions destroy that contract, and the result is low institutional trust, disengagement from governance and weak SDG 16 outcomes. The framework supplies the criterion applied in this article: an institution is legitimate to the extent that it gives the people subject to it reasons they can see and contest.

5.3 Role Congruity Theory

Eagly and Karau (2002) explain prejudice towards female leaders as a conflict between two sets of expectations, those attached to the leader role and those attached to the female role. Unlike the first two frameworks, this one makes no claim about what leadership ought to achieve. It is used here only where the data requires an explanation of why an authority is contested, and of why a leader whose legitimacy is already in question may gain more from rules that bind everyone than from discretion that depends on trust.

Keeping the normative and the explanatory frameworks apart matters. Transformative feminist leadership and social contract theory describe what good institutional leadership would look like, and a study that uses them as measuring instruments will find its participants falling short of an ideal. Role congruity theory predicts behaviour and can be tested. The framework was fixed before coding, which makes it easier to see what it anticipates and harder to see what it does not.

6. Literature Review and Research Gap

Comparative work establishes an association between women's presence in governance and institutional performance. Amanuma et al. (2023) found, across many countries, that a greater proportion of women in governance institutions goes with better scores on social and institutional SDG indicators. The association is not automatic. Gysman (2018) showed for the Southern African Development Community that countries with more women in political positions did not necessarily perform better on SDG 5 or SDG 16 targets, because those women were not genuinely able to decide. Srinidhi et al. (2020) describe a mechanism for the cases where presence does tell: norms shift in response to a change in procedure, so that an altered procedure comes before an altered norm. Choi and Ko (2025) and Latu et al. (2013) add that influence increases once numbers pass a threshold, and that the presence of successful women affects how other women perform.

Work on Pakistan is concentrated in two places. On politics, Khan (2025) finds that women legislators contribute substantially to policy on women's rights and welfare, and Moazzam (2024) asks whether women in Pakistani governance are making a difference or supplying a façade, noting that about twenty-one per cent of National Assembly seats are held by women, mostly reserved rather than directly won, while legislative power sits with committee chairs and informal circles that remain male. On universities, Rafiq et al. (2024) interviewed fifty female deans and directors in Punjab and report patriarchal institutional cultures, exclusion from the informal networks where significant decisions are made, and the burden of managing male staff who do not accept female authority; they also associate a transactional style with efficiency and transformational and servant styles with a positive climate. Nosheen et al. (2025) report retaliation by relocation among university leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Samo et al. (2019) find that women leaders are perceived as less capable under pressure. Sadaf (2025) finds gender equity commitments rarely implemented, for want of capacity, gender-disaggregated data and coordination between ministries.

Theoretical work on institutional change supplies the vocabulary for the limits. Waylen (2014) shows that informal institutions may support or undermine formal ones and tend to survive formal reform, and that opposition is likely where a formal rule change would upset privileges resting on ambiguity. Mackay (2014) describes nested newness, a formally open procedure enclosed within an older one. Pape (2020) distinguishes strategies that help an individual succeed under existing gendered rules from strategies that change those rules. Annesley and Gains (2010) locate real decision-making in the core executive rather than in the formal legislative process.

Five gaps follow from this literature, and the parent study addresses them. First, Pakistani work on female leadership treats national political figures or selected university settings, rarely both and never alongside a third public institution in the same design. Second, almost no empirical work captures the lived experience of women leaders in relation to SDG 16 outcomes, because most existing research uses

surveys, policy analysis or document analysis, so that women's own meaning-making is largely absent. Third, studies of leadership style in Pakistan seldom connect style to institutional outcomes specified as SDG 16 targets. Fourth, the integrated framework used here has not previously been applied to governance and higher education in Pakistan. Fifth, research on female political leadership has concentrated on the national level, and provincial representatives in Punjab have received almost no attention.

To those five this article adds a sixth, which emerged from the data rather than from the literature. The reviewed work asks whether women leaders change institutions and what style they bring. It does not ask what authority a practice required before it could begin. That question is the subject of the analysis below.

7. Methodology

The study works within an interpretive paradigm and uses a qualitative, multi-site phenomenological design. The decisive events in this setting are informal and leave no record, and are available only through the accounts of those present.

Sixty women took part, twenty in each of three fields: public-sector universities, political and policy-making institutions, and the Punjab Police. The higher education group comprised deans, directors and heads of department in Punjab public universities with three to seventeen years in a current or recent senior role. The politics and policy group comprised National and Punjab Assembly members, senators and senior Higher Education Commission policy staff, with between one term and fourteen cumulative years. The police group comprised officers of Deputy Superintendent rank and above working in gender crime, investigation, administration, training and public protection, with four to twenty-six years in the force and two to thirteen at senior rank.

All interviews lasted between fifty-five and ninety-five minutes and were transcribed verbatim. Thirty-five were held in Urdu, fifteen in English and ten in both. Fifteen respondents across the three fields took part in member checking. One semi-structured guide of twenty questions in six sections was used with all participants, with probes differing by field and marked HE for higher education, POL for politics and policy and PP for the Punjab Police. Keeping the twenty questions identical across the three fields is what makes comparison between them possible, since differences between fields could not otherwise be separated from differences between instruments. The guide is reproduced in full as the Appendix.

Urdu extracts were translated into English. Translation is not neutral transfer but an act of interpretation, and Temple and Young (2004) note that words concerning honour, respect and family do not carry their register or their force between languages. Urdu extracts should be read as conveying what was said with less confidence than English extracts convey the act of saying it.

The researcher is part of the instrument. The analysis was carried out by a person trained in Pakistani institutions and familiar with the leadership literature produced in Western contexts, and that shaped what was treated as significant in the transcripts. The theoretical framework was fixed before coding, which makes it easier to see what the framework anticipates and harder to see what it does not.

The analysis reported in this article uses sixteen of the thirty-five extracts in the parent study, drawn from sixteen participants: six in higher education, five in politics and policy and five in the police.

These are the accounts of leadership practice. The remaining nineteen extracts, which concern barriers and cross-field comparison, are analyzed in the companion article and are not used here.

8. Data Analysis

The method applied was interpretive phenomenological analysis, with themes generated through the procedure set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). The two are not the same but they are compatible. Phenomenological analysis is case-specific, requiring the researcher to work through the participant's own reading of her situation before moving across cases, while thematic analysis supports cross-case work. Both are used here: each extract is followed by a paragraph that reads that account, and the work across accounts appears as sub-themes and cross-field patterns. Where a case does not fit a theme, it is reported rather than concealed. Analysis was performed in NVivo.

Interview data establish what participants said and perceived. They do not establish that events occurred as reported or that consequences followed from them, which is true of all interview research. Four tiers of evidence are therefore distinguished. A Tier 1 statement is the participant's own words, translated where the interview was in Urdu, and is signaled by described or said. A Tier 2 statement is something the participant states that no one has verified, signaled by reported or according to. A Tier 3 statement is the researcher's reading, extending beyond what the participant said, signaled by suggests or can be read as. A Tier 4 statement rests on a document such as minutes, a policy, a case register, a posting record or an official report, and would be signaled by corroborated by.

