CHAPTER 2

Contexts of a Reconstruction Site

Introduction to the Contexts

A construction site has many visible physical elements. For example, its perimeter can be marked off with a purpose-built fence or tape to keep the site secure and control visitors. Materials, vehicles, equipment, temporary structures, and personnel are all visible and moving as work starts and progresses. The site has clearly defined limits.

Outside of that site is the rest of the world. The adage that "context is everything" applies here—"context" being the broader view of factors or conditions in which something exists. The construction site exists in complex contexts that may affect or may be affected by the project; its main context is the surrounding community. The community, in turn, is the manifestation of many influences. In situations of disaster reconstruction, the complexities are almost certain to multiply.

While construction sites exist within innumerable surrounding contexts, many construction and reconstruction projects focus their efforts in the opposite direction: inward. Policy makers, planners, construction engineers, architects, and contractors might see only those contexts directly related to getting shovels in the ground—for example, weather, costs, financing, permits, or the supply of steel, concrete, and laborers. Construction projects sometimes assume themselves to be—or try to be—separate from broader sociocultural contexts, but in reality, such a disconnection is unlikely and can even be self-defeating. While an inward focus is necessary to get a project up and running, to keep it on schedule, and to maintain high-quality work, an intense inward focus creates the risk of losing sight of the other larger contexts that may determine or affect a project's outcomes.

Considering context gives rise to important questions: Will any parts of the context affect how people will relate to the project? Will they help the project? Will they resist or block it in any way? Are there tensions and conflict among them over anything related to the project? Will the project cause any problems or losses for the people? What are the strengths or ca-

pacities in the communities that the project could support or build upon? Might the people be interested in participating in or contributing to the work? Could any of these people or project behaviours affect long-term use of the new facility to be constructed?

In postquake Pakistan, even several years after the disaster, much of the reconstruction was either not started or never completed. And Pakistan is not the only country with such problems—slowed or delayed construction appears to be quite common in disaster reconstruction and can even occur on construction sites in nondisaster situations. Why and how does this happen? The reasons are many, but as disasters are expected to increase in the coming years, there will be a growing need for reconstruction and, therefore, a need to identify and understand the causes and solutions of such problems. Some of these lessons can be presented through this book's examination of PERRP.

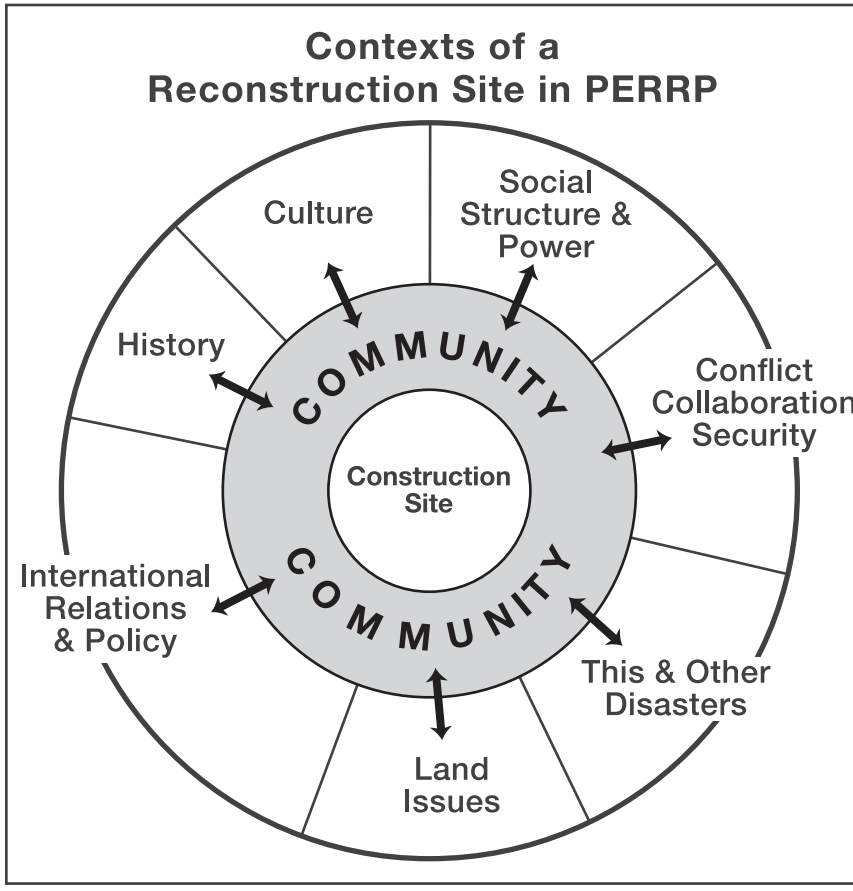

Figure 2.1. Contexts of a Reconstruction Site in PERRP. © Jane Murphy Thomas.

Interventions after disasters have often been criticized for not taking account of local contexts, especially including the affected people's culture (Cannon et al. 2014: 186). One of the main lessons is that the reduction of disaster risk involves many actors at several stages, from preparedness to reconstruction. At every stage there are different perceptions of what is taking place, most notably by the people affected and by the organizations that get involved.

This chapter shows how PERRP took local contexts into consideration. From these contextual analyses, approaches for the social program were then established and implemented; they formed the foundation of the project's community participation and were integrated with the technical aspects of the project, altogether contributing to the success of PERRP.

Context: This Quake and Other Disasters

In the event of substantial disasters like the 2005 earthquake, countries assist one another. Plans, programming, budgets, and agreements have been developed to enable such assistance. In the decades during which these agreements have evolved, countless disasters have occurred around the world: the Chernobyl disaster of 1986; the Bangladesh cyclone of 1991; the European heat wave of 2003; the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2004; Hurricane Katrina in 2005; the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011—to name just a few. After each disaster, all entities involved—governments, NGOs, academics, practitioners—gain experience and learn lessons that guide their responses to subsequent catastrophes.

This section takes a brief look at the trends and evolving understandings of hazards and disaster. Specifically, I will outline the changing emphasis from reactive emergency response to preventative approaches, vulnerability assessment, and risk reduction measures.

Trends, Status, and Changing Understanding

Disasters are increasing in number and severity around the world, resulting in more loss of life and destruction of the built and natural environment. In our time, "disaster management paradigms have, arguably, shifted from disaster relief to disaster preparedness, hazard mitigation, and vulnerability reduction" (Hidayat and Egbu 2010: 1269). Relief efforts—providing food, water, sanitation, medical treatment, and shelter immediately after the disaster—have, until recent years, been the main focus in emergencies (Bosher and Dainty 2011). While disaster relief is still in practice and essen-

tial to saving lives, disaster management emphasizes better preparation, hazard mitigation, and preventative measures to reduce losses when such events occur.

Understanding of the underlying causes of disaster-related losses has begun to change, and, to reflect these shifts, efforts are being made to update the language used to describe disasters. For example, the expression "natural disaster" is avoided in the research literature. Instead, the critical event—the hurricane, earthquake, flood, or drought—is usually referred to as a "hazard." A hazard is the event, and a disaster is the result: disaster is what happens to people, and those most likely to experience disaster in the wake of a hazard are those who are already vulnerable. As some argue, "Disasters only happen because trigger events (natural hazards) interact with vulnerable people. Hazards are only 'translated' into a disaster if there are vulnerable people to be affected by it. For example, the same hurricane can pass over three different countries in the Caribbean and have very different effects in each" (Cannon et al. 2014: 185). How is it that such events affect some people more than others?

As Chmutina et al. have pointed out, "Hazards cannot be prevented, [but] disasters can be" (2017: 3). Earthquakes, droughts, floods, storms, landslides, and volcanic eruptions are natural hazards. They lead to deaths and damage—that is, disasters—because of human acts of omission and commission, rather than the act of nature: "In effect, the new perspective asserts that disasters do not simply happen; they are caused" (Oliver-Smith 1999: 74). Moreover, as posited by Hoffman, "There is no such thing as a natural disaster. All catastrophes are human-caused at one level or another" (2020: 3).

Human acts of omission or commission are indeed the underlying causes of disaster, as was clearly visible in the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. Over seventy thousand people died and more than half a million homes, health facilities, and schools were destroyed; both common knowledge and formal studies attributed the losses to shoddy construction and unsuitable building materials. Although the applicable building codes for earthquake resistance were known in Pakistan, they were seldom enforced (Durrani et al. 2005). Braine discusses poor construction practices as but one cause of disaster: "Today's disasters stem from a complex mix of factors, including routine climate change, global warming influenced by human behavior, socioeconomic factors causing poor people to live in risky areas with inadequate disaster preparedness, and education on the part of governments as well as the general population" (2006). The underlying cause, however, is poverty. It is "one of the principal reasons why people become vulnerable to natural hazards" (Middleton and O'Keefe 1998: 4).

Vulnerability and Disaster

Vulnerability refers to "the social and economic characteristics of a person, a household, or a group in terms of their capacity to cope with and to recover from the impacts of a disaster" (Zaman 1999: 194). There are many different types of vulnerability: physical, economic, social, educational, attitudinal, and environmental. As Cannon et al. suggest, "People's vulnerability is largely determined by factors of politics (how well government functions and how power is used to benefit all citizens), economics (how income and assets are distributed and taxes used for preparedness) and society (whether some people are suffering discrimination on a gender or ethnic basis" (2014: 185).

To reduce vulnerability and reduce risks, the causes of vulnerability and risks must be overcome. Factors such as local culture, social structure, and the arrangement of power should be put at the center of this undertaking, as these factors can either act as obstacles or support disaster risk reduction.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Its Guiding Principles

Although disasters have been a field of study for several decades, recent international attempts for better understanding and practice led to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015, which was succeeded by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 under the United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). It plans to reduce disaster losses and advocates for the "substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries" (UNDRR, n.d.a). Although it has its critics, the Sendai Framework is at least a focal point that presents ideals and principles that can be built upon. The UK Department of International Development recognizes the need for this: "Good DRR not only happens well before disasters strike but also continues afterwards, building resilience to future hazards" (Palliyaguru et al. 2010: 278).

Two of the guiding principles in the Sendai Framework are "Build Back Better, for preventing the creation of, and reducing existing disaster risk," and the "empowering of local authorities and communities through resources, incentives, and decision-making responsibilities as appropriate" (UNDRR, n.d.a). These two principles underscore the rationale for technical and sociocultural experts to combine expertise in disaster-resistant reconstruction, as occurred in PERRP. Besides being able to construct new buildings to withstand future disasters, thereby reducing physical risks,

reconstruction can also be a process for local institutional building and empowerment.

Context: History, International Relations, Conflict, and Collaboration

While the history, politics, and international relations of Pakistan and the region are an enormous and highly complex subject far beyond the scope of this book, it would be remiss to avoid the subject completely. These factors play a large part in local people's daily lives, shaping their impressions, ideas, outlook, actions, and reactions, including in a postdisaster humanitarian aid project such as PERRP. Significantly, Pakistan's earthquake zone, including AJ&K, is in one of the world's most volatile locations. This section thus gives a brief background on the disaster area's historical, political, and security environment.

