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E-Governance Without Inclusion: Are Digital Employment Policies Reaching Educated Women in Erstwhile FATA?

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to examine whether digital employment policies and e-governance initiatives are effectively reaching educated women in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. Based on a mixed-methods case study of seven previous FATA districts, the research results show that there is weak awareness of government digital employment initiatives, the distribution of access to useful digital tools is uneven, and digital skills are still weak among educated women. The socio-cultural norms and the household control of technology also limit the participation of women in online work. These results demonstrate a trend of e-governance without inclusion, in which national policy commitments to digital inclusion and gender equality are failing to be translated into actual opportunities for women in the erstwhile FATA. This article finds that despite the expansion of digital governance initiatives, many educated women face challenges related to limited digital literacy, inadequate internet infrastructure, socio-cultural restrictions, and insufficient policy outreach.

Keywords: *E-governance, Digital employment policies, gender responsive policy, educated women, erstwhile fata gendered digital divide*

INTRODUCTION

Digital services and skills programs have become the pillars of the development and employment policy in Pakistan that are expected to make the country more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Digital Policy 2018-2023 clearly focuses on better access and services by women, youth, and marginalised groups, including the recently merged districts that, previously, belonged to Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Ahmad and Khan (2025) argue in Gendered Governance and Social Inclusion in Post-Merger Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that policy and field research caution that constitutional and institutional principles of gender equality may not be implemented in effective opportunities for women in conservative and post-conflict contexts.

In the erstwhile FATA, access to education, employment, and public space has increased with the merger of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but still, the social norms about women in the area, the insufficient infrastructure, and the weakness of the local level governance restrict women. On this front, digital employment policies that are part of e-governance are commonly viewed as a low-

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cost and scalable means of connecting educated women to formal and remote work. Nonetheless, it has emerged that most of them are still urban-centric, technological, and socially indifferent and do not reflect the realities of women in post-merger districts (National Commission on the Status of Women, 2023).

The main argument of this study is that the adoption of e-governance and digital employment policies in Pakistan does not necessarily guarantee inclusive access to economic opportunities for all its citizens. Although digital governance aims to make governance more efficient, transparent, and employment-friendly, educated women in the erstwhile FATA are still facing structural, technological and socio-cultural barriers in accessing digital economy. Current research indicates that the lack of access to technologies is not the only factor influencing digital exclusion, gender norms, education disparities, rural-urban divides and gaps in policy implementation are also crucial determinants (Jamil, 2021). Likewise, studies related to gender digital divide in Pakistan show that the access of women to digital tools is having a significant impact on their entry into the labor market, however, institutional and socio-cultural barriers are still limiting access to digital tools by women (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023). Thus, this study suggests that if there is a failure in targeted inclusion measures, the policy of digital employment can inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities, especially among the educated women of the erstwhile FATA marginalised districts.

The research question in this paper is: *Are digital employment policies embedded in e-governance really reaching educated women in erstwhile FATA, or do they continue to be largely symbolic and exclusionary in practice?* The study uses a mixed-methods case study of seven former FATA districts, including Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan, to examine the relationship between awareness, access, digital skills, and socio-cultural norms and the role of these factors in determining women's participation in digital governance-based employment initiatives. The paper is placed within the context of the debate surrounding the development and implementation of the public policy, as it seeks to understand the underlying factors that may lead to increased or decreased gendered exclusion within the erstwhile FATA region of Pakistan through the framework of e-governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan: Digital Governance Landscape

Over the last decade, Pakistan has undertaken major progress in integrating digital governance in its public policy framework. Digital Pakistan Policy contains a generalised vision of e-government, such as online provision of services to citizens, e-identities, e-tax, and digital labour market (Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, 2018, p. 12). Online portals and mobile-based interfaces have been brought to the youth through parallel programs like the Kamyab Jawan Programme and provincial e-skills training programs to help bridge the gap between the youth and the jobs and training. Such changes are indicative of a more general policy change in terms of utilising digital instruments as a means of administrative efficiency, rather than economic inclusion.