There is no Tier 4 evidence in this study, because the document review and institutional observation have not been analyzed. Almost all outcome statements are Tier 2 and almost all interpretive paragraphs are Tier 3. That is the ordinary position of interview evidence, and it is stated here so that no claim is read as more than an interview can carry.

One further caution applies throughout. Several questions in the guide contain an answer within the question. Participants were asked whether their leadership had been questioned because of their gender, whether family responsibilities had affected their leadership, and whether their institution had become more accountable because of women's leadership. These are useful questions and they are leading. Where a finding arises in answer to such a question, it is the participant's interpretation of a frame the interviewer supplied.

Thirty-five extracts are reported from thirty-five participants: thirteen of the twenty in higher education, eleven of the twenty in politics and policy and eleven of the twenty in the police. Twenty-five participants are not quoted. One extract per person gives breadth across the sample and carries two costs. No participant appears under more than one topic, which is the depth a phenomenological analysis would ordinarily provide, and selecting one passage from each transcript risks selecting the most eloquent rather than the most typical. Any statement about how common a pattern therefore requires the full coded data set.

One further coding step is specific to this article. Each of the sixteen practices was read with a single question put to the transcript: before the participant could do this, whose agreement was required? Three answers were possible. The practice sat inside her own sphere, and she names no one whose consent she sought. It required one person above her, whom she names, or it ran against that person's instruction. Or it depended on peers or a collective who had to agree, tolerate, copy or vote.

The unit of coding is the practice and not the participant, and this route coding is the researcher's reading rather than the participant's statement. Each practice was also coded for the SDG 16 target it most plausibly served, and for whether it was embedded in something separable from the participant herself.

9. Findings and Discussion

Sixteen practices are reported, one from each of sixteen participants, grouped under five headings. Read one by one they look unrelated: a noticeboard, a scoring rubric, an invitation list, a telephone call, two months of separate meetings, a written escalation, a one-page budget, a public board, a legislative amendment. Read together, most of them do the same thing. They put the grounds of a decision where a second person can see them.

9.1 Making institutions legible

The most common practice in all three fields was to make an institutional process visible to people with less power in the institution. No participant used the phrase inclusive governance. They named specific acts: committing decisions to minutes, circulating minutes, publishing criteria that had circulated informally, widening who is heard before a plan is made, and telling people what is happening to their case.

The minutes of departmental meetings were not made public and were kept by the administrator when I arrived at this job. I asked why. There was no cause or reason. I started posting them on the department noticeboard. Then there were some of my senior people who were not happy. After two months, though, the staff started to come to the meetings, which were led by a junior member. They never went to school because they were not aware of it. Transparency does just one thing, it changes the participants.

(HE-04)

HE-04 states the mechanism plainly. While information stays inside informal networks, participation stays with those who have access to the network; once the record is published, the set of people who can take part changes. Her closing line is a claim about participation, not about the quality of decisions, and the analysis stays at that level. The reported outcome is that junior staff began attending after two months. The displeasure of senior staff is what Waylen (2014) would predict, since a formal rule change that disturbs privileges resting on ambiguity attracts opposition.

There were guidelines for promotion in HEC. However, in practice committees applied different criteria to different individuals. I asked the Vice Chancellor to allow me to develop a scoring rubric, which is a document that I'll provide all the candidates with before the cycle starts. He agreed. Three women were promoted in the next promotion cycle, who'd been passed over twice previously. The rubric was not modified than the criteria were. It had simply acted as a way of making the criterion visible if it was being used, or not.

(HE-11)

HE-11 used a different instrument for the same purpose, and she is exact about what it did. The rubric did not change the criteria; it made visible whether the criteria were being applied. That sentence is the analytic core of this group. Acts of this kind do not change a rule. They change whether a rule can be checked. Two cautions attach. The promotion of three women in the following cycle could also reflect a change in the committee, in the field of candidates, or in whose case reached the Vice Chancellor's

attention, and the account cannot isolate the rubric's effect. The second caution is about authority: there is a rubric because the Vice Chancellor agreed to one. This is the first of four cases in this dataset that turned on one senior person.

Typically, NGOs visit, and present. Visitors from the government visit. We hear them and then the Committee decides. I began to call teachers themselves classroom teachers of government schools, not the union or government officials, the teachers. This was unusual, some of my male colleagues on the committee thought this was unusual. I replied: "This is the group who the policy impacts. Why would we not hear them? After 2 sessions it was normal. Sometimes other committee members invite members of the community as well.

(POL-07)

POL-07 applied the same reasoning to who is heard. Her account contains a sequence that matters for the argument: male colleagues objected that the practice was irregular, and after two sessions other members began to do it themselves. This is procedure preceding norm, as Srinidhi et al. (2020) describe it. The final step, where colleagues adopt the practice, is her observation; committee minutes would place it on firmer ground.

Most of the time when a woman files a complaint with our station, she does not hear back until weeks later. She isn't aware of what's going on. She doesn't come because she believes she is not doing anything. Created a process for every complainant to be called by my office within 7 days of filing, informing his/her case. Not long. Just: 'Your case is with the investigation officer and here is the next step, here is the date that we hope to have an update'. The number of cases that have progressed to investigation rose by forty per cent in six months. The women had not given up -- they had not known they should not give up.

(PP-03)

PP-03 reports the most specific outcome in this group, and it therefore deserves the closest scrutiny. Her reading is that complainants had been withdrawing not because they were unwilling but because the information had not reached them. The reported forty per cent rise in cases reaching investigation over six months has no stated baseline, denominator or comparison period. A seven-day status call may well raise that proportion by reducing withdrawals. It may also reflect a change in what is recorded as progress, or in investigating officers' caseloads. Station registers would allow a before-and-after comparison and would move the claim from report to record.

Across these four accounts the participant's own reasoning accompanies the outcome, and no competing explanation is ruled out. Three of the four sit inside the participant's own unit, the noticeboard, the committee and the station, and the fourth concerns the promotion process of a whole institution.

9.2 De-escalation and working relations

Conflict was treated in every field as an ordinary part of the job. In the three accounts below the participant does not resolve the dispute. She works on the conditions under which the parties can function.

I had two professors, who hadn't talked to each other for five years. At first, it was a salary dispute, but it was a personal one. It was the ban of every meeting. I met each of them one at a

time for 2 months. Don't tell me to act as a mediator, I wasn't trying to solve the problem. I wanted to try to figure out what each of them had to feel respected by. Ultimately, however, I did not have to settle the original dispute. I set up the situation so that they didn't have to fight in the same room and make it a point of attention. It's not a solution. It's a working institution, though!

(HE-16)

HE-16 is careful about what she is not claiming. She says she was not trying to settle the disagreement and that the result is not a solution; what she claims is a working institution. The distinction matters in a study that treats social harmony as an SDG 16 outcome, because restoring institutional function is not the same as resolving a conflict, and she is the one who separates them.