Independence and Partitioning

In 1947, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan became an independent country, emerging out of the partitioning of India. It is the world's fifth most populous country with a population of about 220 million, with a 60 percent rural–40 percent urban split. Pakistan is surrounded by Iran to its west, Afghanistan to its west, China to its northeast, India to its east, and the Arabian Sea to its south. Long before becoming a country, the space now known as Pakistan had a tumultuous history due largely to its strategic position between rival superpowers. For centuries, the histories of Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan have been inextricable due to the expansionist practices of Persians and Moghuls, and later the Russian and British empires. Some remnants of these intertwined histories still fester today, notably in the flash point region between India and Pakistan: Kashmir.

The Kashmir Issue

In the partitioning of India and Pakistan, the former princely state of Kashmir was split four ways. India controls both Ladahk and the State of Jammu and Kashmir, with these parts otherwise known as Indian-Administered or Indian-Occupied Kashmir. The parts controlled by Pakistan are AJ&K (also sometimes called Azad Kashmir) and Gilgit-Baltistan, with these parts often referred to as Pakistan-Administered or Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. In 1962, a fifth division occurred, with Aksai Chin and the Trans Karakoram Tract coming under the control of China. Most critically, both Pakistan and

India claim Kashmir in its entirety and have fought two wars over it. Kashmir remains one of the world's longest unresolved conflicts.

An outgrowth of the animosity between Pakistan and India is the nuclearization of both countries: "Pakistan asserts the origin of its nuclear weapons program lies in its adversarial relationship with India; the two countries have engaged in several conflicts, centered mainly on the state of Jammu and Kashmir" (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2019). Partly due to this scenario, in its short history Pakistan's government has alternated between civilian and military, with about thirty of those years under military rule by General Ayub Khan (1958–1969), General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), and General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008). It has been noted that "all three of these dictators served as presidents for many years, sometimes using flimsy elections or bizarre constitutional clauses to hide the autocratic nature of their rule" (Development and Cooperation 2018). At the same time, civilian political parties and activities have proliferated.

As shown in the maps on page xviii, PERRP was carried out in KP province's Mansehra district and in AJ&K's Bagh district; the latter having its northern, eastern, and southern borders marked by the Line of Control, which separates India and Pakistan. The earthquake zone and PERRP project area were located in a part of Pakistan where the country is at its narrowest from border to border: only about two hundred miles wide.

Although the 2005 earthquake reached partly into IAK, destruction was concentrated in AJ&K. These two parts of Kashmir are demarcated by what had been the agreed cease-fire line in 1949; in the 1972 Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan it was made the Line of Control and de facto borderline. It is along this line that the Pakistani and Indian militaries are concentrated in what is known as the most heavily militarized zone in the world. Various sources estimate that hundreds of thousands of troops are permanently located there and face occasional skirmishes across the Line of Control. These realities had many implications for the aid programs responding to the disaster, especially for the need for conflict sensitivity.

As described both above and below in the section "War on Terror," this disaster zone was already part of a historic war zone, with long-standing tensions and violence involving adjoining and surrounding countries, and internally as well, with "Pakistan [being] a prime example of a state with significant political marginalization and unequal sovereignty among its political units" (Sökefeld 2015: 174). Additionally, each of the five parts of the former princely state of Kashmir has its own characteristics. Although the majority of the population has religion in common—Islam—each part is culturally, demographically, and linguistically distinct from the other, with different histories, alliances, and politics. While there are little or no antagonistic relations between these five parts, each one has its own in-

ternal differences at the district and community levels. Pakistan's more recent decision to make Gilgit-Baltistan a province was seen as a provocation by India and a setback by Kashmiri nationalists. These complex, unresolved historical factors—including the growing issue with major water supplies for both Pakistan and India originating in Kashmir—mean that the simmering conditions could continue indefinitely.

At times, "Kashmir" appears in international news, but only in reference to IAK and to the clashes there between the Indian army, police, and Kashmiri protesters. Excluding the international media response to the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, the international media is silent about AJ&K. In Pakistan, there are distinctions between KP, which is a full-fledged province, and AJ&K, which is an internationally disputed territory. Before this disaster, international NGOs were not allowed to operate in AJ&K, and the government of Pakistan controlled what little UN and multilateral donor funding existed for development programs in AJ&K. As such, AJ&K has remained isolated, with relatively little outside contact and presence there.

Such unresolved conflict and tensions have had many implications for the aid programs responding to this disaster, especially in how they avoid creating or adding to conflict. This necessitated such projects having a high degree of conflict sensitivity and a deep understanding of the contexts in which they operate, as I describe in this chapter. Above all, as discussed in chapter 4, projects need to effectively engage in a peaceful, participatory social process.

The "War on Terror"

By the mid-twentieth century, Pakistan was playing a vital role in Cold War alliances, which was greatly heightened by the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and by the American and international backing of the resistance. The USSR withdrew its forces ten years later, but out of that situation emerged the Afghan Taliban and the Afghanistan-based Al-Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden: "The 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent US response through the invasion of Afghanistan substantially changed the security environment of South Asia, if not the whole world" (Shafiq 2015: 3). At peak numbers, about one hundred thousand foreign troops from over fifty countries were stationed in Afghanistan, close to the earthquake zone. The overall changed security environment inevitably impacted postquake humanitarian work.

The 2005 earthquake struck in Pakistan's most politically sensitive and insecure locations, at a time of pressures from both outside and inside the country. The years during which PERRP ran, 2006 through 2013, were particularly tense; adding to the tension were the effects of Al-Qaeda and the

growth and reach of the Taliban. In 2011, Osama Bin Laden was captured and killed in Abbottabad, the closest city to Mansehra, which was the location of many earthquake reconstruction offices, including PERRP's. The next year in the nearby Swat Valley, Malala Yousafzai was attacked by the Taliban for her promotion of girls' education, while at the same time, PERRP was building schools for girls and boys.

In PERRP's community participation program, there was a strong sense of apprehension and anxiety among local people: would the Taliban influence spread to and take over their communities? There was a quiet worry that they would be punished for accepting help from a country the Taliban considered an enemy. Already traditional and conservative in nature, the inhabitants responded by becoming even more cautious, especially in adhering to the customs of male/female practices.

When asked about the security situation in AJ&K, a prominent community member explained, "We never know what to expect. Trouble can come from different directions. India fires rockets into AJ&K every once in a while, and Pakistan fires back. You don't know if they will retaliate, and what will that lead to? You can't call it war, but it is not peace either."

The Human Rights Situation

Further issues of concern in the disaster response, as observed by national and international human rights organizations, were human rights violations in AJ&K. A range of reports from several sources gave similar observations. Of the reports, the most comprehensive is from Human Rights Watch, entitled "*With Friends Like These . . .*" *Human Rights Violations in Azad Kashmir* (2006). The NGO posits (6–7), "Though 'Azad' means 'free,' the residents of Azad Kashmir are anything but. Azad Kashmir is a land of strict curbs on political pluralism, freedom of expression, and freedom of association; a muzzled press, banned books; arbitrary arrest and detention and torture at the hands of the Pakistan military and the police." A Freedom House report sums it up: "The political rights of the residents of Pakistan Administered Kashmir remain severely limited" (2011: 783). These limitations come from constitutional restrictions and the strong presence of Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence. There are similar observations and conclusions in reports by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Amnesty International, the Asian Human Rights Commission, and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, among others. In sum: at the time of this disaster, the overall political and military environment was tense. With such restrictions in place, the political and security situation could have led to people being either more politicized and outspoken, or more reluctant or intimidated.

How much these factors affected people's participation in any of the reconstruction remained a question throughout the PERRP project.

Security Environment of the Disaster Zone

To recap, the earthquake zone was located in a relatively small geographic space with military presence and pressure on both the west and east sides of it. The zone also had serious internal security risks due to the historic heterogeneity within communities. This combination of security and sociocultural factors made it vital for aid programs to operate with strong conflict sensitivity, with an emphasis on cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

In such a location, where the risk of conflict to any degree is virtually normalized, such realities have implications for aid programs of any kind—but for disaster reconstruction, there can be additional risks. Importantly, construction itself can spark differences and conflict. This is especially the case in postdisaster reconstruction, when so much reconstruction is happening at once and there is extra competition for jobs, money, and precious resources such as land, water, and electricity. Such resources can become flash points, especially in regions where people already have long-standing social, cultural, and political differences.

Construction teams anywhere need to know if there is any amount of disagreement in the community—even if it appears to have little or none. In the last few decades, international sources have recognized that aid programs have special obligations in this matter. One of the main figures in this field, Mary B. Anderson (1999: 1), posed the question, "How can humanitarian or development assistance be given in conflict situations in ways that rather than feeding into and exacerbating the conflict help local people to disengage and establish alternative systems for dealing with the problems that underlie the conflict?"

In the PERRP project area, where tensions bubbled below the surface much of the time, on a day-to-day basis the normal state in communities and villages was one of calm. Therefore, equally as important as understanding the divisions, frictions, and their causes was knowing what helped to keep the peace. Who was responsible for this, and how did they do it? What were the factors that connected people? How did they collaborate? The goal, of course, needed to be to keep what calm already existed. What then could the alternative systems be for preventing or exacerbating the conflict? What could be done to alleviate underlying causes? One of PERRP's challenges was to choose strategies and tools to prevent or deal with conflict if it still happened.

While Pakistan has endured a long history of strife, the same can be said about many locations of the world, especially when examining them

closely. This should also raise more questions about disaster reconstruction projects and their operation in different security environments. Hazards and their subsequent disasters occur in countries at peace, where there may be working systems for assistance, protection, security, and justice. Yet they also happen in places with conflict, threats, or restrictions that reduce survivors' access to services and constrain their ability to be proactive or participate in decision-making and problem-solving.

As will be shown in more detail in chapter 4, PERRP's social program set up a conflict-sensitive, do-no-harm approach from the start of the project. This approach had dual benefits: it saved people from trouble and loss, and it enabled construction to proceed uninterrupted by conflict, unlike many of the other reconstruction projects in this disaster response. Our main approach was to be highly participatory, starting community participation by asking rival social groups to come together, form a partnership with PERRP, and then work together throughout the project.

Context: Social Structure, Power, and Culture

When it comes to the contexts of a reconstruction site, possibly no other context can determine more about a project than the social structure and the arrangements of power and culture of the affected people. The content below sets the stage for understanding the kinds of sociocultural contexts and influences that projects should be prepared for. It looks at the importance of developing this understanding and how the project and surrounding people affect each other. It explores social structure, power arrangements, and culture and cultural norms, and it examines what was taken into consideration in PERRP's social program, including beliefs, the norms of language, and the gender roles and customs of *purdah* (separation of the sexes), as well as the local power structures and informal leaders. The first part of chapter 4 delves into detail as to how these realties were then manifested and dealt with at the community level.