However, e-governance is still not evenly implemented in all provinces and regions. This implies that there are policies in place, but their physical effects are very different in different places and infrastructures. Urban centres (Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad) have stronger internet-

based penetration and the developed ecosystem of digital services, whereas the rural and conflict-affected regions have weaker connectivity, lower technical capacity and less trust among citizens in the online services (NCSW, 2023, p. 35). Consequently, the citizens living in the less developed regions cannot enjoy the similar benefits of digital governance programs.

Since 2018, when the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were incorporated into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the incorporation of the digital governance infrastructure into the previously semi-autonomous areas has become one of the key policy issues (PIDE, 2022). This shift has provided new possibilities for reform and revealed underlying structural inadequacies that constrain successful policy realisation.

Socio-Economic Position of Women in Erstwhile FATA

Akhter, Lakhvi, and Munir (2024) highlight in Rituals and Challenges regarding Women in Ex-FATA Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that erstwhile FATA has long been underrepresented in terms of facilities, education, and formal jobs compared to other portions of Pakistan. This is the historical marginalisation that has greatly influenced the socio-economic reality of the region, especially among women. In this scenario, the women have been doubly disadvantaged by the conservative social norms, lack of mobility and access to the available space.

Women's education and literacy have been gradually improving in recent years. The growth in the number of educated women in ex-FATA districts is due to increased enrollment at the primary and secondary stages as well as to higher education and increased access to higher education (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022, Table 4.7; NCSW, 2023, p. 41). This means that there is a positive transformation of the attitudes of society towards female education and that women have the potential to contribute more to the economy.

Nevertheless, these gains are not sufficient to withstand the shift to formal employment. Such a disparity is an expression of structural inefficiencies in the labour market, besides limited opportunities for women. Most of the educated women are forced into early marriage, housework, and cultural values that do not favour the workforce. Such limitations curtail their participation in the labour market, even where they have the relevant qualifications.

Moreover, according to the National Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan, local labour markets in these areas tend to be informal, male-dominated, and geographically limited. This generates a disparity between the level of education and the level of employment, and has many women being underutilised. Digital employment can be viewed as an opportunity in this kind of environment, as it is flexible and offers the chance of home-based work. Nevertheless, its successes are hinged on the availability of these opportunities and their suitability to the socio-cultural realities of women.

Gendered Digital Divide

Gendered digital divide is pronounced in Pakistan, where women are much less likely to access, own, and use digital technologies than men. This gap is observed especially in the rural and conservative areas, where smartphone ownership and mobile internet usage are significantly low as compared to those of males (GSMA, 2023). This means that not all people have access to technology, and it is a subject of gendered inequalities.

Notably, the gap is not restrictive to access, but also skills, usage, and outcomes. This gap is conditioned by the measures of structural factors that lack digital literacy training, exposure to technology, and financial dependence (Saqib & Ahmad, 2014). All this makes women unable to utilise digital tools fully, even in cases when they are accessible. Also, the socio-cultural context can tend to present the online presence of women as something improper or dangerous, further limiting their activities on the digital platform (PTA, 2024, p. 16). These impressions affirm the status quo of gender roles and demoralise women who join the online world.

These difficulties are magnified in ex-FATA settings. Lack of internet access, low enrolment of women in digital training programs and the awareness of digital opportunities in e-governance play a significant role in limiting women's access to digital opportunities (NCSW, 2023). Consequently, digital platforms that are supposed to be inclusive might not be accessible in reality.

It brings out a very important problem: digital governance does not necessarily translate to inclusion. Digital policies without the identification of structural and socio-cultural barriers will continue to perpetuate, instead of mitigating existing inequalities. It is thus critical to understand this gendered digital divide to evaluate the claim that digital employment programs are actually targeting educated women in the former FATA.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework presented in this paper is based on two theories complementing each other, namely, the capability approach and the digital divide theory. Collectively, these lenses assist in unpacking the influences of the digital employment policies vested within e-governance on the actual opportunities that educated women possess in erstwhile FATA.

The capability approach, as formulated by Amartya Sen and subsequently extended by Martha Nussbaum, changes the perspective of service access to the freedom of people to utilise services in a way that makes sense. In this respect, it assists us not only in querying whether women possess internet or online job portals, but also whether they are capable of utilising them efficiently in enhancing their job opportunities under the limitations of mobility, childcare, and family consent. A policy can offer digital technologies, and when women do not have the abilities (time, safety, skills, autonomy) to utilise them, it will be superficial. The most recent contributions to the study of governance transitions in Pakistan, such as the “FATA Future Governance Model by PIDE” and the “Merged Areas Governance Project by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)”, also point to the necessity of matching formal institutional reforms with actual freedoms of citizens to engage in the life and services of the state (PIDE, 2019; UNDP, 2021).