There was a bill which stalled. No two committee members, of different parties, or old enemies, would agree. The chair of the committee was unable to get it moved. He requested me to talk to both. I do not come from either of the two groups. I believe it was for this reason that he asked me. I saw each of them three times in 14 days. I didn't attempt to swap out their jobs. I tried to grasp what they had to be able to say yes without embarrassment for their party. The bill passed. Not a single person said a word about what I did in public. But I knew and the chair knew.

(POL-13)

POL-13 did comparable work in a legislature and added something that should not be passed over. Her role was requested by the committee chair, was carried out across party lines and was never made public. The bill's passage is on public record; by her own account, her part in it is not. This is the labour feminist institutionalism identifies as sustaining institutions while going unrecorded and uncredited (Waylen, 2014).

Our officers could not go about without getting in trouble, there was a neighbourhood. Whenever there was a patrol there was confrontation. I personally visited there without any uniform. I was seated with the ladies of the neighbourhood in a community centre. I came in as a cop, not that way. Arrived as a woman desiring to know what was going on. During my three visits I learned this: The community was not averse to the male officers. Harassment had been experienced. They didn't believe in complaints being listened to. Established a Community Liaison Desk with female officers working there. Three tip-offs from that neighbourhood led to the arrest in four months. The community had not been antagonistic to the police in the past. They had been opposed to the type of police that they had known.

(PP-14)

PP-14's case is the one conflict here that lies between an institution and a community rather than inside an institution. Her reading is that the community was hostile not to the police as such but to the policing it had experienced, and the liaison desk follows from that reading. The three tip-offs leading to arrests within four months is a reported outcome that unit records could confirm.

Two qualifications apply to this group. The guide asks whether the participant handled the situation differently from the way a male colleague might have handled it, and no men were interviewed, so any comparison is imagined. Nothing in these three accounts shows that men in the same posts would have acted differently. What can be said is that these are practices women carried out within the duties

of their posts. The second qualification is cost. PP-14 went into the neighbourhood alone and out of uniform; POL-13 held six meetings in two weeks and received no credit; HE-16 met two people separately over two months. That is a large amount of labour and none of it appears in any institutional record.

9.3 Integrity under pressure

Participants in all three fields described decisions taken on principle under pressure, and the accounts share one shape: a request or instruction, a refusal, then a cost.

My first year came to me, a senior professor. It was a student who had not passed the qualifying exams, his best wasn't even passed, I knew the job well done. He assured me that the student came from a good family and a poor performance would impact on the relationship with the family of that student. I informed him that they would not assess the exams again. He took his grievance to the Vice Chancellor. The VC requested me to 'Review my decision'. It was checked by me and I saw no mistake. From then on, I did not receive any such request for a while. A reputation for fairness is established and repeated. It isn't built through assent; it's built through refusal.

(HE-08)

My party wanted me to cast my vote a certain way. I had been talking to my constituency -- teachers, school administrators. This bill would reduce funding for the schools in my district in rural areas. I was unable to cast my vote for it. I voted against it. The party was enraged. Then I was taken off the education committee, the punishment for me. But, my ward knew that I was standing for them. In the following term I patrolled that. Politics is all about character. The Party's in the House, and the Bean Pot is boiling.

(POL-05)

There was a case. A strong family was involved. I had the evidence. My superior told me that it would be better if all of us got along and the case would be solved in a quiet manner --- he didn't say it, but I can see that it is better in this manner. When I asked what it meant by 'resolved quietly'? He did not answer. I followed up the inquiry. The case was referred to prosecution. I was transferred 3 months later. I knew this was going to occur. I knew all along. But if I closed it then all the officers in my unit would know why. They'd know that I was a man on whom they could play. As soon as they know that's all you have.

(PP-09)

The costs differ by field, and they differ in a way that follows each institution's main instrument of control. HE-08 faced administrative pressure and an instruction from the Vice Chancellor to review a decision she judged correct. POL-05 lost the committee seat where legislative influence sits. PP-09 was transferred. The pattern matches what the literature anticipates, resistance that is procedural in the university, relational in politics and hierarchical in policing, but three cases are not enough to establish a gradient.

More interesting is that each participant supplies a theory of why the refusal mattered. HE-08 says a reputation for fairness is built through refusal rather than through assent. PP-09 says that closing the case would have told her unit she was someone who could be managed, and that once they know that authority is gone. POL-05 says that in politics character is the only asset. These are not statements

about virtue. They are assessments of how authority is maintained by someone whose authority is already in question.

A reading that treats this as evidence of women's superior ethics would be unsafe, and it is not the reading taken here. Role congruity theory holds that women in leadership are penalized for departing from expectation (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and in each of these cases the officeholder already had a contested standing. A leader in that position has less margin for error and more to lose if a decision can be presented as a favour. All three participants say something close to this. Men in the same posts may also refuse improper requests, and without a male comparator the gendered element of the inference is not demonstrated. A gendered account of principled conduct is better understood as a response to a legitimacy deficit than as a property of gender.

The pressures themselves are of analytic interest. A student from a good family and a case to be resolved quietly are patronage and impunity, the two mechanisms SDG 16 targets most directly. PP-09's transfer resembles what Nosheen et al. (2025) report for university leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which makes retaliation by relocation more likely to be systemic than peculiar to one force. Whether her transfer was retaliatory is her reading, and a posting record would test it.

9.4 Transparency as a deliberate practice

This group is related to the first and analytically separate from it. The first concerns inviting a process to the people it affects. This one concern publishing information that no one has asked for.

Each semester, create a one-page summary of the department's budget. Not the total amount of the budget the parts that are pertinent to the topic. What was allocated. What was spent. What remains. Where the decision taking took place. Share with all faculty. This was not done by my predecessor. As I began to do it, some faculty remarked we didn't request this. I said, "I know. You should have; however, It's your responsibility.

(HE-03)

The exchange HE-03 reports is the important moment here. Her faculty said they had never asked for the information, and she replied that they should have, because it is their department. The practice sets an expectation and then meets it. She reports faculty comment and nothing more, and no outcome is added that she did not report.

There is a communications system within the party. Official statements, press releases. The party, however, has discretion as to what information should be sent and to whom. I began a Facebook page to post all the committee discussions, what I voted on and why, and what I challenged and why. It is not favored among the party. My constituents know what I am doing, but. They message me. They inform me of their requirements. This feedback alters my approach to preparing for committee. It's not just transparency of telling; it's transparency of hearing.

(POL-18)

POL-18's practice sits outside her institution. Her closing line, that transparency is a matter of hearing and not only of telling, describes a loop: the page draws constituent feedback, which changes how she prepares for committee. The account also shows what the loop replaces. A reserved seat member has no constituency mandate and no formal feedback channel, so an informal platform performs an institutional function. No claim beyond feedback is made.

