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Inclusion, Accountability, Reducing Exploitation

Enhancing Social Cohesion

Aawaz II Early Warning and Response System

Policy Brief

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Disclaimer

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Acronyms

AAC	Aawaz Aagahi Centre
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DF	District Forum
DSP	Downstream Partner
EWS-ERM	Early Warning System/Early Response Mechanism
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FP	Focal Person
GBV	Gender-based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RP	Resource Person
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SROI	Social Returns on Investment
V/NF	Village/ Neighbourhood Forum

Highlights

The existing early-warning systems in Pakistan cater to natural disasters, not to social conflict. Community conflicts that arise due to disputes related to land, water, inheritance, social relations, interfaith and sectarian issues often turn violent, costing t the state and communities dearly. These too can be prevented and managed through early warning and response systems.

A proven community-based model filled the gap and demonstrated how gender sensitive and inclusive, community-led systems can prevent escalation of disputes, and work closely with government services to resolve to promote social cohesion. The Aawaz II Early Warning and Early Response Mechanism (EWS/ERM), implemented across 37 districts (23 in Punjab, 14 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) over six years, preventing conflict and strengthening social cohesion showed that prevention is far cheaper than response.

The Cost of Inaction The cost of an escalated community conflict costs households, the state and the local economy around PKR 290,000 (GBP 769). Preventing a dispute costs the state about PKR 31,000 (GBP 82) based on the Aawaz II community led model.

The Benefit is Substantial. Using the Aawaz II EWS/ERM model, avoided costs are estimated at approximately PKR 2.6 to 4.3 billion (GBP 7 to 12 million), against a running cost of PKR 425 million, a return of about ten to one across the programme.

The Policy Imperative. The provincial governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can leverage the Aawaz II model, building off the trained and informed community forums and focal persons who are volunteers. By allocating a nominal recurring budget and a place in the rules, the policy shift from reactive response to effective prevention, saves costs and time and enhances social cohesion.

Overview

Every district administration in Pakistan already pays for conflict, through police investigation budgets, court time, forensic and medical costs, and the workdays lost when a dispute over land, water, inheritance or faith turns violent. The cost is more than what their books show, because much of the true cost shifts onto ordinary households in terms of dealing with the aftermath of a conflict whether it is in terms of arranging security, managing legal and court fees, transport and any health-related costs. The state lacks an effective and inexpensive prevention system, that engages the community to address disputes early on, before they require the police, the courts, or, in the worst cases, the management of community-wide violence.

The Aawaz II Early Warning and Early Response Mechanism (EWS-ERM) is an inclusive, community-based model in Pakistan that fills this gap, and shows with real case records and real costs that prevention is not only better for social cohesion but markedly cheaper than response. Implemented across 37 districts over six years, the EWS-ERM detects disputes early through trained community focal persons, resolves most at the community level, and refers only those disputes to the government mechanisms that require external intervention. It reaches women, religious minorities and other vulnerable groups whom the traditional jirga and panchayat exclude. This inclusion and reach build community trust that lets a warning be raised early, which triggers cost effective responses and leads to savings.

The economics are striking. Preventing a dispute costs the state about PKR 31,000 (GBP 82[1]); the same dispute, left to run, would cost households, the state and the local economy around PKR 290,000 (GBP 769). Across the programme this amounts to avoided costs of roughly PKR 2.6 to 4.3 billion (GBP 7 to 12 million), against a running cost of PKR 425 million (GBP 1.12 million): a return of about nine to

1 All figures are converted at PKR 380 to GBP 1, the average official exchange rate for the programme period, as used in the Aawaz II SROI study.

one on the fully audited, case-by-case evidence alone, and of up to ten to one across the programme as a whole. These figures are built not on the value of the programme in general but on the specific conflicts it prevented, costing against what those conflicts would have incurred had they escalated. Domestic and sexual violence and child marriage are excluded from this estimation as Aawaz II refers these to protection and counted separately.

The case for government is therefore a choice about where to spend, not whether to spend, because the state pays for conflict either way. It can pay less, early, through a community-based system that already exists and is already staffed, or far more, later, through the police, the courts and the aftermath of violence. What sustaining the system requires is modest: a permanent home in a lead department, a small recurring budget, recognition and support for the community volunteers who run it, and its place written into provincial rules.