On the same note, Van Dijk (2005) claims that the digital divide is not only about the access to technology but also the difference in skills, use, and capacity to derive adequate benefits out of digital resources. The perspective makes the difference between connectivity and an even greater question of who is capable of being an active participant in the digital society. On the same note, Hargittai (2002) argues that disparity in online capabilities forms the second layer of the digital divide, in which people can have access to the internet yet cannot utilise it productively. In other words, a set of these arguments is aimed at stating that digital inequality is a multidimensional construct that is deeply rooted in existing social structures.

This is a gender and geographically unequal fault line within the realms of Pakistan. The GSMA (2023) and NCSW (2023) consider that women, especially those in rural and war-torn territories, are much less likely to own smartphones, have access to the internet, or be exposed to digital skills training than men and the urban population. It means that digital transformation is not benefiting everybody equally, and it is a manifestation of the current trends of exclusion.

These differences are also enhanced in erstwhile FATA. The World Bank (2022) also estimates that infrastructural and poor connectivity are still limiting digital access within the merged districts. Meanwhile, Nizamani (2019) and UCP (2019) emphasise the overall governance and institutional issues that create the context of service delivery in the region, and NDU (2019) addresses the continuity of socio-cultural restrictions on the participation of women in the public and digital sphere. This intersection causes a situation where online platforms become more accessible to men and younger people in the city, and not to women, whom they are supposed to empower.

Integrating both viewpoints, this paper critically analyses the question of whether digital employment policies in Pakistan translate into real capabilities of the educated women in the former FATA. It raises the question of whether these policies actually increase the opportunities or whether they are only repeating a preexisting digital divide of gender in the guise of e-governance.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods research design is adopted in this research project as both quantitative survey and qualitative interview data will be used to determine the extent to which the digital employment policies are available to educated women in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Mixed methods have been facilitated to comprise not just measurable tendencies (through survey information) but also detailed lived experiences (through qualitative accounts). The case study is adopted in order to bring about a thorough and context-sensitive insight into the socio-cultural and structural impediments influencing the inclusion of women in digital governance programs. The study area is the FATA region that used to be part of the former FATA region, comprising of Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan districts. The region has been selected due to the resemblance of the history of administrative marginalisation, inadequate infrastructure, low systems of service delivery, and the presence of gender inequalities.

The respondents were sampled using purposive sampling technique since the research is based on exploratory and contextual sampling. The sample size was approximately 50 educated women who had a Bachelor degree qualification or above as they are the primary target group of the national digital employment and e-skills interventions. Besides the survey, 10 semi-structured interviews with the selected participants were held in order to get deeper, more narrative-based insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges they encounter when accessing digital employment opportunities.

Quantitative data collected by the survey and analysed in the form of percentages were analysed with the help of descriptive statistics, in an attempt to determine the key trends and patterns in the sample. Qualitative data collected through the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis and thus enabled the identification of the recurring themes that were used to refer

to access, skills, socio-cultural barriers, and the perceptions of the policies. This methodology allowed the study to get the complexity of the experiences of respondents in an organised and meaningful manner.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE WITH NO INCLUSION: GROUND REALITIES IN ERSTWHILE FATA

Digital Employment Policies Awareness

The results show that there is a significant gap in the knowledge about government-led digital employment programs among educated women in former FATA areas, such as Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan. Most of the respondents (about 68 per cent) stated that they were not aware of such programs as freelancing programs, online job portals, or online skills training programs, even though such programs as Kamyab Jawan and other e-skills and online livelihood programs existed in the country. This difference means that the policy communication is not targeting the same population that it is aimed at reaching.