Outside the station I set up a board. It displays: Number of cases filed this month, number of cases under investigation, number of cases resolved and number of cases pending in court. Numbers only. No names. It's something that anyone who passes by can see. Initially my officers were not enamored of it. They felt it was putting pressure on them. I said to them: When the board has good numbers on it that means they have good work. If it displays poor numbers, we discuss why. At the end of six months the officers began to update the board themselves. It was no longer my board; it became their board.

(PP-12)

PP-12's board is the clearest case in this dataset of a practice outliving its author's attention. Her description of the moment it stopped being her board and became theirs identifies the condition under which an introduced practice survives: someone other than its author takes on keeping it going. That is the most direct statement in these sixteen accounts about durability.

Two of these three accounts report no outcome. HE-03 and POL-18 report comment and feedback; only PP-12 reports a change in others' behaviour. All three practices were also one-armed: no one's permission was needed, because each lay inside the participant's own authority. That makes them the easiest in the dataset for a successor to stop. Nothing in the three accounts suggests any of them is formally protected.

9.5 Advocacy on behalf of others

The fifth group concerns using a position on behalf of someone else, a colleague, a constituency or a member of the public. In all three cases the participant used a document and a formal channel.

I checked my department's workload information. Female teachers had the extra burden of 20-30% more teaching hours than male teachers of the same rank. The difference was with no policy. It was in the way that individual assignments have been springing up over the years, one after the other, each being small, each being informal. Wrote a formal memo to the Dean about the discrepancy and asked for a review of policy. When my male colleagues told me that I was making enemies I believed them. I told them that I was making a record. The gap was less in the following semester.

(HE-19)

HE-19 gives the sharpest statement in this dataset of what formalisation is. Her colleagues read the memo as making enemies; she read it as making a record. The disparity she reports, twenty to thirty per cent more teaching hours for female staff at the same rank, is the single most checkable claim in the study, because workload records exist. If the records support it, the finding moves to documentary evidence and becomes the strongest in the parent study. If they do not, the claim should be withdrawn, since an unverified figure that was available for verification is worse than no figure at all. The same applies to the reduction she reports in the following semester.

The idea of bringing up the minimum educational standard for teachers in primary schools was put forward. This sounds great in theory! But, in rural Punjab 60% of female primary teachers lack the qualification that would require. This would have taken away their work. It was introduced as quality measure. I drafted an amendment to that, that said that it would be a 10-year progressive phase in over a decade, with a commitment from the government to support

teacher training. If the amendment had not been passed those teachers wouldn't have had jobs! The amendment passed. I am still asked about this by women's organizations. They remember. (POL-02)

POL-02 is the only practice in this dataset that changed a rule beyond the participant's own unit. She reads the original proposal as removing the livelihoods of a large share of female primary teachers in rural Punjab: a distributional effect carried inside a technical frame, and what she did was identify it. The amendment is on the legislative record and can be confirmed. The account is consistent with Khan (2025) on the contribution of women legislators to policy on women's rights and welfare.

A case, a woman had to complain about a man from a politically influential family. The investigation officer was holding up on each step. I did not make the call as the case officer. It was not a formal job that I was responsible for. However, I had a meeting with the investigation officer and specifically inquired with him regarding the delay. He was unable to provide any satisfactory responses. I took it up to the DPO. I have expressed my concern in writing. The case was transferred to another prosecutor. It was turned over to prosecution. It would have been dead if I hadn't saved it. On the other hand, I was also aware that I am creating an enemy in the system by intervening. I worked it out that it was worth it.

(PP-06)

PP-06 sets out the calculation behind advocacy. She intervened in a case for which she had no formal responsibility, put her concern in writing and raised it through a formal channel. Her own words present this as a weighed risk rather than a moral impulse: she knew she was making an enemy within the institution and judged it worth the cost. Of the sixteen practices this is the most direct in relation to the SDG 16 target on equal access to justice, and it was carried out at personal cost.

All three accounts run through a formal channel and leave a written record. Advocacy here is itself a form of formalization: the participant converts a situation into a document the institution has to answer. In each case the cost falls on the individual and is named. This is also the group where documentary corroboration is most attainable, since two of the three outcomes could be checked against existing records.

9.6 Authority route and what it decides

Table 1 sets the sixteen practices side by side. It records the SDG 16 target each most plausibly served, the authority route the participant had to take, the outcome she reported, and whether the practice was embedded in anything separable from her. Target coding and route coding are the researcher's readings.

Table 1*Theme One Practices: Target, Authority Route, Outcome and Embodiment*

Code	Practice	SDG target	16	Authority route	Outcome as reported	Embodied in
HE-04	Publishes departmental minutes	16.6, 16.7		A Own unit	Junior staff begin attending	Instrument
HE-11	Written promotion rubric circulated before the cycle	16.6, 16.b		B Vice Chancellor's consent	Three previously passed-over women promoted	Instrument
POL-07	Invites classroom teachers to committee hearings	16.7		C Peer norm; chair's tolerance	Some colleagues adopt the practice	Informal norm
PP-03	Seven-day status call to complainants	16.3, 16.6		A Own office	Reported 40% rise in cases reaching investigation	Instrument
HE-16	Separate dialogue to restore working relations	16.7 (loosely)		A Own faculty	Working relations restored; dispute unresolved	Personal practice
POL-13	Informal cross-party mediation on a stalled bill	16.7		C Invited by chair	Bill passed; unacknowledged role	Personal practice
PP-14	Community visits; female-staffed liaison desk	16.1, 16.7		A Own division	Three tip-offs leading to arrests	Instrument and personal
HE-08	Refuses to re-evaluate an examination outcome	16.5 (loosely), 16.6		A Contested by Vice Chancellor	Similar requests stop	Personal practice
POL-05	Votes against party line after consultation	16.6, 16.7		C Party discipline	Lost committee seat; constituency trust (a cost)	Personal practice
PP-09	Continues an investigation despite pressure	16.3, 16.5		B Superior's pressure	Case prosecuted; later transferred	Personal practice
HE-03	One-page budget summary to faculty	16.6, 16.10		A Own department	Faculty comment only; no outcome stated	Routine
POL-18	Public page on committee work and votes	16.7, 16.10		A Independent of party	Constituent feedback; no outcome stated	Personal platform
PP-12	Public performance board outside the station	16.6, 16.10		A Own station	Officers take over updating it	Instrument
HE-19	Workload data and memo to the Dean	16.b, 16.7		B Dean's decision	Disparity reduced next semester	Record

Code	Practice	SDG target	16	Authority route	Outcome as reported	Embodied in
POL-02	Amendment phasing a qualification requirement	16.b, 16.7		C Committee and assembly majority	Amendment passed	Legislative instrument
PP-06	Written escalation of a delayed case	16.3		B District Police Officer	Case reassigned and prosecuted	Record

Note. Targets follow United Nations (2015): 16.1 reduce violence; 16.3 rule of law and equal access to justice; 16.5 reduce corruption; 16.6 effective, accountable and transparent institutions; 16.7 responsive and inclusive decision-making; 16.10 public access to information; 16.b non-discriminatory laws and policies. Route A = exercised inside the participant's own sphere; B = required a superior's approval; C = depended on peers or a collective. All outcomes are as reported by the participant; none was verified against a document.