To an outsider, social structure, culture, and power in any location, including a construction site, might be invisible. However, as shown in figure 2.1, social structure, culture, and power were among the main contexts that shaped PERRP construction work. Besides the technical, financial, and management challenges that construction projects may encounter, there can also be a wide range of sociocultural challenges. The need for sociocultural expertise is especially important in projects following hazardous events, as the disaster may have compounded social, cultural, and economic factors.

At its simplest, culture is about the traits, values, beliefs, and behaviors of a population, while social structure is about the pattern of relationships and power arrangements among social groups or institutions within or outside of a culture. While separate subjects, social structure and culture are inextricable. Power comes into the picture when talking about status among individuals and groups.

Failure to consider sociocultural and power contexts regularly causes project problems and failures, no matter the location or sector. One particularly apt example comes from a study by Lisa Buggy and Karen McNamara in a situation very different from earthquake reconstruction in the Himalayas: climate change adaptation projects in Vanuatu, an island in the Pacific. The projects studied by Buggy and McNamara focused on issues such as coastal erosion, flooding, and fresh-water scarcity, but the researchers concluded that it was mainly social issues that "contributed to the majority of thirty-four projects breaking down, stalling or being abandoned completely" (2015: 274). Looking at causes of these breakdowns, the researchers observed that "social dynamics, power relations and changing traditional norms at the community level [were] at the epicenter of project failures" (2015: 270). Although Pakistan's mountains and Vanuatu's ocean are very different settings, projects in different sectors can face similar outcomes when such sociocultural contexts are overlooked.

To address contextual sociocultural challenges, construction and reconstruction projects require the expertise of sociocultural specialists. Just as engineers, architects, and other technical specialists first drill down to the physical aspects of a site—to plan if and how to build on that site and predict the behavior of the building once constructed—so too are specialists needed to ascertain social characteristics and how to work with them in construction projects. They are the ones who will be able to bring understanding of the social and cultural environments by foreseeing strengths, vulnerabilities, and behaviors of the people, and by predicting how the project and its surroundings will interact. With this contextual knowledge, these experts can work with construction managers to develop strategies that both respect local realities and work with them to facilitate construction—creating a win-win situation.

Sociocultural experts who have years of experience in one project location will already be highly familiar with the region's social structure, power arrangements, and culture, and so will be able to bring that knowledge to the project. Such region-specific expertise provides invaluable service to the construction project, as being able to draw on existing knowledge saves a great deal of time. In PERRP, our social team comprised about a dozen people, a small fraction of total project staff, who had lived for de-

cades—even their whole lives—in the project area. This collective knowledge was put to use immediately.

An understanding of the communities is especially useful in construction projects, as the projects themselves can spark disputes or conflict among people who may already have long-standing differences over other matters. What manifests as a technical problem for construction managers may be of historical, social, or cultural origin. To alleviate such problems for construction, sociocultural expertise is also needed to handle these underlying problems with sensitivity. As shown in an anecdote, page 68, a serious cultural breach was risky—but with knowledge of the culture, the offense was handled effectively, reducing tensions.

Social Structure and Culture

A construction project is about more than bricks and mortar. Unfortunately, with so much else to consider, construction planners and managers sometimes lose sight of the fact that the purpose of the construction is to serve people.

Social structure has been a central matter in sociology and social anthropology since the emergence of these disciplines in the mid-nineteenth century. While discussed and debated by the founders of the disciplines and figures such as Herbert Spencer, Ferdinand Tönnies, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, Raymond Firth, S. F. Nadal, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, Max Weber, and Anthony Giddens, there still is no universally accepted definition of "social structure." Notably, in describing a social structure, the social sciences have borrowed vocabulary from building construction: "The Latin source of the word structure is *struere*, which means 'to build.' And the most general notion of this term does, in fact, refer to the framework of elements that constitute and support a building" (Bernardi, Gonzalez, and Requena 2006: 162). One online introductory discussion on social structure expands upon the building metaphor: "A structure can be called a building only when these parts or components are arranged in relationship with the other. In the same manner society has its own structure called a social structure. The components or units of social structure are persons" ("Social Structure," n.d.).

As figure 2.1 suggests, construction builds physical structures, but social structure completely surrounds and permeates the construction site. Social structure refers both to how, in any society, people exist in groups, and also to how these groups relate and interact with each other and their institutions based on factors such as kinship, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, language, age, and sect or denomination. Of further relevance is how such people and groups are arranged in layers of power or

stratification—some being at the top or in the highest class, some in the middle, and some in the lowest, who are sometimes marginalized or even eliminated.

It is the stratifications, divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities that give advantages to some and limits to others. For instance, a stratified social structure might restrict human rights, choices of occupations, access to the justice system, and access to resources and public services such as health and education. Being either well-off or the poorest becomes normalized. While such social division may be a universal reality, Shandana Khan Mohmand and Haris Gazdar have argued that, in Pakistan, social stratification ultimately "creates social exclusion, which recreates itself within the community and village, and is usually expressed as an integral part of the social structure—as part of culture and tradition itself" (2007: 3). Such social ordering also involves strong economic ties, as one group may be forced into dependence on another for shelter, land, and livelihood. Some groups are thereby trapped in subservience, unable to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Power Arrangements

Social structure inevitably is about arrangements of power, influence, and control—who has it, and who does not. For project planners and managers, close examination and acknowledgement of these factors—the divisions, connections, and arrangements of power among the people—is essential to formulating approaches that both help meet project goals and respect local realities and culture. This advice is certainly important in the chaos often following disasters, when reconstruction is to be attempted. Accordingly, in each affected community, the PERRP social team identified blocs of power—who had power, what they held power over, and how the project itself was part of the power structure. Such analysis looks at the stratifications, arrangements, or layers of people and groups according to power, then discreetly observes: How are people grouped? Among those individuals and social groups, who has what power, and to what degree? What gives them that power and how do they use it or misuse it? Who is excluded, marginalized, or subject to the power? Who is excluded? Some individuals or groups may hold all the power, or it may vary; some may have all the power to do X, but little to do Y. In such a project, it is necessary to know the arrangements of power—who has it and who does not—so the project, where need be, can influence those who have it and watch out for those who need protection. For further discussion of the power arrangements and blocs of power at the community level, see part 1 of chapter 4, "The Social Component."

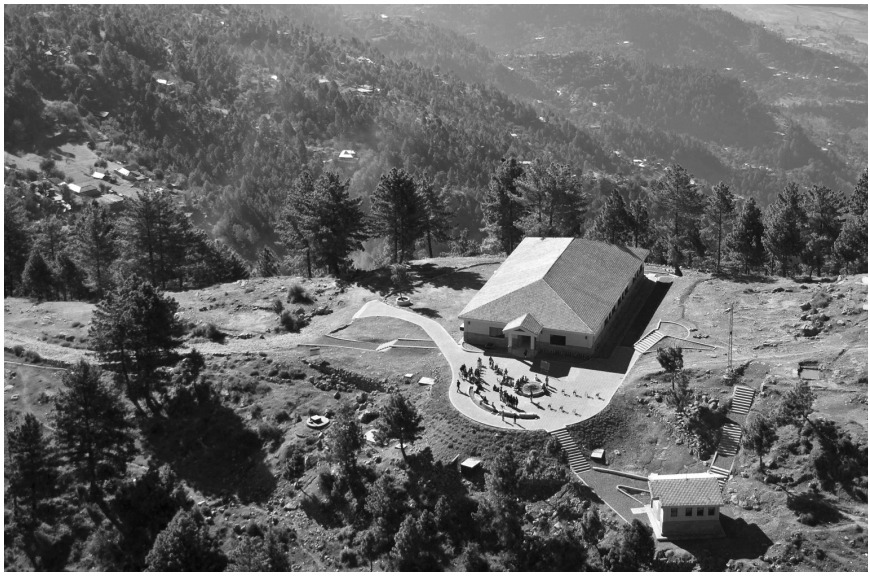

Figure 2.2. The School above the Clouds. Several schools reconstructed were at high elevation, with this one being above the clouds. Here, some students wait outside the newly completed school after a long walk there on mountain footpaths. Government Boys' Primary School Phel, 2009. © Jane Murphy Thomas.

As with the social structures themselves, power is also dynamic. As PERRP witnessed, some people's power changed over time. This was especially visible in this project, because for the first time, each community had a representative committee that was chosen by the community, which worked with the project to meet their urgent need for a new school or clinic. This responsibility gave committee members the confidence and power to get cooperation that they might not normally have had the courage or authority to obtain. Membership on the committee meant the power of some was decreased, and the power of others was increased. For example, early in the project, there were some cases of individuals being domineering and demanding, but they became less so when committee members discouraged that behavior. Sometimes even family members strongly opposed each other, but other family members became the mediators. At the same time, others—especially younger people and those lower in the social hierarchy—had opportunities to speak up for the first time.

In some cases, there can be a fine line between power and influence. As several of the anecdotes included in this book illustrate, power and influence can also be used in positive, productive ways, even in some of the most divided, conflict-prone communities. As experienced in PERRP, such

local power and influence can be used by individuals or groups to lead communities to try to achieve things they would not do otherwise. This strong potential for local power to be used in such ways can be nurtured by aid agencies—first by recognizing that such capacities exist, and then by encouraging their use and development.

The question then is: besides designing and constructing new buildings to withstand future hazards—thereby reducing physical risks—what else can such projects do to reduce social, cultural, and economic risks? A construction project is not a social revolution, yet how can such a project avoid inadvertently increasing the power of people who misuse the power they already have? Or avoid making the marginalized more marginalized, or making poor people poorer? At the same time, how can the project encourage and support positive, productive uses of power and influence in a community?

One answer goes back to some of the most basic ideas of community development and poverty alleviation. Essential to both are organized, representative, proactive, empowered communities with strengthened skills, resources, connections, and capacities that they can put to work for their own benefit. Whether or not communities already have groups with such potential, PERRP's social team believed that leading such groups to mobilize the community and to participate in a reconstruction project had the potential to be a major opportunity for institution-building, one of the foundations for development and disaster risk reduction.

Social Structure, Power, Culture, and Norms in the PERRP Project Area

In northern Pakistan—as in the rest of the world—the component parts of social structure and culture interact in complex ways. Understanding these interactions was essential in order for PERRP's social team to plan and develop strategies for our community participation program. The PERRP project area can be described as socially heterogenous, stratified, and hierarchical, and the subsequent inequalities can be "maintained through specific practices and informal institutions, which limit the access of certain groups to livelihood options, social services, and political empowerment" (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007: 33). Specific social structures varied from district to district, and even within districts, villages, and communities.