Respondents also tend to note that they receive information about jobs and training through informal channels such as relatives, local networks, and word of mouth rather than through formal e-governance and mass media campaigns. When one of the respondents in Bajaur said:

> *"...I am a graduate of Bachelor of Degree, and I have never heard about any government program to work online..."*
>
> **Respondent 7, Bajaur**

Likewise, in South Waziristan, one respondent commented on:

> *"...The relatives or local networks can only mention jobs; we have never heard of any opportunities available online..."*
>
> **Respondent 18 South Waziristan.**

This disposition was chiefly sharp with relatively distant and less connected districts, in which there is practically no awareness regarding digital work policy. Such absence of targeted outreach, local language campaigning, and organized information dissemination systems would indicate that in reality, digital governance is a dark spot to most educated women, yet there is often a policy claiming to be inclusive.

Technology and connectivity Accessibility

Even though there has apparently been an increase in the availability of the basic digital infrastructure, it is not even-distributed and gendered. It was reported that about 72 per cent of the respondents had access to smartphones which could be used to communicate easily and do little internet browsing. However, they only had personal access to a third of the laptops or computers which are required to conduct most forms of digital activities such as content writing, graphic designing, online learning, or data keying. This digital separation between mobile access and working digital tools bundles the spectrum of professional interaction even though there is presence of internet connectivity.

Furthermore, the access can not necessarily be converted to autonomy or meaningful use. Some of the respondents indicated that their usage of the internet and gadgets was strongly restricted by the family members especially their male relatives. One of the Khyber participants stated:

> *"...We have internet at home, but I do not have the freedom to use it as my brother is the one who is in control of the Wi Fi, and he decides when I will be allowed to use it...."*
>
> **Respondent 12, Khyber**

The same tendency was followed in Mohmand:

> *"...I have a phone that belonged to my father, which I use occasionally, but I cannot use it too long or at work..."*
>
> **Respondent 5, Mohmand**

The findings above show that power dynamics in the household are critical to the problem of digital access. Women cannot even use infrastructure where they can get it to suit the needs of their profession and permission and supervision and their culture. In practice, this means that connectivity is not an equivalent of inclusion because it is conditional upon gendered control at home.

Digital Education and Digital Skills Gap

Even though it was an official education, a significant percentage of the respondents did not have the practical digital skills required to engage in the online economy. Only 18 percent of them answered that they had undergone some form of digital training, whether it was workshops about freelancing websites, online job websites or simply skills in computers and the internet. Even people who had some training, only a tiny part of them proved to be sure about creating profiles, writing proposals, or using online markets.

One of the respondents of Mohmand pointed out the lack of connection between academic education and employability:

> *"...We did classes in college, and no one told us how to earn money online or how to work in the freelancing web sites..."*
>
> **Respondent 3, Mohmand**

And like in Kurram, one of the participants said:

> *"...How do I apply to jobs online, or where are they? I have a degree..."*
>
> **Respondent 9, Kurram**

This means that the current education system does not equip women with digital skills that could enable them to access the e-governance programs. There are very few practical courses of online entrepreneurship, communication or telecommuting technology on the list of arts, social sciences or education degrees. As a result, educated women continue to be dependent on external advice or self-training, which is rather slow, haphazard, and cannot compete in the online markets.

Socio-Cultural Barriers to Participation

In addition to technical and structural limitations, there are socio-cultural norms that are determining women in digital jobs. Approximately 61 percent of the respondents had mentioned that their family or society somehow limited them to use technology in their course of professional activities. These restrictions are often the fear of reputation, gender standards of decency, and the fear of being opened up to the Internet.

Orakzai interviewed one of the interviewees who stated:

"...Although I may be working at home, my family believes that girls cannot work online..."

Respondent 15, Orakzai

There were reputation and social norm issues that were visible in North Waziristan:

"People in our area talk a lot. They assume that bad things happen in case a girl spends all her time online."

Respondent 21, North Waziristan.

These findings highlight how even non-studio work that takes place at home is not free of gendered analysis and cultural critique. Females are also tracked, assessed or restricted in their socialisation on the Internet particularly when they chat with strangers, with foreigners or with male-dominated systems. In other cases, it may happen that families permit some use of internet to educate or communicate, but highly discourage its use to the profession or income-earning activities. This is a two-leveled dilemma; women can be practically available in the e-governance websites, but socially, unacceptable to use to seek employment.