The fourth column is the important one. Eight practices followed route A, four route B and four route C. This is the central analytic result of the analysis, and it is easy to misread as a statement about women. It is not.

On route A no one's permission was required. The participant could publish minutes, start a calling system, post a board or circulate a budget because the decision was already sat inside her authority. Eight of the sixteen practices are of this kind, and they were also the quickest to show an effect: HE-04 reports one after two months, PP-12 after six. The limit of route A is as clear as its advantage. The practice reaches exactly as far as the participant's own sphere. A department noticeboard can change department. It cannot change a university, and nothing on route A can.

On route B the practice existed because one person above the participant agreed to it. There are four such cases: HE-11 needed the Vice Chancellor, HE-19 the Dean, PP-06 the District Police Officer, and PP-09 acted against a superior's pressure. Route B reaches further than route A, a promotion policy for a whole cycle, a workload policy for a department, but it depends on one person's continuing agreement. When that person moves, the successor has no obligation to maintain anything. This was not anticipated by the literature reviewed in Section 6, and it is the most useful finding for policy, because it is a small administrative matter with a large effect.

On route C the practice depended on peers or a collective decision. There are four cases, and all four are in politics: POL-07 had to persuade colleagues to tolerate and then copy a change in committee practice; POL-13 was invited by a chair and worked across party lines; POL-02 needed a committee and an assembly majority; POL-05 ran against party discipline and lost her committee seat. Politics distributes authority collectively rather than hierarchically, which is why route C clusters there. Route C is also the only route that changed a rule outside the participant's own unit, and the route with the highest cost of failure.

Reading the table this way changes the question the study is asking. It is not that some of these women acted and others did not; all sixteen acted in a way adequate to their situation. What differed

was the room available. A participant with route A authority over a meaningful rule can change that rule tomorrow. A participant whose authority ends at her own office can create a good practice that ends with her. The difference is produced by the distribution of authority inside the institution, not by the participant.

9.7 Outcomes, embodiment and gatekeeper dependency

Three further results follow from the table. The first concerns outcomes. Thirteen of the sixteen accounts report a concrete outcome: five of six in higher education, three of five in politics and policy, and all five in policing. The police result is striking and is probably part a property of the field. Policing produces countable things, prosecutions, arrests, complaints advanced to investigation, whereas a change in committee practice produces nothing that can be counted. Any comparison of leadership effectiveness across fields has to be adjusted for this, or it will overstate the field with better records.

The second concerns what practice leaves behind. Eight practices are embedded in something separable from the participant: a noticeboard, a rubric, a calling system, a liaison desk, a performance board, a workload record, a written escalation and a legislative amendment. Five are personal practices that require her presence. Three falls between. Whether the embedded ones have in fact survived cannot be established here, because the data were collected at a single point in time and record adoption rather than continuation. Durability is therefore a hypothesis in this analysis, not an observation. The interview guide asks about it directly and those answers have not yet been reported.

The third concerns dependency. All four route B practices depended on one named individual. The Vice Chancellor and PP-09's superior are described as men; the gender of the Dean and the District Police Officer is not stated in the accounts, and no claim is made that these gatekeepers were typically male. The point does not turn on their gender. If practice exists because one person allowed it, it is one transfer away from ending.

9.8 Leadership style and the participants' own vocabulary

The guide contains no question asking participants to describe their own leadership style, so no claim about style can rest on self-description. Reading the sixteen practices against the six-style typology is therefore the researcher's mapping. Three styles fit most of the practices. Servant leadership fits HE-03, HE-04, POL-07, PP-03 and PP-14, where the participant places herself at the service of people with less power. A transactional reading fits HE-11, HE-19, PP-06 and PP-12, where rubrics, boards, records and clear instructions are the means. Authentic and ethical leadership cannot be separated from this evidence and fit HE-08, POL-05 and PP-09, where a value is not traded away under pressure. Transformational and transformative feminist readings fit HE-16, HE-11, HE-19 and PP-06, where a practice brings an informal advantage to the surface.

Two conclusions and one limit follow. Effects on institutional climate appear most clearly where servants and transactional repertoires meet junior staff attending once minutes are public, officers taking over a board, committee habits changing. Rafiq et al. (2024) associate the transactional style with efficiency; in this data the transactional repertoire is carrying the accountability work, which is an empirical contribution rather than a confirmation. The limit is that the categories overlap so heavily that assigning an extract to one style misrepresents it. HE-11's rubric is transactional, servant and

transformative feminist at once. The evidence supports repertoires selected to fit a situation better than it supports styles.

A separate result concerns vocabulary. The participants used terms of their own that do not come from the Western style labels: making a record (HE-19), a reputation for fairness (HE-08), a working institution (HE-16). Each of these names is the property of an institution, not the property of a leader. That is itself a finding, and it points to the institution rather than the leader as the unit of analysis for SDG 16.

Read against the frameworks, the data supports one mechanism and qualifies two expectations. The mechanism is the one HE-11 name: a practice changes an outcome by making the reasons behind a decision open to review. This is precisely the criterion social contract theory supplies. Singh and Singh (2024) hold that an institution's legitimacy rests on whether it gives the people subject to it reasons they can see and contest. A published rubric or a posted board does more than speed a process up; it creates the conditions under which a junior colleague or a complainant can hold a decision to a standard. HE-04 reports junior staff attending once minutes became public and PP-12 reports officers taking over the board. Both can be read as an institution beginning to supply grounds for the trust it asks for.

This also corrects a claim common in the literature on women's leadership in Pakistan, that women bring transparency as a value. The data supports something more useful and less flattering. These participants made reasons reviewable. Whether they did so because they value transparency, or because a leader whose legitimacy is questioned gains more from rules that bind everyone than from discretion that requires trust, cannot be settled by an interview. The second reading follows role congruity theory and is offered as an interpretation.

Transformative feminist leadership is qualified rather than confirmed. The framework describes leadership that challenges unjust power systems and works collectively. A few practices fit, HE-19's workload record, HE-11's rubric, PP-06's escalation. Most do not. The accounts describe individuals acting within the limits of their own authority, not collective challenge, and that is because the framework states an aspiration rather than a description of this practice. On the evidence here, the framework is better used to specify what institutions would have to permit than to score what these women did.

The second qualification concerns scale. Almost every accountability gain reported here occurred in a department, a unit or a station. Only POL-02's amendment changed a rule outside the participant's own sphere. This matches the finding that equity interventions change practice without changing governance systems. The contribution of female leadership to SDG 16 in this data is therefore real, local and, in eight of sixteen cases, lodged in an instrument that might outlast its author, in five cases dependent on her remaining in post, and in four cases dependent on the continuing agreement of one other person.

Table 2 states the findings for Research Question 1, with the evidence tier, the caution attaching to each and what would strengthen it.