And while PERRP's two project districts—Mansehra district in KP province and Bagh district in AJ&K—have some significant sociocultural differences, their proximity does mean that they have some things in common. For instance, in both districts, there is a heightened level of tension, both

from the region's unstable history and from security pressures on both eastern and western borders. Activity such as construction can easily spark or reignite seemingly unrelated disputes and even violent clashes between people, which then affect both the construction and the whole community.

In the AJ&K and KP project areas, the main elements of social structure and power in the communities are kinship groups, clans, or family (*zaat* or *quom*); castes; ethnicities; tribal groups; religious denominations (mainly Sunni and Shia Islam); fraternity (*biradari*, an Urdu word adopted from the Persian *biradar*, meaning "brother"—hence fraternity, brotherhood, or unity group); and political alignments. "Caste" refers to a people's position in the social stratification, while *biradari* refers more to the wider unity among groups based on kinship ties or religious or political affiliation. The *biradari* "provides security and power for millions of its members. It gives them an identity because *biradari* is not just a matter of being a Jatt or a Rajput[:] it is also a kinship system. The system provides a wider support group than a family" (Ahmed 2009: 91–92). Because many people in these regions use these terms interchangeably, I use the label "social groups" to refer to all such identity groups.

Although Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim country, and caste is considered against Islamic teachings, caste nonetheless remains a strong part of the local power structure and social identity—especially in rural areas, arguably as an inheritance from Hindu culture. The American sociologist Ayesha Jalal (2005) has stated, "Despite its egalitarian principles, Islam in South Asia historically has been unable to avoid the impact of class and caste inequalities." Still, many Pakistanis dismiss or denounce even the idea of castes or classes, claiming that these are problems that exist "next door" in India, but not in their country. This opinion results in there being "little tolerance in the public domain of any serious discussion about caste and caste-based oppression, social hierarchies and discrimination" (Gazdar 2007: 3), which is perhaps indicative of a dominant class or caste. As one PERRP manager explained, "Caste is an explosive issue; it is not discussed in polite mixed-caste company." Aliani describes it another way: "It appears that caste is the elephant in the room. Everyone knows it's there, but no one wants to talk about it, let alone address it" (2009: 12). While some Pakistanis refuse to see caste, few dispute that class is a fact of life, and most are able to cite many examples of class influence in their own lives.

Most, if not all, project communities are heterogeneous. Of community members' many differences, the most common clashes were over politics and class or caste. In this region, people are born into hierarchies or classes of advantage and disadvantage, also inheriting a position of power or a lack thereof. In the PERRP project areas, the population is stratified into over a hundred high, middle, and low castes and subcastes, into which

people are born and subsequently spend their lives. These social groups include the Mughals, Sudhans, Jats, Rajputs, Abbasis, Kashmiris, Sayyids, Arians, Gujars, Sawatis, Pashtuns, Tanoli, Awan, Dhund, and Tarkhan. The class or caste of each is often distinguishable by occupation. Low-caste people may be shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, agriculture workers, laborers, or barbers, while high-caste people tend to fill government jobs or become professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers. Almost every community where PERRP worked was multi-clan, multi-caste, multi-*biradari*. Many of the anecdotes and ethnographies included in this book illustrate such differences. For a detailed example, see the ethnography "Government Boys' High School in Flat Land" (chapter 8), which details how long-standing differences between two castes threatened the start of construction.

If any generalization can be made about social structure in Pakistan and the PERRP project area, it would be that people's number one loyalty is to family. As Hazma Alavi has noted, "the pivotal institution in the 'traditional' social structure . . . is . . . the kinship system" (1971: 114). The family is the foundation of Pakistani culture and of all parts of the social structure. Going far outside the nuclear family, members range from immediate to distant relatives. Loyalty and conformity to the family in these collectivist communities is the norm, and individualism is discouraged.

While civil society is sometimes described as weak in parts of the PERRP project area, kinship is a self-representative system: "Leadership of these kinship groups is characterized by the vesting of authority in the hands of a head selected on the basis of virtues prized by the kin network, such as the ability to effectively participate in the business of the kin group" (Mohmand and Gazdar 2007: 5). In other words, people represent their own social groups' interests to the extent of excluding others.

Highly significant in recent times is the intense politicization of social groups, such that they have become voting blocs. About general elections that took place in Mansehra district in the project area, journalist Azam Khan noted, "Here voters don't cast their votes so much as they vote their caste, and it is the clans that rule the roost." Highlighting the complexities, Khan goes on to explain, "the vote bank in these two constituencies is divided among *Swatis, Tanoli, [Sayyid], Gujar* and other smaller clans as well as the [*Pashto*-] speaking population. Language also affects loyalties" (2013). Such politicization also means that "people are already thinking of how to push forward their families and clans in the next election. For a person to win, he had better belong to a dominant '*biradari*'" (Ahmed 2009: 91).

With the *biradari* as the "overriding determinant of identity and power relationships within the [AJ&K] socio-political landscape" (Human Rights

Watch 2006: 12), it is membership in the most powerful *biradaris* and their association with political parties—which are fervidly followed and aggressively promoted—that lead to the key political positions and upper strata government jobs. Holding such key positions enables individuals to create more opportunities for returning favors to fellow *biradari* members, who in turn use that advantage to curry favor with others. In AJ&K, for instance, the most influential social groups are the Mughals, Sudhans, and Rajputs, and almost all AJ&K politicians and leaders come from these groups (Human Rights Watch 2006).

Not surprisingly, the general politicization and discrimination adds to strife and conflict, with tensions simmering much of the time. This reality raises risks for construction projects, which can easily spark conflict among already embittered and competing groups. Real or perceived project favoritism over jobs, income, or opportunities; potential losses of resources such as land and water; and unwanted impositions from outside the community—all can rapidly ignite reactions against the project.

However, in this part of the world, basic social transformation is beginning to occur even while the old guard resists it. Change is occurring "due to capital inflows, globalization, the media boom and trends in women's education" (Zaidi 2008: 3). Other factors include urbanization, rising economic mobility, and the beginning of the breakdown of the feudal system (Hasan 2009). Although the feudal system as it is known in other parts of Pakistan does not exist in the PERRP project area, the caste hierarchy and its coercive power structure are not dissimilar. For the first time in history, poor families in the most remote areas have family members regularly working abroad—mainly in the Gulf States—to send help home; those still at home are hearing about different ways of life and are enabled by remittances to take opportunities they did not have before. The earthquake and its aid programs likewise provided some opportunities that did not previously exist.

One of the main changes occurring in northern Pakistan is through education, although origins are not discounted. As Satti notes, "Caste is (still) defined by birth, even if you change your profession from cobbler to surgeon" (1990: 24). Nowadays, if the son or daughter of a shoemaker or tailor is able to work their way through the education system and become employed or establish their own businesses, they are still rising into more prominent ranks of society, albeit with their low-caste status.

Culture and Cultural Norms

Although culture has been a formal study for well over a century, there is no universally accepted definition of the term. In the late nineteenth century, E. B. Tylor—one of the founders of cultural anthropology—defined

"culture" as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society" (1871: 1). Roger M. Keesing offered a similar definition, describing culture as the "learned, accumulated experience and socially transmitted patterns for behavior characteristic of a particular social group" (1981: 68). Geert Hofstede posited that culture "is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (2011: 3).

Experts in culture and disaster point out the importance of understanding and planning for culture in reconstruction projects; it facilitates work and creates effective results. For instance, it has been argued that

> culture is important—both in the "people's culture" of those who face risk and for the "organizational culture" of those who are trying to help. . . . Culture is not about "residuals" that can be ignored as strange and illogical: it is absolutely crucial to the way that disaster risk reduction and adaptation succeeds or fails. . . . It is foolish to ignore one of the most significant factors affecting success. (Cannon, Kruger, and Bankoff 2014: 27)

While the relevance of culture is obvious to some, putting cultural knowledge into practice is another matter: "Instilling the knowledge of culture in its most profound connotation into much disaster prevention and aid, and most crucially into the policies and practices of international, national, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with disaster, has proven recalcitrant" (Hoffman 2020: 272). This challenge persists even when knowledge of the local culture provides solutions to what may be challenges for the outsider.

Culture is inseparable from social structure and power. How culture manifests itself—even in one location—is highly variable from one time to another. What will work in one culture will not work in another, what is a priority in one culture may not be a priority at all in others, and what is culturally normal and acceptable in one culture may be abnormal and offensive in another. Within cultures there are variations and inconsistencies, and culture is dynamic, especially in times of disaster: "Along with cultural change, researchers can witness cultural conservation and its mechanisms" (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002: 11).

Culture and Cultural Norms in the Project Area

Pakistan is a country of many cultures, even within a small region such as the earthquake zone, but many groups share some of the same cultural norms. For a project like PERRP to proceed effectively in such locations, it was first necessary to build trust with the local people. Without clear

signs from the elders and other influential people that they accepted and welcomed the project, others would be reluctant to join in. One way to develop this trust was to show that the project team was culturally respectful and sensitive, knowledgeable of cultural norms and how to work within them. Being culturally sensitive was also an important part of being conflict sensitive, as certain offences could be met with violent reactions. Crucially, being culturally sensitive necessitated knowing cultural norms: what is expected or considered normal, typical, or the right way to behave.

With its many ethnicities, castes, classes, and tribal and kinship groups, the PERRP project area was a complex of many cultures that may appear to blend together to the outsider. Local people, however, can easily distinguish each other's identity groups by physical appearance, clothing, language, names, and other features. The communities' relative isolation maintained their heterogeneity. Both project districts are in the southern lower reaches of the Himalayas, and they are therefore largely covered with mountains—the highest peak being Hari Parbat at eighteen thousand feet above sea level. The rural, conservative populations are spread throughout the mountains and, as there are few roads, most live far from other communities. Their only means of transport is by foot, on paths crossing over or around mountainsides and across valleys, resulting—until recent times—in limited interchanges and communications. At the time of the earthquake, access to information technologies were limited in this region. Across the mountain landscape, television was uncommon while computers and the internet were available only to the better-off in the cities. Cell phone reception was sketchy at best, but access to it increased rapidly as companies providing these services scrambled to increase the number of towers and make owning a phone much easier.

There is a dearth of research and internationally accessible scholarly work on the cultures in this project area, and conducting deep anthropological research was outside the scope of this project. However, from the social team's long-term practical expertise in the local culture and many years of related project experience, certain important factors about the communities were identified as priorities for PERRP to acknowledge and respect. In this regard, despite local differences, the social team's emphasis was on what the people had in common. Besides a common history, similar topography, and a similar communications infrastructure, people in the region shared a religion—Islam—and many related cultural norms.

Religion and Beliefs

Although figures are not available for the project districts, the majority of Pakistan's population—about 96 percent—are Muslim, with the remain-

ing 4 percent being Christian, Sikh, or Hindu. Of the two main Muslim denominations, Sunnis are estimated at 75–95 percent of the population, while Shias are a small minority, with estimates ranging from 5–20 percent, but that percentage may also include the even smaller groups such as Ahmadis, Sufis, and Ismailis. During PERRP, sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia in some areas—including the project area—was becoming more common; their minority status made the Shia particularly vulnerable.