1. The choice in front of government

The question this brief puts to provincial government is whether to invest in a proven way of preventing conflict and building social cohesion. Every local dispute left to fester, over land, water, a place of worship, a marriage, chips away at the trust between neighbours and communities that holds social cohesion together; and where that trust is thin, the next dispute escalates faster. Catching disputes early does more than avoid the cost of the police and the courts. It keeps communities intact, which in turn makes the next conflict less likely. *Prevention and social cohesion reinforce each other.*

Funded projects lapse quietly when funding ends, as donor money is finite and a province has many calls on its budget. But the choice is not really about a project. It is about whether to keep, and extend, a way of working that the numbers show to be one of the cheapest investments a government can make: the real cost of a conflict left to run is many times the small cost of catching it early, and the return is paid not only in rupees saved but in communities that stay whole.

Consider what the state already pays. Every district administration in Pakistan carries the cost of conflict whether it admits to the line item or not: police investigation budgets, court time, medical and forensic costs, and the workdays lost when a quarrel over land, water, inheritance or faith turns violent. These costs are rarely gathered in one place, which is precisely why they are so easy to go on paying. What the state has never had is a cheaper way of dealing with such disputes, i.e. a means of catching them early, before they become cases that demand police and court time. **The Aawaz II Early Warning System and Early Response Mechanism (EWS-ERM) is the first model rooted in the community to show, with real case records and real costs, that prevention is not merely a matter of social cohesion. It saves money as well.**

The question in front of the two provincial governments is a narrow and practical one. Should Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invest in and take ownership of a proven, community-led way of preventing conflicts, or let it fall away when the donor funding ends? The analysis that follows answers it plainly: *letting it go is the more expensive option.*

Figure 1:The Economic Case

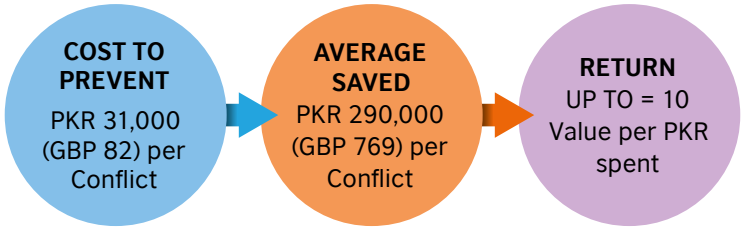


Figure 1 summarises the economic value of the EWS-ERM. Based on the audited cases, the system costs approximately PKR 31,000 to prevent one conflict, while preventing that conflict avoids an estimated PKR 290,000 in costs. This means that every PKR 1 invested in the system generates approximately PKR 9 in avoided costs. Across the programme as a whole, the estimated value of avoided conflict costs is up to 10 times the system's running cost.



2. Aawaz II Model of Social Cohesion

Pakistan has early warning capacity for floods and disasters, run through the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMA) and the Pakistan Meteorological Department. There are measures for managing social conflict e.g. peace committees, the Dispute Resolution Councils (DRC) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and additionally the Meesaq Centres (to respond to complaints of religious minorities and interfaith disputes) in Punjab, that mostly respond once a dispute has already surfaced or turned violent, which means that the point at which prevention would have provided an inexpensive alternative is lost. These bodies also work under real constraints: they are short of staff, funding, equipment and transport, their mandates are built around responding to disputes rather than detecting them early, and their engagement with communities is uneven from district to district. None is resourced or mandated to watch for emerging disputes at the community level, which is the gap this brief addresses. The informal traditional alternatives, the jirga and the panchayat, are easy to reach but often exclude women, religious minorities and transgender persons, so the very people most exposed to harm are the least able to use them.