Table 2*Findings for Research Question 1*

No.	Finding	Tier	Condition or caution	What would strengthen it
F1.1	Across the three fields, participants described practices corresponding to SDG 16 targets for accountable institutions, access to justice and inclusion; 13 of 16 accounts report an outcome	2	Accounts of success were invited by the guide; the extracts illustrate rather than count	Coded prevalence across all 60 transcripts; answers on what each participant's leadership changed
F1.2	The practices that produced accountability gains work by making the reasons for a decision reviewable, not by changing the rule	2, 3	Stated explicitly by HE-11; inferred for the remainder	Promotion criteria, minutes and case records set against the accounts
F1.3	Those gains are almost entirely confined to the participant's own unit	2	One exception (POL-02)	Evidence of any practice adopted institution-wide
F1.4	The reach of a practice is set by its authority route: eight own-sphere, four gatekeeper-dependent, four collective	3	Route coding is the researcher's reading of the transcript	Route coded by a second coder across all 60 transcripts
F1.5	Integrity under pressure carried a cost that differed by field	2	Three cases; the guide elicits such accounts from everyone	Posting and committee records; accounts of blocked change
F1.6	Styles co-occur; a repertoire pairing an accountability instrument with attention to the less powerful is associated with unit-level climate change	3	No style question in the guide; the typology is imposed	Two-coder style coding across all transcripts

10. Conclusion

Sixteen women in three different public institutions in Punjab described practices that bear on the targets of SDG 16, and thirteen of the sixteen report a concrete outcome. The practices are heterogeneous in appearance and alike in mechanism. They make the reasons behind a decision open to review. That is a narrower and more testable claim than the claim that women bring transparency to institutions, and it is the first contribution of this article.

The second contribution is the answer to the question of reach. What limited these practices was not the ability or the intent of the participants, but the authority attached to their posts. Eight practices lay inside the participant's own sphere and went no further than it. Four required one named superior's consent, reached further, and remained one transfer away from ending. Four depended on peers or a collective, carried the highest cost of failure, and produced the only change to a rule outside the participant's own unit. If this is right, the central problem of female leadership and institutional development in Pakistan is not that women do not act. It is that the space in which they are permitted to act is small.

That reframing has a practical consequence. Widening the authority attached to a post, and removing the requirement for one individual's consent, are administrative changes rather than cultural ones. So is requiring that reasons be recorded where decisions are taken about people. Both follow from the findings rather than from a general commitment to gender equality, and both can be done by an institution without new legislation.

The limits are substantial and should govern how the findings are used. No document was examined, so almost every outcome in Table 1 rests on what a participant reported to an interviewer. Several of those claims are checkable and should be checked: workload records for HE-19's disparity, promotion records for HE-11's three promotions, station registers for PP-03's forty per cent, the legislative record for POL-02's amendment, posting records for PP-09's transfer. Some questions in the guide carry an answer inside the question, so where a finding arises in answer to one of those, it is the participant's interpretation of a frame the interviewer supplied. Thirty-five of the sixty participants are quoted in the parent study and sixteen here, one extract each, which gives breadth and forgoes the depth a phenomenological analysis would ordinarily provide. Durability is a hypothesis, because the data record adoption at a single moment and not continuation. And the authority route coding, which carries the main argument, was done by one coder.

Three pieces of work would settle most of this. A documentary pass on the records named above would move the outcome claims from report to record. A second coder on the authority route across all sixty transcripts would test the eight-four-four distribution. And a follow-up on whether the eight embedded practices are still running would convert the durability hypothesis into an observation. Until then the findings are best read as propositions: that female leadership reaches SDG 16 through instruments that make reasons reviewable, and that the distribution of authority inside an institution, rather than the style or the values of the leader, decides how far that reach extends.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Twenty-Question Schedule

Female Leadership, Institutional Development, and SDG 16 in Punjab, Pakistan

1. What This Guide Is For

This guide generates the primary data of the study. It has twenty questions in six sections and is used with all participants in the three institutional fields: public-sector universities, political and policy-making institutions, and the Punjab Police. The twenty core questions are the same for everyone. The probes under each question differ by field and are marked HE for higher education, POL for politics and policy, and PP for the Punjab Police. A probe with no marking applies to all three.

Keeping the twenty questions identical across the three fields is what makes the comparison in Research Question 3 possible. If each field was asked different questions, differences between the fields could not be separated from differences between the instruments.

The guide was developed and tested against a set of sixty synthetic interview examples prepared for coding practice. Those examples are not data and no finding rests on them, but working through them showed what each question yields and where a question produces nothing useful. Several features of this guide come directly from that exercise and are noted where they occur.

2. How to Use the Guide

The guide is a schedule, not a script. The twenty questions are asked by everyone, in this order unless the participant takes the conversation somewhere that makes a later question natural now. The probes are prompts for the interviewer and are used only where the participant has not already covered the ground. Several of the most useful accounts come from material the guide did not anticipate, so the interviewer should follow the participant and return to the schedule afterwards.

2.1 Ask for events, not opinions

Every question asks for something that happened. A general question about leadership style produces a general answer, and the answer is usually the one the participant thinks a researcher wants. What she did when a post felt vacant, when a complaint was filed, or when an instruction came from above is the evidence this study needs, and it is not available through questions about leadership philosophy. If a participant answers in general terms, the interviewer asks for the most recent occasion.

2.2 Three standing probes

Three probes apply to every question in the guide and are not repeated under each one.

How do you know? Used whenever a participant states an outcome. It asks what she observed, what was recorded, and what she is inferring. The distinction between what a leader saw and what she concluded is what allows the analysis to grade its evidence, and without this probe the two arrive in the transcript indistinguishable. Who had to agree? Used whenever a participant describes an action. It establishes whether she could decide the matter herself, whether she needed a superior's approval, or whether it required colleagues acting together. This is the single most productive probe in the guide.

Is it still in place? Used whenever a participant describes a change she made. A change that survives its author has altered the institution. The change that ends when she is transferred has not.

2.3 Do not supply gender explanation

When a participant describes being treated badly, the interviewer does not ask whether it was because she is a woman. She is asked what she thinks explains it, and the alternatives she raises are recorded alongside the gender explanation if she raises that too. In the development exercise the most careful answers were the ones that named more than one possible cause, and a leading question removes them.

2.4 Keep SDG 16 out of the interview until Q19

The Sustainable Development Goals are the researcher's analytical vocabulary and not the participants. A senior official asked directly about SDG 16 will usually produce an answer prepared for a different audience. Sections A to E therefore ask about accountability, fairness, information and trust in ordinary institutional language, and the term is introduced only at Q19. At that point the interviewer records whether the participant already knew the term or was hearing it explained, because an answer given after an explanation is a different kind of evidence from one given without it.

2.5 Language and pace

The interview is conducted in Urdu or English as the participant prefers, and participants commonly move between the two. Section C is the most sensitive part of the schedule and should not be rushed. Where a participant falls silent the interviewer waits rather than moving on, since in the development exercise the pause was often followed by the most specific account in the interview.