Beliefs, whether from religion or other sources, are a subject of interest to some disaster analysts. As Terry Cannon, Alexandra Titz, and Fred Kruger note, "people's beliefs (and how people behave in relation to hazards because of those beliefs) can often act as an obstacle to disaster risk reduction." However, they continue, "people's response to any disaster risk reduction initiative is likely to be much greater when their own beliefs are acknowledged and not ignored" (2014: 186–87). Consider, for instance, one example from Nepal: villagers believed flash floods were sent by God, so there was nothing they could do about the floods. However, once these people were shown how to protect their land with sandbags and bamboo, flood consequences were reduced while beliefs were still honored. Since the aid agency had understood and respected the culture, they were able to assist in ways that accommodated both religious beliefs and technical needs (Cannon et al. 2014).

For some, science provides explanations for the causes of disasters, but for others, religious beliefs provide these answers: "Islamic scriptures . . . present an antediluvian view on natural disasters, dubbing them a manifestation of Allah's anger and punishment for sins" (Shahid 2015). Several prominent Pakistanis—humanitarian figures, politicians, and business and religious leaders—drew on this belief and used the 2005 earthquake to draw attention to what they perceived as the sins of many, including those who engaged in immoral behavior, who were corrupt, or who had not paid their taxes or zakat, a tithe.

At the same time, religious beliefs may be used to mediate and support initiatives. Numerous times in PERRP, imams and other religious community members called on Islamic teaching to stop disputes and conflict, strengthen cooperation, and encourage volunteering and contributing to the reconstruction. For example, when obstacles to school construction arose, community members were reminded by members from within their own community that, in Islam, seeking education is obligatory. By calling on their faith and beliefs, quoting the importance of education from the Quran or Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), religious leaders successfully reasoned with people to resolve their differences so the new school building could be ready as soon as possible.

Cultural Norms

As part of the earliest assessment, from their in-depth knowledge of the culture, the social team considered the cultural norms and set selection criteria by asking: "Of all the cultural norms, which ones would make the biggest difference in the project? If the project failed to do X, Y or Z, which would cause the biggest trouble for the people or the project? Which would cause the loss of the most opportunities, including opportunities for participation?" We concluded that there were three main intertwined norms: the multilingual nature of the area; gender roles as prescribed by the customs of *purdah*; and the local power structure, including the traditional, informal, nonelected leaders. For the project to work most effectively with local people, we needed to get a wide range of participation from as many of the local language groups as possible, which often included distinct ethnicities, castes, and tribes. We also needed to be able to include both men and women and heavily involve the local informal leaders.

Cultural Norm 1: Language

For the widest diversity of people to be interested in participating in the project to any degree, language had to be a project priority. Between the two project districts, there are significant language differences. While Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, is the official language in both KP's Mansehra district and AJ&K's Bagh district, few people speak it as the mother tongue. Instead, most use one or more of the dozens of other local languages, even within the same district. In Mansehra district, languages include Hindko, Gojri, Kohistani, Pashto, and Potohari, while in Bagh district, people speak Pahari, Gujari, Kashmiri, Punchi, and Punjabi. English, also an official language, is taught in schools and is in fairly common usage, especially in offices and urban areas.

If we had not taken the diversity of the local languages into account, we would have communicated only with the relatively elite, educated, and powerful. While Urdu is normally used in public meetings, and English is common at official levels, both are associated with power, the politics of the dominant castes, and the colonial legacy. To enable people in the project area to participate in their own languages, at least some project staff needed these local language skills. While most project engineers and other technical personnel were from other parts of Pakistan and so did not speak the local languages of the project area, PERRP social mobilizers—in addition to being fluent in Urdu and English—spoke the languages of the villages, meaning they were able to hold discussions and facilitate the participatory process and to settle complex land disputes and issues with construction. For local people, this provided unusual access to infor-

mation; it also had an empowering effect, encouraged participation, and helped to build trust.

Cultural Norm 2: Gender Roles and *Purdah*

To enable both women and men to participate in the project, we adapted to *purdah* customs that are in strict practice in most of the project area. *Purdah* (literally, "curtain") is a cultural practice or code of conduct in some Muslim cultures that defines the relations and roles of men and women. While *purdah* is possibly one of the most visible parts of culture in the PERRP project area, its practices vary significantly; however, its distinguishing feature is the separation of men and women, with culturally prescribed rules for both genders. With some exceptions, contact with anyone of the opposite gender outside the family is limited or forbidden. The separation also occurs through clothing, with both genders' clothing concealing the body, and women additionally covering their face and hair. Mobility is also prescribed. Women more commonly stay at home or study or work in female-only settings, and, when going outside, are usually accompanied by a male family member or by other women. Men, on the other hand, move about as they desire, except to places deemed for women. *Purdah* is a complex subject, varying in practice even family to family, moment to moment, circumstance to circumstance.

The "curtaining-off" limits visual, spoken, and physical direct contact, and it starts in the home, with separate rooms to receive guests from outside the family: male guests will not see the women of the household, and men of the household will not see the female guests. The separation extends to schools: girls go to girls' schools and boys to boys' schools. Socializing with the opposite gender outside the family is highly frowned upon, and dating (as it is practiced in the West) is not done at all. Most marriages are arranged. In general, where *purdah* is in practice, its rules and norms are observed by both men and women to keep their own honor and family respect.

Purdah also means that girls and women often do not have some of the advantages that boys and men possess. For instance, in Pakistan, while school enrollment of girls varies greatly across the country, generally the enrollment of girls is lower than boys. However, this difference is not due solely to *purdah*. It happens for a combination of reasons: the low value that some put on education; the need to keep girls, and often boys, out of school to help at home or add to the family income; the distance between the school and the home; and a lack of culturally appropriate school facilities (for instance, schools may have no functioning toilets, no female teachers available for girls' schools, or no visual barriers to protect privacy).

In many cases, *purdah* also means that the men dominate community affairs. Women normally do not attend to such matters, and for development projects, having access to local women can be restricted unless the project adapts to what is culturally acceptable. At the professional level, there are some exceptions to the complete separation of the genders—for example, professionals of both genders may hold meetings or workshops together.

In PERRP, about half the beneficiaries were girls and women, so to work within *purdah*, PERRP needed to find ways for both men and women to participate. This need required us to hire both male and female social team members; however, the security conditions emanating from the nearby Taliban sometimes made hiring women to do fieldwork too risky, especially in KP province. In these cases, PERRP used other culturally acceptable ways for men and women to communicate. In KP province, local men formed the boys' school committees and male social mobilizers worked with those men. At girls' schools, the committees were composed of women, while men formed a construction advisory committee. To maintain communication with the women-led SMC, the construction advisory committee appointed a respected community "white beard"—an older man—to act as a bridge between the male construction advisory committee, the women's school committee, and the male social mobilizer.

In AJ&K, however, *purdah* arrangements were different from those in KP, reflecting some cultural and security differences between the two areas. PERRP engaged both female and male social mobilizers in AJ&K, with Kashmiri women mobilizers working both with mixed-gender and all-male committees. In general, these local women social mobilizers were accepted even by the traditionally minded, playing leading roles in some of the toughest conditions, such as the negotiations between all-male committees and contractors.

Sometimes attempts to have women participate were especially challenging, as the norm is for men to look after what they consider community issues. See anecdote "Who Should Attend the Meeting?," page 74.

Cultural Norm 3: Local Power Structures and Informal Leaders

In Pakistan, working within an administrative hierarchy is partly a cultural norm and partly an administrative expectation, as international aid projects are initiated from the top down. The donor and recipient agencies refer the project from the national level to local government officials who, in turn, refer the project to others located in the area where the construction is to occur. Officials at the local level included the District Coordination Officer, the top administrator for the district; the district-level officials of the Departments of Health and Education; the District Reconstruction Unit;

and the Revenue Department. At the community level, head teachers had the most authority, as they represent the government at the school level. Outside the school, each community had traditional informal leaders, including elders, notables, and other well-known, influential people. As the ethnography at the end of this chapter illustrates, complex problems in PERRP regions were handled effectively because the social team knew the local realities and could take a culturally sensitive approach, drawing on sociocultural knowledge and community leaders to solve problems in construction.

The above has been an overview of the cultures, heterogeneity, hierarchies, and diversity of social groups across the general project area; the first part of chapter 4 shows how the social team identified and analyzed the blocs of power at each level, working with them to shift and share the distribution of power.

Context: Land Issues

As in many countries, land issues—notably, disputes over land ownership—are common in Pakistan. When such issues arise, they can result in disputes, violence, and losses to local people, often leading to court cases, long costly delays, or even abandonment of any ongoing construction.

Much of the reconstruction following this earthquake was severely affected by land issues, but in PERRP, we were determined to prevent this by dealing with any such issues long before construction started. The process of settling land issues was one of the first steps in introducing the project's community participation program. With a focus on the Pakistani context, the following section demonstrates the importance of knowing about and dealing early with land issues.

Land Issues Are Serious

Construction, regardless of its context, involves land: construction cannot be done without land, and land often comes with minor or major issues. Pakistan is one of many countries in which the seriousness of land ownership disputes is hard to overstate: these are often matters of life or death. Almost every day, the Pakistani media reports murders committed across the country over land disputes, as individuals, families, and groups try to settle their scores using force. Such disputes often continue over years, even decades, and involve many people. A national TV news outlet reported that an exchange of gunfire between two armed groups of the Jatoi tribe in the southern province of Sindh brought the death toll to

nineteen—these people were killed in the same land dispute over the course of five years ("Four Killed" 2018). A USAID report states that in Pakistan "land disputes are the most common form of dispute filed in the formal court system. . . . Between 50 percent and 75 percent of all cases brought before the lower-level civil as well high courts are land-related disputes" (2016: 10).

Such issues are high risk for local people as well as for construction projects, whether for development or disaster reconstruction. In the PERRP project area, the landholdings were not dominated by large feudal landholders as is the case in other parts of Pakistan. With family landholdings being very small—often under two acres—every inch is precious and protected.

In Pakistan, "major causes of land disputes are inaccurate or fraudulent land records, erroneous boundary descriptions that create overlapping claims, and multiple registrations to the same land by different parties. Credible evidence of land rights is often nearly impossible to obtain" (USAID 2016: 10). Land cases are infamous for taking years, decades, or even lifetimes to settle. Innumerable cases are still bogged down in the courts; some cases date back seventy years, for "evacuees" who were displaced in the 1947 partition from India.

Throughout the earthquake zone, the most common issues had to do with land ownership and boundaries. There is a long history of ownership changing without being registered with government. Land is inherited and subdivided among relatives, but ownership often is not formally transferred, resulting in there frequently being no up-to-date land records, titles, or official records of ownership called "mutation documents." Cadastral survey documents are out of date, sometimes even by generations.