Aawaz II model of social cohesion and conflict pre-emption fills this gap with a design that is simple and layered. Village/ Neighbourhood Forums (V/NFs) detect disputes early via early warnings raised by community members. The forums membership is fifty percent women, and includes vulnerable groups represented in the community such as youth, religious minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender persons. Each forum has two focal persons overall, one of them a woman, and two focal persons specifically tasked with early warning and response, again one of them a woman; where the community includes non-Muslims, one of

these early-warning focal persons is drawn from that community. These focal persons receive and record the warnings. Aawaz Aagahi Centres (AACs) verify and coordinate. Disputes that need a higher-level response are referred to the District Forums (DF) to handle and connect to the Deputy Commissioner, the police and the protection services. The system is tried and tested, having been implemented since 2020, reaching 22 districts, with 15 more added in August 2024, operating with clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) as a documented process, with defined roles, rather than a loose network of goodwill,.

The disputes handled by the early warning and response system are wide ranging: community conflicts such as quarrels over land and water and inheritance, interfaith and sectarian tension, domestic and sexual violence, child marriage, and the everyday exclusion faced by religious minorities and other vulnerable groups. Across the 37 districts, from 2020 to March 2026, the system raised 28,634 early warnings and responded to 20,403 of them. Some kinds of cases, such as domestic and sexual violence and child marriage (approximately 6,700 of the cases responded to) the forums rightly resolved at the community level or refer as needed to the police and the protection services. Approximately 13,700 community, minority and sectarian disputes, were for the most part managed by the communities at the village level before they ever reached a police station or a court. These totals run from mid-2020 to March 2026 and cover the 37 districts of the programme.

The resulting savings, attributed to the programme interventions, are based on the disputes prevented from growing into conflict that would have needed a costly government response; whether that response would have been the police, the courts, or, if a dispute could ignite into community-wide violence, the provincial authorities would also be involved in managing the response. Two categories of cases are deliberately set apart; domestic & sexual violence and child marriage cases are not counted as savings, they are referred for protection and are treated as a protection gain, not a cost avoided. The distinction is deliberate and cautious.

Figure 2: What the system handles and what counts as savings

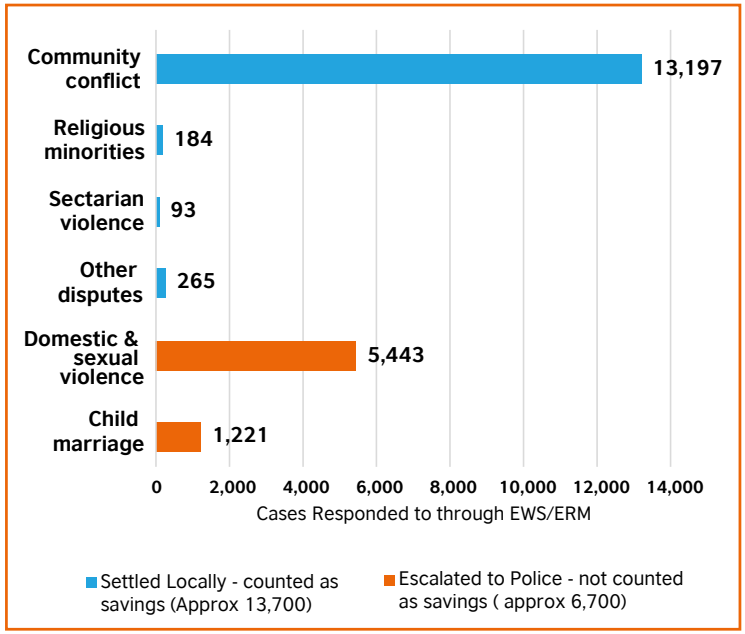


Figure 2 above shows the distribution of 20,403 responses. Roughly 13,700 (community conflict, religious minority, sectarian and other disputes) were handled at the community level and are counted in the savings. The roughly 6,700 domestic and sexual violence and child marriage responses were referred on to the authorities and counted separately, as protection outcomes.



3. From early warning to timely response

The strength of the system lies in what happens after a warning is raised, and it is worth following the path a dispute travels. A focal person in a V/NF receives an alert or picks up an emerging dispute and logs it. The V/NF members, together with the Aawaz Aagahi Centre, assess it and decide what kind of response it needs. Disputes that fall within the community's own domain to manage are handled there and then, through dialogue and mediation in the community. Those whose nature calls for an external authority are referred on to the district forum and on to the police, a Meesaq Centre, or a District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) or Women's Protection Unit (WPU).