Gaps in Policy design and implementation

The study has also revealed that a massive disconnect exists between policy-making and the actual state of affairs. On a national level, however, there are digital employment schemes, such as national e-skills programmes, freelancing support programmes, and online job matching portals, although it appears that these are more of an urban and outdated design. As a matter of fact, these policies tend to ignore the socio-cultural, infrastructural and linguistic background of the former FATA.

Such programs are never responsive to the needs of the respondents. One of the members of Kurram remarked:

"...It has government programs, but these are big city programs, not city programs as ours..."

Respondent 9, Kurram

On the same note, one of the respondents, who lived in South Waziristan, commented:

"...There is no training facilities here, there is no one to train us how to start the job online..."

Respondent 22, South Waziristan.

These observations indicate that digital governance policies are mostly supply-oriented as opposed to demand-sensitive. They are of the opinion that platforms would be created, and users will arise, without sufficient investment in:

- local language interfaces,
- offline support hubs,
- culturally aware awareness programs,
- or community-based digital literate educators.

Moreover, gender sensitive planning is not highly visible; very few programs are targeting women in conflict or in the merged region in specific and there are even fewer providing childcare services, flexible working schedules, or safe internet rooms, which would make it a possibility. The e-governance is therefore at risk of being the top-down digital infrastructure that can bypass the women it is meant to engage.

Outcomes and Aspirations of Employment

Owing to the above-mentioned barriers, there is still little actual involvement in digital employment. Only a small fraction, approximately 10% of respondents, had reported making money via online platforms, and even among them, they made low and irregular incomes that were short-lived. Most said that they used freelancing platforms or social media-based jobs just to earn some money and not to have a steady or permanent stream of income. This implies that individual performance cannot fill in policy design and support systemic gaps.

Nevertheless, the dream to work and earn financial independence was highly manifested in every district. The majority of the respondents indicated that they wanted to earn their own money, decrease reliance on male relatives, and have some sense of agency by working. One of the respondents of North Waziristan stated:

> *"I need to get a job and be able to help my family, but I do not know where to begin."*
>
> **North Waziristan/respondent 21.**

This brings out a crucial disjuncture between the possibilities and actualisation: there is the desire, and education has grown, but the facilitating conditions are missing. Women are willing to be part of the digital economy, but they do not have the infrastructure, training, social support and policy directions to transform that desire into tangible job results. The main conclusion of the section, in this sense, is that digital governance in former FATA is nowadays "non-inclusive": it does not communicate effectively, does not respect local realities, and does not convert technological infrastructure into valuable opportunities to educated women.

DISCUSSION

The result of this research shows a sharp contrast between the discourse of inclusion in policies of national digital employment and e-governance and the reality of marginalisation of educated women in the erstwhile FATA. Although there are online job portals, freelancing

schemes, and digital skills programs, most women in the sample are unaware of these programs. They do not have the infrastructure and autonomy to use them, and are limited by social and cultural norms that undermine their ability to engage in digital work. This trend proves the main argument: e-governance in formerly FATA is used without much inclusion, not lessening, but replicating gendered inequality.

Regarding the capability approach as interpreted by Amartya Sen, the information demonstrates that the availability of digital tools cannot lead to meaningful inclusion. Even women who have access to smartphones or any internet availability usually do not have the liberty to use such technologies to get jobs due to family constraints, time constraints and fear of being ostracised by society. The theory is a reminder that we should not think that we are free because we have the means to do it, but because we can employ it in accomplishing valued functionings, such as working to earn money, developing skills, and acquiring social status. Digital governance, in this case, does not succeed at the stage of practical capabilities, and women are technically well-connected and practically only marginally empowered.

The digital divide prism also helps explain the nature of layered and gendered exclusion in the erstwhile FATA. The gap is manifested on several levels: in access (only a small part of the female population possesses a laptop or personal computer), skills and literacy (fairly few of them have had any digital employment training) and symbolic value (online work is regarded as something improper or even dangerous to girls). These dimensions are in line with larger national trends recorded in reports by NCSW and PTA, which indicated that women in conservative and rural settings had more barriers to digital engagement than men. In erstwhile FATA, such structural and cultural obstacles are enhanced by the isolation and weak governance of the region, which makes e-governance a top-down infrastructure that circumvents the same women it purports to serve.