Unclear boundary lines are common, whether the land is for residential use, agriculture, or a public building such as a school. For generations, in different parts of the country, it has been the custom for governments to offer to build primary schools on donated land. Primary schools are now dotted throughout the country in vast numbers of small villages, but often the donation of land was never formalized. The ownership was never transferred to the government, and exact boundaries were never surveyed, demarcated, or made known with certainty to adjoining landowners. For a long time, such agreements were common understandings, but when a school was destroyed in the earthquake and reconstruction was planned, suddenly it became apparent there were many different and conflicting ideas about ownership and boundaries. There were land issues at almost every school or health facility built by PERRP.

Pakistan is not alone in land issues being so common—indeed, "land-related issues figure into many violent disputes around the world" (Bruce

2013). In some places, land may be a family's only asset, and each plot has a centuries-old history, inextricable from family history, identity, and social status. Even the potential of losing a few inches or centimeters of land can be a dire threat.

In the developing world, even without a disaster occurring, land issues are one of the main causes and effects of poverty. There, "around four billion people live without the protection of the law. As a result, they can be unfairly driven from their land, denied essential services and intimidated by violence" (Maru 2014). Competition over the land and its resources may also be part of even bigger and potentially much longer-standing differences among individuals or social groups based on such factors as ethnicity, religion, political ties, social power structures, ethnicity, caste, or class. Only in recent years have large-scale efforts by governments and international agencies begun to act on such urgent issues. Some of the international agencies involved in these issues are the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the International Land Coalition, Oxfam, EarthRights International, International Fund for Agriculture Development, and International Development Law Organization.

Disasters such as earthquakes can magnify already severe land issues. New pressures may be added, such as disappearance of land due to fissures, landslides, or floods, and the displacement or absence of owners or users, resulting in occupation of the land by others, reduced agricultural livelihoods, and food insecurity. Historically ineffective land governance can even be made worse with destroyed office buildings and loss of life among government workers. Destruction of government buildings and homes can also result in the loss of what few critical land documents existed. Of these challenges, those that existed predisaster may still be the most entrenched and challenging.

Land Administration, Laws, Police, Court System, and Patwari *Culture*

Overall, Pakistanis tend to have little faith in the police, the slow court system, or the outdated and corrupt land administration system. To get justice, many resort to settling scores themselves—often with violence. Such disputes can result in major losses to local people and are one of the many reasons for frequent delays or abandonment of construction.

Pakistan's land administration and legal systems are often seen as main factors in a vicious cycle that perpetuates land ownership problems: the administration has an antiquated manual record-keeping system, and "numerous federal and provincial laws . . . regulate the ownership, transfer,

acquisition, taxation, registration, tenancy, etc. of immovable property" (UN HABITAT 2012: 7). The judiciary is beset with low pay, inadequate training, and an overwhelming case load. Despite its well-known problems, the court system is still a common avenue taken for redress. A common cause of long costly delays in construction is complainants pursuing court cases or requesting stay orders to stop construction. While this is a democratic right and there are many legitimate cases, some are considered nuisance cases, while others are motivated more by retribution than justice: the court process is a long, drawn-out affair, a punishment in and of itself for any perceived offenses. Many such court cases involve issues that could have been dealt with more effectively through direct resolution by the parties involved.

In Pakistan, when conflict of any kind erupts, including over land, asking for help from the police is often avoided. When police are called in, it is often an act of revenge by one party against another. As Human Rights Watch has stated, "Public surveys and reports of government accountability and redress institutions show that the police are one of the most widely feared, complained against, and least trusted government institutions in Pakistan, lacking a clear system of accountability and plagued by corruption at the highest levels" (2016: 1). At the district level, police are "often under the control of powerful politicians, wealthy landowners and other members of society" (Human Rights Watch 2006: 15).

There is also a highly diverse body of customary law that governs land rights. These customary laws vary from province to province, and vary as well by local administrative units, tribes, castes, or other social groups, especially around inheritance and division of property.

In the Revenue Department, the blame is usually placed on the *patwaris*, the land record officers, who are notorious for "corruption and misdeeds" (Qadir 2017) and for their "practice of taking bribes[, which is] blamed for kicking off the cycle of violence" (Anwar 2018). In Pakistan, "*patwari* culture" is virtually synonymous with "corruption." For a "fee," *patwari*s are known to tamper with land records or simply reassign ownership. In such an advantageous position as land record keeper, the *patwari* is known to be a powerful person, put in their position by even more powerful people for their own political and financial benefit. There is no transparency. Any number of politicians and governments have vowed to clean up the *patwari* culture and outdated land registration system. As part of the problem is the out-of-date record-keeping practices, the government of Pakistan and World Bank in the Punjab Province have undertaken the digitization of all the records, making them far more accessible. But the realities and root causes of these issues are far more complex, and first

require careful, fair settlement of disputes that can then be turned into trusted legal documents.

Eminent Domain, Encroachment, and the Land Grab

Pakistan's Land Acquisition Act of 1894 allows government seizure or acquisition of land. The law of eminent domain "is perhaps the most abused law in most countries and Pakistan is no exception" (Ul Haque 2009). Encroachment and land grabbing, even from official levels, goes practically uncontested. As observed by Pakistan's Supreme Court:

> In our society, the acts of illegal dispossession [of land] are largely committed at the behest of persons who are rich, powerful feudal lords, politicians, builders, government functionaries or persons who head large communities, and on account of their influence and power that place them in domineering positions either over their fellow community members or over less powerful communities living in an area of their influence. (Malik 2016)

In other words, the status and imbalance of power are what underlie many of the land struggles. Land administrators tend to be from dominant social groups, and "[l]and disputes may be the cause or effect of other problems" (Home Office 2017: 4). As found countless times in PERRP, what appeared to be a technical problem for construction—for instance, someone blocking access to a construction site—was, at its root, caused by long-standing problems between groups over unrelated problems or existing land issues.

Understanding the Social Nature of Land Disputes

While land issues are usually considered legal matters, in PERRP they were treated primarily as a social issue. Through a legal perspective, land is a commodity with physical attributes—size, type, location, and value. Land is an asset that can be seized, bought, or sold. However, from a social point of view, all parcels of land have adjoining land that is owned by different people. These people can make decisions about their land, and such decisions may depend on a wide range of factors, not the least of which is the relationship between those who own or use the land. How they deal with each other, as individuals and as groups, may be the most important determining factor about the land.

As long as landowners could come to an agreement and make decisions with each other about their land, they needed the legal system only to formalize what they had already agreed. This was the approach taken in

PERRP: the social team facilitated agreements, and by liaising with government had a cadastral survey conducted and new, legalized mutation documents issued on the spot. These documents were then filed in the land records system. The process often settled disputes that were already years old and meant that court cases were not needed. Details of this process are included in chapter 5.

In PERRP, many lessons were learned about taking care of land issues before proceeding with design and construction. The first lesson was "Do not assume there are no land issues."

Serious Cultural Breach

In any community, what are its cultural norms? What is acceptable behavior and what is not? In these remote conservative project communities, which normally have no outsiders visiting at all, the behavior of such visitors can be very risky.

With construction at a girls' high school well underway, the construction site was the center of attention of the whole community. The site was visible from a long way off across the facing mountains, and the novelty of having something so big happening in such a far-flung place had all eyes on the construction activity and the large number of outsiders: the construction workers brought from other parts of Pakistan by the contractor. Not used to having such strangers in their midst, there was general concern.

Unfortunately, what some feared did take place. Local people noticed something seemed to be happening between a worker and a young woman in the village. He was phoning her, or trying to talk with her in person, then one night he was caught trying to get into her family's house. In such a closed, conservative area where *purdah* is strictly in practice, and only family members may see and speak with each other, this was a very serious offense—an act of disrespect and dishonor to the whole community.

Villagers caught the offender and beat him seriously, and as this was nightfall, committee members intervened and had him locked in the contractor's site office to deal with him in the morning. This was then a village-wide crisis, so serious that elders demanded that construction be stopped and that the contractor be fired; they would rather go without a school than allow such insulting behavior. Over the phone, social mobilizers asked committee members to come to the PERRP project office in the morning to meet, instead of the mobilizers going to the community where emotions were running high. In the morning there was more uproar when it was discovered that the offending worker had escaped, knowing his life could be in danger.

At the meeting, attended by the committee members, social mobilizers, project engineers, and the contractor, the committee still demanded the contractor be fired. They blamed the contractor's senior site manager for this disgrace and not being able to control the laborers, despite already having agreed to such control in the Committee-Contractor Agreement, which had clauses about honoring cultural norms, and in the code of conduct. Committee members predicted more trouble, sure that the remaining laborers on the site would pose an equal risk.

The PERRP engineers explained to the committee members that it was not possible to fire the contractor. For all this, the contractor humbly apologized and offered a solution: he would replace all the workers at this site. He would move them to a second reconstruction site where he was building another PERRP school and bring those workers here. After more discussion about this idea, and a commitment that the new workers would be retrained in the code of conduct and would be better supervised, the committee agreed with this solution. About three days of construction were lost due to this incident.

"All It Takes Is One Person"

"All it takes is one person in a community, and the whole project can be stopped. It all depends on how people use or misuse their power. Sometimes in the communities there are individuals who will not listen to anyone, not their own family members or the elders, even when it is customary here to listen, especially to elders. They get an idea—always something in their own self-interest—and they will push so hard for it. They will make threats and take court cases, no matter how much the people closest to them tell them they are being unreasonable. We have certainly had some cases of this in the project. Because of a few individuals' demands, construction would have been stopped for sure. But when it happens, we social mobilizers just wait and let the family and committee work it out. There wasn't a single case where that didn't work."

—Social mobilizer

Who Are the Powerful People? Depends on Whom You Ask and When

Even identifying the powerful people is not necessarily easy. In one village of a few hundred people, all who lived there were from one extended family, but they were split into factions over political differences. In many communities certain castes dominated, even if they were a minority. In another place,

two tribal groups each considered itself superior over the other. With such divisions, simply asking who is "on top" could elicit a strongly biased answer, as people tended to identify influential people only from their own group. Issues in identifying the notables or other prominent people made it necessary to triangulate, consulting several sources and making observations in different settings to get the most reliable picture. Even then, over time and in different situations, power arrangements changed. Those who were prominent or powerful in one setting were not necessarily so in another.

Power and the School above the Clouds

There can be fine lines between being influential, prominent or powerful. In one location where a destroyed school was to be rebuilt, the site failed PERRP's technical assessment: it was on a dangerous mountain slope, making it too unsafe to build another school there, and no other land was available. Devastated by this news, the local School Management Committee pleaded with PERRP to reconsider, but the project had to refuse due to the unsafe conditions. The implementation team had only a short amount of time to choose a set of sites and to get approval to build there. The committee was informed, regretfully, that since this site was not suitable, the project had to move on to other communities to find safer, more feasible locations. Again, the committee persisted. If they could find another more suitable piece of land for a new school within reasonable distance, would the project agree to build the school there?