3. Before the Interview

3.1 Briefing, reading aloud or given in writing

"Thank you for agreeing to take part. Before we begin, I will explain what the study is about and what taking part involves.

This research looks at the experiences of women in senior positions in Punjab's public institutions. I am speaking with women in universities, in the legislatures and policy bodies, and in the police. The study is for a PhD thesis. Taking part is voluntary. You may stop at any time, for any reason, with no consequence of any kind. You do not have to answer any questions. Everything you tell me is confidential, your name and your institution will not appear anywhere, and identifying details will be changed before the material is used.

With your permission I would like to record the interview. The recording is used only for transcription and analysis. If you want me to stop recording at any point, say so and I will stop.

I will send your transcript back to you before I analyse anything, so you can correct it or remove any part of it.

Do you have any questions? Are you happy to go ahead?"

Note. Written consent is taken on the form at Appendix A before the recorder is switched on. If the participant declines recording, take detailed notes and write an extended account immediately afterwards, as close to verbatim as memory allows.

3.2 Interview record, completed by the researcher

Item	Detail
Participant code	HE-__ / POL-__ / PP-__
Field	Higher education / Politics and policy / Punjab Police
Current role and years in it	
Route into the post	Appointed / Promoted / Elected / Reserved seat / Other
Date and place	
Language	Urdu / English / Both
Duration	
Recorded	Yes / No / In part
Knew the term SDG 16 before Q19	Yes / No (completed after the interview)
Transcript returned	Date: _____ Comments received: Yes / No

4. Section A: Route, Authority and Self-Understanding

Purpose. To establish how the participant reached her position, what she can actually decide, and how her understanding of her own role has changed. Q2 is the most important question in the guide and the rest of the interview is read against it.

Q1. Leadership journey. How did you come to be in your present position? Take me through the path.

RQ2 / SDG 16.7 inclusive decision-making

Probes

- What roles came before this one, and how long in each?
- Was there a particular appointment, posting or decision that mattered most?
- Did anyone encourage or sponsor you, and did that make a difference?
- Was there a point at which you nearly did not continue?
- [HE] Did you move into administration from teaching, from research, or from a coordinating role?
- [POL] How did you first enter politics or policy work, and on what basis do you hold your present seat or post?
- [PP] How did you enter the service, and how were you moved into a senior role?

Q2. Authority. In your present role, what can you decide yourself, what needs someone else's approval, and what needs other people to agree with you?

RQ1, RQ2 / SDG 16.6 effective and accountable institutions

Probes

- Take one recent decision and tell me who had to sign it.
 - Is there anything you are formally responsible for but cannot actually decide?
 - Do people outside the institution assume you have more authority than you do?
 - [HE] Where do teaching allocation, recruitment and spending each sit?
 - [POL] Where does the real decision on a policy or an allocation get made, and are you in the room?
 - [PP] What falls inside your own command, and what needs approval from above or from another unit?
- ##### **Q3. Leadership identity. Can you describe something that happened in this role that changed how you understood the job, or changed what you thought you could do?**

RQ1

Probes

- What did you assume before, and what did you think afterwards?
- Did it change how you actually work, or only how you see the work?
- [HE] Was there a point at which you realised that being approachable was not the same as the process being sound?
- [POL] Was there a point at which you realised that a programme was not reaching the people it was designed for?
- [PP] Was there a point at which you realised that an instruction was being followed in form but not in substance?

5. Section B: Fairness, Information and Complaints

Purpose. To generate accounts of ordinary institutional practice: how allocations are made, how disagreements are settled, how information reaches people, and what happens when someone complains. These four are the practical content of SDG 16 inside an institution.

Q4. Fairness. Tell me about something you did to make an allocation or a decision in your area fairer. What was the situation?

RQ1 / SDG 16.7, 16.b

Probes

- What was the position before you changed it?
- Who gained, and did anyone lose?
- What did it not fix?
- [HE] Think about supervision allocation, teaching load, funding or conference travel.
- [POL] Think about eligibility rules, outreach to areas that were being missed, or the evidence used in an assessment.
- [PP] Think about duty rotation, access to training, or how cases are reviewed.

Q5. Conflict. Tell me about a disagreement or conflict you had to deal with. What did you do?

RQ1 / SDG 16.1, 16.3

Probes

- Who was involved and how did it start?
- What did you base your decision on?
- Did you record the reason anywhere?
- Was anyone still dissatisfied at the end?
- [HE] Think about a dispute over workload, a course allocation, or a disciplinary matter.
- [POL] Think about a disagreement over priorities, over a measure, or between a standard rule and local conditions.
- [PP] Think about a dispute between units, an unclear handover, or a case where responsibility was contested.

Q6. Information access. How do the people affected by your decisions find out what the rules are and why a decision went the way it did?

RQ1 / SDG 16.10 public access to information

Probes

- What have you changed about that?
- Who still does not get the information, and why not?
- Is anything published, or is it explained individually when someone asks?
- [HE] Think about admission rules, assessment criteria, or how a decision is communicated to students.
- [POL] Think about how a policy or an entitlement is explained to people outside the institution.
- [PP] Think about what a complainant is told about what will happen next and how long it will take.

Q7. Complaints. Tell me about a complaint or a grievance that came to you. What happened to it?

RQ1 / SDG 16.3, 16.6

Probes

- Was the complaint about a person or about the process?
- What could you actually do about it, and what was outside your reach?
- Did anything change afterwards so that it would not happen again?
- Has a complaint ever been upheld against your own office?
- [HE] Think about a missed deadline, a marking dispute, or an administrative error.
- [POL] Think about an eligibility refusal, a lost document, or a decision the person believed was wrong.
- [PP] Think about conduct, delay, or a case that did not progress.

6. Section C: Pressure, Resistance and What Lasts

Purpose. To explore pressure from above and outside, challenges to the participant's authority, the part played by informal arrangements, and whether what she built survived. This is the most sensitive section of the guide and carries most of the evidence for Research Question 2.

Q8. Competing pressures. Tell me about a time when you were under pressure to do something you did not think was right, or to report something more favourably than the evidence allowed.

RQ2 / SDG 16.5 reduce corruption

Probes

- Where did the pressure come from, and was it explicit or understood?
- What did you do?
- What did it cost you, if anything?
- Has that changed how you handle the same situation now?
- [HE] Think about enrolment targets, a programme someone wanted launched, or a request from a senior colleague.
- [POL] Think about a launch date, a coverage figure, or pressure to present a finding in a particular way.
- [PP] Think about a target, a request on behalf of someone, or pressure to close a matter quickly.

Q9. Continuing changes. Of the changes you have made, which are still working now, and which stopped? Why?

RQ1, RQ3 / SDG 16.6

Probes

- Was the change written into a rule or a procedure, or did it depend on you?
- Was anyone given the job of keeping it going?
- Did a committee or a formal body adopt it?
- What happened when you were away, or when staff changed?