The juxtaposition of what national instruments are offering and what women are actually receiving at the policy level is especially salient. The policy documents that include the Digital Pakistan Policy and the Digital Gender Inclusion Strategy emphasise the necessity to increase digital access, bridge the gender digital divide, and provide online employment to the youth and women. However, respondents are always talking about programs that are urban-based, insensitive to culture and programs that are geographically far away in their day-to-day lives. Most of them had never heard of government digital employment schemes, and where there was awareness, there were no close training facilities, no local facilitator, and little assistance with safe and flexible or home-based participation.

In this regard, the central conclusion of the article consists of the fact that digital governance in the former FATA is nowadays absent in inclusion. It offers technical platforms, yet it does not eliminate structural, infrastructural, and normative barriers in the way of educated women converting these platforms into actual jobs. The policy in the future should therefore not be stuck at the launching of more portals and more portals, but rather design gender sensitive, context-based and ability-expanding digital employment policies that address the realities of women in the erstwhile FATA.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research demand a change to the policy of digital employment, which is one size fits all on the internet platforms to gender specific and contextualizations such that address the facts of educated women in former FATA. It has been determined that, with limited awareness, unfair distribution, inadequate digital abilities, and significant socio-cultural obstacles, evidence suggests the following recommendations at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

National digital employment and e-governance schemes ought to be restructured with clear gender responsive and conflict-affected area protection at the federal level. This involves allocating part of the source in initiatives like Kamyab Jawan and national e-skills programs on women-specific digital jobs in KP and merged districts. Freelancing and online job portals under federal control ought to provide local language interfaces, streamlined registration procedures, and Urdu-Pashto friendliness to help desktop-first-time users. Furthermore, a gender-disaggregated monitoring framework ought to be initiated to monitor awareness, access and earnings of women who have come out of ex-FATA so that inclusion can be practised, not just written in policy text only.

On the provincial level (KP), implementation should address the gap between urban and rural areas by introducing digital employment support into the pre-existing education and vocational systems. The provincial government is required to create digital employment resource centres in at least one major town per former FATA district, with internet, basic computers, and gender segregated areas where women get to receive orderly training. Such centres must also engage with local colleges and universities to deliver short-term, practice-oriented modules of freelancing platforms, online job applications and remote working platforms, which make higher education directly connected to digital employability. The provincial governments should also liaise with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and mobile network operators to increase the affordable, women-friendly data packages and safe callback services to women-only support lines.

At the local level, community-based interventions are imperative to defeat socio-cultural resistance. Community-based digital literacy circles led by reliable local women trainers should be encouraged by local governments and development partners and take place either at schools, women's centres, or religious institutions where women are comparatively safe. To minimise conservative resistance, the focus of training as household economic resilience skill building should be presented as an alternative to jobs outside the family. Further, there should be the creation of gender sensitive helpdesks in district headquarters offices and online, where female officers can be appointed to assist women through digital employment processes, address account complications, as well as offer simple counselling on balancing online jobs with family demands. Lastly, the communities in the area must be engaged in planning and supervising projects so that the national and provincial policies are applied in accordance with the local norms and not foisted down on the locals in a foreign and authoritative way.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the practice of digital governance in erstwhile FATA is functioning more or less by exclusion, even though the country has national digital employment and e-governance programs. As observed in Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North

Waziristan and South Waziristan, educated women express high ambitions to work online and earn income, yet they fail to do so because they encounter a complex system of obstacles that do not allow them to participate. Poor knowledge about government schemes, limited access to personal devices and stable internet, ineffective digital skills educating programs and the integration of socio-cultural norms all contribute to restricting the way women can access and utilise online jobs. The results, when analysed with the help of the capability approach and the digital divide theory, demonstrate that being connected is not necessarily becoming really empowered. Women usually have to remain computerised, but with minimal hands-on freedom to utilise this opportunity for their own benefit. This means that to be gender responsive in terms of e governance that post-merger Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires, is not basically a technical infrastructure but a system whose design should be socially entrenched and gender sensitive. Until its policies explicitly respond to infrastructural loopholes, socio-cultural resistance and local power relations, digital governance in erstwhile FATA will remain a guarantee of inclusion in official documents and expansion of exclusion in reality.

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