Due to the complex land issues, project management had serious doubts if such land could ever be found, especially in the limited time available to conduct geotechnical testing, environmental assessment, and other preparatory work. Nevertheless, PERRP allowed the committee one month to try. However, as the committee was reminded, PERRP could build only on government-owned land, and had to have the mutation or legal documents to prove its ownership.

One member of the School Management Committee was one of the most influential and powerful people of the area: a retired government official, an education officer. He immediately used his connections and know-how in the government departments to get what the community needed. To everyone's surprise, within only two weeks, from another government ministry he had obtained an almost ideal plot of land on which to build: a large, safe, flat plot beside the road. He and his fellow committee members immediately had the ownership transferred from the forestry department to the department of education, and soon had ownership documents in hand. With the community celebrating this early victory, the technical and environmental

assessments could proceed immediately. When construction was completed, the building was dubbed "the school above the clouds." It looks out over the valleys in Kashmir.

Low-Caste Families Pooling Subsidy Funds

At times, members of the lower castes can arrange their own advantages. In a few instances, it was known locally that recipients of government subsidies that had been intended for rebuilding destroyed houses instead pooled their funds for other purposes: to set up businesses or buy land. These were families in the lowest caste who had members abroad sending money home; that money, which was normally used for living expenses, was now somehow stretched to rebuild their houses. At the same time, those at home were able to start generating new income from the land or business.

Low-Caste Son Becomes a Leader

In aid programs, including those in disaster reconstruction, local project staff are part of the area's culture and its social structure, stratifications, and divisions, including those of caste. This adds challenges for the hiring, supervision, direction, and promotion of staff, especially in basing this on merit and not repeating the normal societal hierarchy.

One PERRP staff member was from a project community and of the lowest caste, but he joined the project as a recent university graduate with a Master's' degree. Usually left out of higher education due to low status and poverty, his father, a tailor, had borrowed money to send his son to school. Although he had very little work experience, with his aptitude, dedication, and experience in leadership and conflict sensitivity in his own community, he soon became a respected, admired PERRP leader and a manager in the multicaste staff, partly by knowing how to handle delicate situations.

Landowner Suddenly Claims Encroachment; Shunning Threatened

Internal influences can pressure community members to conform to the cultural norms or wishes of the larger community. These pressures can take such forms as coercion, demanding reciprocity, threats, or punishment in various forms, including what may be considered the worst by many: shunning.

In one project community, without warning even to his own community, a man applied for a court order to stop construction to protect land that he

claimed as his own. Some months earlier, the social team had the community—including this man—attend a day-long event to identify and settle any issues related to land ownership. The social team also had the government land official—the *patwari*—survey the land and put pegs in the ground to demarcate the school's boundary line. This man had attended the survey and he had raised no objections at that time. Now, several months later, he was claiming that the school boundary wall would be built on his adjoining land.

Community members were aghast and angry with the man for making this unfounded claim while construction was already underway. If a stay order was granted, it would stop construction. First, they tried reasoning with him based on his attendance at and agreement with the *patwari* survey. Committee members used all their knowledge about the history of this land, its ownership, and the exact locations of boundaries. They argued that, on behalf of the community, he should honor their request to not interfere with construction as the school was needed by every family. When after such pressure he would still not relent, the committee gave him their most severe warning: if he did anything that would stop construction, they would organize a community shunning against him. No one would talk with him or his family. Shopkeepers would not deal with him and the whole community would be officially against him. As this is possibly the most serious cultural punishment, he withdrew the court application, which would have caused delays and been less effective anyway. Instead, construction continued unhindered.

"What? Now I Have to Learn the Folk Songs and Wear Traditional Clothes?"

An engineer came from Europe to visit the project and some construction sites to see how the work was being done. After meetings with engineers and architects, during which he heard the project had a social team, he asked to join social mobilizers to attend community meetings. Genuinely interested and wanting to be considerate of the culture, he asked lightheartedly, "But does this mean I now have to learn folk songs and dress in traditional clothes?" This was a deliberate exaggeration coming from a definition of culture that includes the arts. He further wondered, "Is that what you mean as culture? How on earth does culture fit in a construction project?"

As he did then go along to some meetings, his comments gave rise to discussion in the social team about culture per se, a topic that hadn't been discussed until then. Members of the social team explained to the visitor that we hardly ever used the word "culture" in this project as many people—espe-

cially those from other work disciplines—misunderstand it as a high-level, extraneous, abstract thing.

As one social mobilizer put it, "the word 'culture' seems to bother or threaten some. Among other project staff, we just talk about and explain things about the communities that might make a difference to some decisions about design or construction. Although the community people speak for themselves in this project, we social mobilizers often act as cultural interpreters. That means talking to designers, engineers, and managers about what is important to the community people—the way they do things, what they think is right or wrong, what they want. You know, those are the ways culture is defined, but it's not necessary for us to use that high-class word, 'culture'."

"Why Didn't You Just Tell Them They Had to Change the Culture?"

Some disaster reconstruction planners, policy makers, organizations, project teams, and frontline workers show little or no respect for the local culture and have difficulties accepting it the way it is—regardless of whether they share the same culture, come from another part of the same country, or come from abroad. Although the theory of being respectful may be common, there can be large gaps in putting it into practice.

At two separate educational gatherings, I was asked the same question about the people of the PERRP project communities: "Why didn't you just tell them to change their culture?" In one case, I was asked this question at a workshop in the USA with engineers from different international agencies who focused on development and disaster reconstruction. The second time was in a Canadian university class in a peace and development studies program. In both instances, I was presenting the advantages for sociocultural considerations and community participation in construction projects, giving PERRP as an example.

In the American workshop, I explained that to have community women participate in PERRP, we needed to be sensitive to the cultural protocol of the place where we were working—which meant working with men and women separately, according to the customs of *purdah*. The situation also required us to start with the men. After hearing some detail about how the project accommodated these factors, a few attendees were flummoxed. One male engineer blurted out, "That seems like a lot of trouble to go to. Why bother with all that? Why didn't you just tell the elders they should allow women to participate? Tell them to change their culture!''

A man in the audience of engineers, himself from Pakistan, spoke up:

This is reality in my country. Government programs, NGOs, and development programs that want to help women—especially in our villages—have to develop a relationship of trust with the men first. Once they know that you can be trusted, you will be enthusiastically welcomed. Keep in mind we are talking about traditional communities, in an area with a long history of trouble from outside, making people skeptical of outsiders, whether Pakistanis or others. The earthquake and influx of aid agencies also made them cautious.

In the Canadian university class, where students knew each other quite well, one student was not so polite. Her response to those who had asked this question was, "Did you miss our classes on cultural sensitivity? What kind of colonialist question is that? Do you really think we should expect people to change their culture? Why should they change their culture for us?"

To the above remarks on both occasions, I added that PERRP worked by creating an entirely new experience for both women and men so that both were able to be involved with a school construction project—and could do so within their own cultural norms. With this new experience, many built skills that could be applied to other situations, including new expectations for how construction should be managed and how they should be treated by government or other reconstruction projects. This in itself was a big cultural change.

Who Should Attend the Meeting?

At one place, where a Basic Health Unit (BHU) was to be built, the all-male committee was informed that meetings would be held to discuss the design of the BHU. According to *purdah* customs, there would be separate meetings for men and women. Attendance of women was especially encouraged, as they and their children would make up the vast majority of the BHU users. Meeting dates were set, and committee members were asked to make sure men and women were invited to their respective meetings. The men's meeting was held successfully as planned, but when the women's meeting was to occur the next week, only men arrived! When we inquired about the women, some men explained there was no need for women to attend, because they could answer all our questions. The social team was stuck in a quandary, worried that canceling the meeting would be a cultural offense, as dozens of men had arrived. Still, social team members proceeded to insist on talking with women. Convincing reasoning had to be given.

The BHU was to include a birthing center, and the Department of Health was encouraging women to deliver at the BHU with trained birth attendants instead of at home. Because of the inclusion of this birthing center, the social mobilizers explained that it was important to talk with women to get their

ideas and generate interest in the BHU, and out of respect for customs of modesty only women should attend that discussion. The social team asked the men to choose another date, assuring them there would be culturally appropriate arrangements. PERRP's women social mobilizers would attend, accompanied by some of PERRP's women architects. Acceding to that agenda, the men chose another meeting date and dispersed satisfied. A week later, about a hundred women, many with their children, sat on the ground under the trees. A female social mobilizer facilitated the meeting, thanking the women for attending and explaining why their ideas were needed. The four female architects explained preliminary designs, showed photos of other BHUs, and explained the basic labor and delivery rooms. In this case, few ideas were generated from the audience, as most had no birthing center experience to compare it to. It could have been the beginning of dialogue as the conversation generated much interest, and the women liked the novel idea of getting together for discussion.

Unfortunately this BHU was never built, as the community was split into two rival factions. Despite extensive efforts by the social team, the two factions would not come to a firm agreement over location for the new building. One faction wanted it on the same footprint as the old BHU that had been destroyed, while the other wanted it moved to another location. As a result, the Department of Health canceled building there altogether and had PERRP assigned to another location for reconstruction there instead.

Land Issues? Perspective Matters

While almost all construction in PERRP was completed on or ahead of schedule, outside PERRP, much of the Pakistan earthquake reconstruction was slow, delayed, or abandoned. One of the many reasons for this was the failure to prepare for issues related to land ownership. Many of the aid agency decision makers were new to the scene and were either unfamiliar with Pakistani realities or simply did not know how to proceed. Mistakenly, they simply assumed there were no issues that would hinder their reconstruction. They assumed that the necessary land would fall in place, or that somebody else would take care of any such possible complications, and that all they had to do was build. This was not so.

In the early stages of PERRP, some Pakistani government officials erroneously advised the project team that we would encounter no land issues. It appears that issues related to land ownership are often overlooked in construction planning for a range of reasons: lack of awareness, officials' unwillingness to disclose possible complications, dismissal of the seriousness of such issues, and a refusal to deal with them altogether.

Case in point: after the PERRP project ended, I was recruited by an international engineering firm to help prepare a proposal for a construction project in a country that I had never visited and was not familiar with. However, I was put in online contact with the people who did know the country and project region; my role was to work with them to establish a process and, from their input, write a proposal for community participation. Given my experience with issues of land ownership, my first questions were about this topic. Local government officials and the prospective project engineers all said, "No problem, land issues are not a big deal here." However, when I asked the same question of NGO personnel working in the communities where the construction project was to occur, they replied, "Here, fighting about land is so common."