Q10. Questioned authority. Has your authority or a decision of yours been challenged? Tell me what happened.

RQ2

Probes

- Who challenged it, and in what setting?
- Was it done openly or indirectly?
- What do you think explains it? Are there other possible explanations?
- How did you respond at the time, and would you respond the same way now?
- [HE] Think about a senior colleague questioning a change to an established arrangement.
- [POL] Think about your expertise or your mandate being questioned in a meeting or in public.
- [PP] Think about an instruction being tested, or someone going around you to a colleague.

Q11. Informal decisions. How much gets settled informally in your institution, before or outside the formal process? What does that do to people without the right contacts?

RQ2 / SDG 16.5, 16.7

Probes

- Give me an example of something that was effectively decided before the formal meeting.
- Who benefits from working that way?
- Have you tried to bring any of it into the record? What happened?
- Are there things you can only get done informally?

Q12. Failed changes. Tell me about something you tried to change that did not work.

RQ2

Probes

- What was the obstacle, and where did it come from?
- Was the problem the design, the resources, or the resistance?
- What would have had to be different?

- Did you try again in another form?

7. Section D: Conditions

Purpose. To establish the material conditions the participant works in, how gender bears on her position, and who has helped her. These three determine how much of what she described in Sections B and C was possible at all.

Q13. Resources. What do you not have enough of, and what does that prevent?

RQ2 / SDG 16.a strengthen institutions

Probes

- Staff, budget, time, space, equipment, records: which is the binding one?
- What do you do instead, and what does that cost elsewhere?
- Is there knowledge held by one person that would be lost if they left?
- [HE] Think about vacant administrative posts, teaching capacity, or the condition of records.
- [POL] Think about staff for oversight or analysis, the timing of funds, or capacity in the field.
- [PP] Think about personnel for follow-up, the cost of transfers, or gaps in institutional memory.

Q14. Gender. Does being a woman change how you are treated in this role, or what you are able to do? If so, how?

RQ2 / SDG 16.b non-discriminatory practice

Probes

- Can you give me an occasion rather than a general impression?
- Are there other explanations for what happened on that occasion?
- Are there situations in which it works in your favour?
- Do you think women in your field have the same experience as each other?
- Does anything else about your position matter as much, or more?

Q15. Support. Who has actually been useful to you in this role, and what did they do?

RQ2

Probes

- Was the help practical or was it encouragement? Which mattered more?
- Was it someone senior, a peer, or someone junior to you?
- Has a woman colleague made a difference, and has a male colleague?
- Has anyone told you something you did not want to hear that turned out to be right?
- Is the support you had available to the women coming after you?

8. Section E: Approach, Values and What Should Change

Purpose. To let the participant describe how she works and what she thinks matters, after the interview has already established what she actually did. Asking these questions earlier produces a self-description that the rest of the interview then has to be read against.

Q16. Leadership approach. Looking back over your time in senior roles, how has the way you work changed?

RQ1

Probes

- What did you do early on that you would not do now?
- What do you now decide yourself, and what do you push back to the people whose job it is?
- How do you handle a situation where you are not sure of the right answer?
- What do you do when you have to act on incomplete information?

Q17. Values. What do you insist on in the way your office works, even when it is inconvenient?

RQ1 / SDG 16.3, 16.7

Probes

- Give me an instance where you held to it at a cost.
- Can a junior person disagree with you openly? What happens if they do?
- Is there a tension between respect for seniority and people being able to ask questions? How do you manage it?
- Does anything in your own background or belief shape how you approach this?

Q18. Proposed change. If you could change one thing about how your institution works, what would it be?*RQ2, RQ3 / SDG 16.6**Probes*

- Why this rather than something else?
- Who would have to agree, and who would resist?
- Has it been tried? What happened?
- Is it a change of rule, of resources, or of practice?

09. Section F: Outcomes and Closing Reflection

Purpose. To ask directly about effects and about the evidence for them, and to close by asking the participant to advise on the research itself. SDG 16 is named for the first time in this section.

Q19. Effects and SDG 16. Thinking about everything we have discussed, what has actually changed as a result of your work, and how would you know?*RQ1, RQ3 / SDG 16 overall**Probes*

- What can you point to: a record, a number, something someone told you, something you observed?
- What do you believe changed that you cannot demonstrate?
- Could anything else explain it?
- Who would be able to tell me whether it made a difference?

Only after the participant has answered the above, say:

"There is an international framework called Sustainable Development Goal 16, which covers peaceful and inclusive institutions, access to justice, reducing corruption, accountable and transparent decision-making, and giving people a say. Is that a term you have come across?"

Record the answer. Then, whether she knows it, ask:

"Does any of what you have described seem to you to connect with that, and if so, where? And where would you say it does not?"

Q20. Closing reflections. What should I be asking that I have not asked, and who else should I be speaking to?*RQ3**Probes*

- Is there anything in your account that you think I may have taken too favourably?
- Who would give me a different picture of the same events?
- Which cases or people are missing if I only speak to leaders?
- Is there anything important about your experience that none of my questions reached?
- Optional, where time allows: how do you think the experience of women leading in your field compares with the other two?

Closing

"Thank you. I will transcribe this and send you the relevant parts within three weeks so you can correct anything or remove anything. Please contact me at any time if you want to add something or withdraw from the study."

Ten questions serve Research Question 1, ten serve Research Question 2, and four serve Research Question 3. The totals exceed twenty because five questions serve more than one. Five questions carry no SDG 16 target because they are about the conditions under which the leader works rather than about an institutional outcome, and they earn their place by explaining the answers to the questions that do.

9.1 A note on Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asks how experiences across the three fields converge and diverge. Only four questions serve it directly, and that is intentional rather than an oversight.

No individual participant can compare the three fields. A dean knows universities. An officer knows the police. Asking any of them to compare their field with the others produces an impression rather than evidence, and an impression formed largely from what they have read or heard. The comparison that answers Research Question 3 is made by the researcher across the sixty interviews, by applying the same twenty questions in all three fields and then reading the three sets of answers against each other. That is why the twenty questions are identical for everyone, and it is the main reason the schedule must not be varied by field beyond the probes.

The optional probe at the end of Q20 is included because participants sometimes volunteer a comparison and it is worth recording when they do. It is not the evidence base for Research Question 3 and should not be reported as though it were.

10. Interviewer's Checklist

To be worked through at the end of each interview, before leaving.

Check

- ☐ Consent form signed and a copy given to the participant
- ☐ Route into the post recorded on the interview record
- ☐ Q2 produced concrete examples of all three kinds of authority, not a general answer
- ☐ Every stated outcome was followed by the question of how she knows
- ☐ Every change she described was followed by the question of whether it is still in place
- ☐ Whether she knew the term SDG 16 before Q19 is recorded
- ☐ Q18 answered in full, with who would have to agree and who would resist
- ☐ Q20 asked properly rather than as a closing courtesy
- ☐ Contact details for the transcript check confirmed
- ☐ Field note written up the same day, including what could not be asked and why