Ethnography: Government Girls' School Sabaz Zameen*

**Sabaz Zameen is a pseudonym. To maintain confidentiality, the names of all schools, villages, and castes in this example have been changed.*

Sabaz Zameen village in KP province was one of the school reconstruction sites assigned to PERRP. The school was to accommodate 450 girls from primary to secondary grades. The site was almost ideal technically: most of the land was flat, it was near the road, and it was not surrounded by other buildings, making access to the site easy for construction. Our technical team thought construction could proceed without hinderance, but the social feasibility of construction was another matter. Problems between local groups presented high risks for construction.

For an outsider visiting Sabaz Zameen, there were no visible signs of its complex social makeup. It is a village surrounded by the lush green of well-tended agricultural fields and stands of trees. Just below this verdant surface was the tension of deep divisions among the people. Such a volatile social context significantly increased risks for the community, the imminent reconstruction process, and the long-term use of the new school.

At Sabaz Zameen there are two castes—here called the Balla and Demani—and virtually all local people belong to one of these two social groups. Historically, the Ballas had been the higher caste—wealthy landowners or landlords—while Demani have been their subjects, the tenant farmers stuck in the vicious cycle of poverty. Unable to afford their own land, Demani have been stuck leasing land from the Ballas and then having to pay rent in the form of most of their crop, leaving them with little for all their hard work.

When PERRP first arrived at Sabaz Zameen, the social mobilizers needed to deal with the strained relationship: their differences were so serious that people would not even sit down with each other to talk about the potential

new school. They had a long history of quarreling, opposing each other on just about everything; even when something good happened, each tried to take credit for it. If an achievement was clearly due to the efforts of one caste, the other tried to downplay it or put obstacles in its path. Their differences were so great that even though the people of both castes are Muslim, they had defiantly built separate mosques only three hundred feet apart. Normally the mosque is considered a point of unity, a way to come together because of the common beliefs, but not in this case—the Balla and Demani would never even pray together.

School staff were also split. The head teacher had been transferred here from a long distance, and as the Demani gave her accommodations and other help, she sided with the Demani, while all her government-appointed teachers were from another even higher caste, the same caste as authorities in the Department of Education. With so many divisions, it was difficult to see how they would ever be able to solve the community-related problems for construction or carry out any of the roles that the project would assign to them. Serious discussions ensued within the social team and with project management and engineers. We considered not even building in this location at all; however, the social team decided to push ahead to next steps, to give it a try and somehow form a local committee.

As Sabaz Zameen school was a girls' school in KP province, the government required that the committee—here a parent teacher council (PTC)—be composed of women only. PERRP's social team therefore decided to strike two committees: the women-only PTC was formed to work with teachers and help with school functions, while a separate committee of men was struck to act as the PTC advisory committee, since construction-related matters—land, water, electricity—in this culture fall into the male domain. The main purpose of the PTC advisory committee was to prevent or solve community-related problems for construction. Both Demanis and Ballas eagerly joined the committee, motivated by their rivalry and not by any sense of cooperation; nonetheless, they met many times together with social mobilizers to form the partnership with the PERRP project, to learn the design and construction schedule, the procedures, and many other details, including the social program's processes for grievance and conflict resolution.

In these early months, while the buildings were being designed and construction was being tendered, the social team built up strong working relations with district officials; the District Coordination Officer, Department of Education administrators, and the local District Reconstruction Unit, as well as local notables, community members, and committee members. By the time the construction contractors arrived, these relations were well established, and it had been agreed by all that if there were differences or disputes, the committee and the social mobilizers would have people sit

down together to resolve the issues in friendly ways. At each meeting, social mobilizers explained the PERRP communication protocol and its grievance procedures, noting that these would mean there would be no need to fight over anything. This was repeated frequently at regular and special meetings attended by the advisory committee, contractor, and PERRP, as well as at meetings with government people. Everyone agreed that this collaborative process was much preferred over the more frequent violent clashes, calling in the police, or pursuing court cases that go on for years. This kind of third-party facilitation was a new experience. The Demanis and Ballas, as well as government officials, welcomed these ideas.

This process of establishing community participation before construction started meant that when the construction contractor arrived, social mobilizers worked with the committee and contractor as they made a detailed Committee-Contractor Agreement on all the points that would often cause conflict. This agreement answered a range of questions: What land outside the construction site would be needed by the contractor? Where was it, and for what purpose was it needed? Would it be needed, for example, for a site office, laborers' camp, or to store materials? Would this land be rented? If so, then from whom and under what terms? Point by point, each item was put into a written agreement, to which the advisory committee members—both Balla and Demani—and contractors were signatories.

But even with all this preparation and these agreements, things started to go wrong only a few weeks later, just as the construction contractor was ready to put shovels in the ground. With no previous information or warning that this was happening, the PERRP office received a letter from the District Coordination Officer demanding an explanation in response to a letter of complaint he had received from the Demani, which accused the project of favoring the Ballas. The letter had been written by the local leader of the Demani without the community's knowledge. This leader had himself attended all the project meetings and knew all about the established grievance procedures, but he saw an opportunity to get advantages for his own caste. He had previously worked in local government, and so he used his connections to the local politician whom the Demanis had backed, asking him to use his influence with the District Coordination Officer to stop this alleged favoritism.

With such accusations flying and construction due to start any day, the project's social mobilizer team knew an immediate, assertive response had to be made. The Ballas took this inflammatory letter as an affront and the situation could have easily escalated into caste conflict, lawsuits, countersuits, revenge, blockades, damage to property, construction stoppages, and even loss of life. Social mobilizers asked for an emergency meeting of the PTC Advisory Council, construction contractor, and PERRP engineers. To lead this mediation, the social team had the PTC advisory committee choose

a respected local man. He happened to be the chairman of the PTC advisory committee and a Balla, but he was well respected by both Ballas and Demanis, as he was also a retired teacher from this village. He was admired for being pious, honest, impartial, and well aware of the caste differences.

It was agreed that the meeting would be held at the Demani mosque, since they were the complainants and would never go to the Balla mosque. Meeting in the mosque to settle disputes is also common as, despite caste differences, it is considered neutral and sacred ground where people are less likely to tell lies. By custom, agreements made in the mosque are considered similar to oaths. The meeting was attended by all Balla and Demani PTC advisory committee members, the *kateeb* (religious leader), the contractor, PERRP engineers, the social team, and former (but still influential) elected officials, who were both Demani and Balla.

At first the whole audience was split and arguing, but the retired teacher reminded them of what they had all agreed to months earlier through PERRP—that differences would be settled face-to-face in open discussion. So, with this respected man leading, discussion was brought under control. The offending letter was then read aloud to the audience. It accused the construction contractor of giving jobs to only the Ballas, but the audience of both Ballas and Demani pointed out this was not true, identifying men from both castes who had been hired. Next, the letter accused the contractor of doing business only with the Ballas, renting land from them and giving them other advantages. Participants concluded, yes, the land rented by the contractor was Balla land, but this was logical, as all the land surrounding the school was owned by Ballas, and the nearby land was needed by the contractor to put his equipment and supplies. The third and final accusation was that the contractor had given special help to the Ballas by improving the water well on their land, but this issue was immediately dismissed by the *kateeb* who acknowledged, yes, the well was on the Balla land, but an improved well would be a new benefit for everyone, not just the school. He said that the well's improvement would not only increase the supply of water for construction, but that all the students and the school's neighbors would benefit from this improved source for a long time to come. And, as he pointed out, there was no other source of water. With his firm stance, this complaint was also dismissed as not valid.

Finally, everyone—Ballas and Demanis—agreed that the letter to the District Coordination Officer and District Reconstruction Unit should be withdrawn. They wrote and cosigned a formal resolution to this effect, stating that the issues were resolved, and sent it to the District Coordination Officer. In the resolution, they also renewed their support for the school, saying there was no further dispute and restating their gratitude for being given a new school.

Although the Demanis came to the meeting still backing the man who had written the letter, by the end of the meeting, they were deeply dismayed with him. His fellow caste members in attendance now told this man he should be playing a more positive role and putting his energy into more productive things, starting by using his political connections to upgrade the school from a high school to a higher secondary school. Surprisingly, he took on this challenge, and by the following year, was successful in getting the upgrade. This upgrade was considered a big achievement for girls' education, as the added grades and time in school would prepare the female students for university. To build his political favors even more, he had the minister responsible for the upgrading attend the official inauguration of the new building, during which he announced that due to his own efforts, the minister had agreed to the upgrade.

Only five days passed between the day PERRP received the surprise letter of complaint to the day that the dispute was resolved. During that time, the construction contractor continued working with no time lost.

Over the next three to four years, until the project ended, some visible changes happened in the relationship between the two castes. Although they were still in competition with each other, this competition was a little more balanced and not exclusively hostile. A Balla family donated land for the school toilet block to be built, and not to be outdone, a Demani family that owned a little land donated a piece of it for a retaining wall. When the school was upgraded, two new teachers were provided—one a Demani, one a Balla—even though such inclusiveness had never been a priority before.

Also following the resolution of the dispute, the PTC advisory committee, with social mobilizers facilitating, came to an agreement, assigning responsibility to each caste for certain tasks for the school, construction, and other community development. After many years of nothing but disputes, they finally sat together and made plans for their community. In those meetings, social team members observed that both sides in this split would have liked to settle their differences and unite earlier, but only now had agreed on ways to do it.

Although there was still no love lost between these two castes, the above process broke some ice. There were no further incidents about school construction and, when the building was completed, they rallied around it. Furthermore, both castes developed skills in seeking other help for the village. The Demanis had the road paved by going to the Member of Provincial Assembly, who was known to support Demanis, while the Ballas used their opposing political connections to get a tractor, a thresher, and financing for a fifteen-mile link road.

This case study shows that even with good sociocultural knowledge and established, agreed-upon procedures, anomalies can still arise. Without the

initiative of the social team, the trouble caused by this man's letter could have remained unresolved indefinitely, only adding fuel to the fire. The only other option for resolution—a court case—could have taken months or years, and still might not have solved the problem.

The strategy used by the social team provided a different approach. Rather than waiting and hoping for a solution, with the knowledge that such a wait would risk a construction stoppage, the social team acted as a catalyst to find a solution, immediately seeking out the person in the community who was most likely to be able to mediate, choosing a suitable venue, and asking representatives from the two factions to attend. As was the strategy in all conflicts in this project, the social team did not act as the mediator, as doing so could have turned disputes around to being between "them" (insiders) and "us" (outsiders). Instead, knowing it could have more long-term beneficial effects, the strategy put the responsibility of dispute resolution entirely on the people. It also helped emphasize that the construction of their new school depended entirely on their reaching agreement.

This example is important as it illustrates several main points—most notably, that the social context of a construction project can have a strong effect on construction. Alleviating such problems takes an understanding of the social structure and culture, which suggests that construction projects can benefit from having a team of sociocultural experts. With a well-thought-out strategy for community participation, a social team can both help a project save time, and help communities develop their own capacities.