This sorting of early warnings is one of the system's main achievements. The judgement it makes is not about how serious a dispute is but about what kind of response its nature requires. A quarrel between neighboring communities over a playground or a water pump can be serious, yet if caught early it might well be managed within the community by the Forum, without recourse to the police or DC. A simmering dispute over a sectarian or interfaith site is different : it might require the intervention of the provincial home department, reached through the Aawaz District or Provincial Forum, or the DC, whatever its current temperature. And where an early warning points to hate speech by a person or group with wider backing, no amount of forum mediation will hold it, and risks putting forum members in harm's way; involving the police or DC in this instance is the correct response. In Sheikhupura, for instance, an Aawaz II focal person described resolving several Muslim and Christian disputes through mediation after receiving early warnings and referring onward only those whose nature placed them beyond the community's domain to manage. That assessment is exactly what an overburdened district system lacks: a way of routing dispute to the level and the authority that fits it.

For the disputes that do reach the state, the system also makes them easier to handle, because they arrive already documented rather than with an unannounced complaint that needs several visits to sort out. A dispute that comes with a clear record of who is involved, what happened and what has already been tried, is one a duty officer can act on at once. So, the system does two things at the same time: it keeps most disputes out of the formal system, and it makes the ones that do enter easier, and more cost effective to handle.

Figure 3: From warning to response

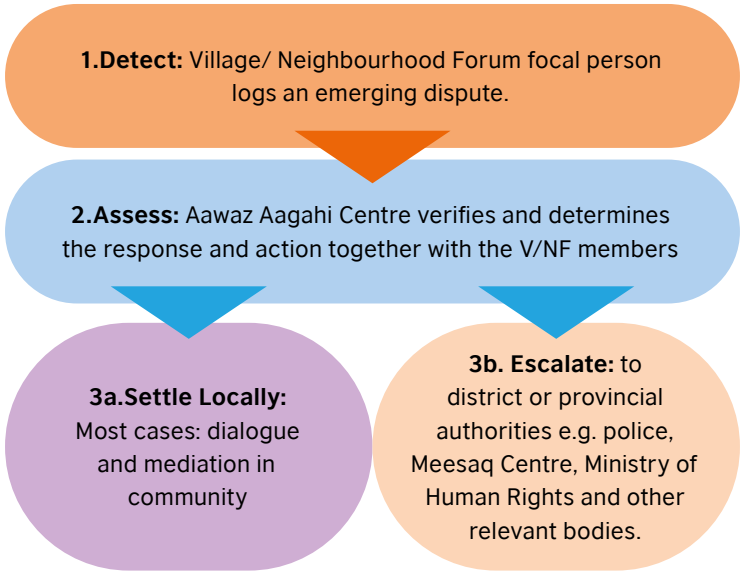


Figure 3 above shows the flow from detection of cases to the response of the system; detection by a community member or a village focal person, assessment at the Aagahi Centre, and then one of two paths: most disputes settled locally through mediation; those whose nature requires an external authority referred on to the police, the Meesaq Centres or other relevant bodies. The cases arrive already documented, thus saving the government both effort as well as costs.

4. Reaching the excluded

A system is only as good as the people willing to use it, and here the Aawaz II model differs most sharply from the traditional forums. The jirga and the panchayat are community based and seen as accessible. However, these are shaped by local power, and women, religious minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender people excluded from decision making, often cannot get a fair hearing and avoid the risks of approaching them at all. A forum that the powerful control, is a forum that records only the disputes the powerful deem worth recording.

The Aawaz II forums are consciously designed to be socially inclusive and gender sensitive. Every V/NF has at 50% women, and two woman among its focal persons, one for general affairs and one for the EWS-ERM. Thus the early warning approach is more likely to surface the risks to community wellbeing and social cohesion, that often begin within the home or in minor interactions: the child marriage, the abuse, the squeezing out of a minority family from shared land or water.

This is the Aawaz II system's core measure of performance. Whether a frightened woman or a minority household trusts the focal person enough to raise a warning early is precisely what decides whether a dispute is caught in time or left to grow into something that needs the police or the courts. Every cost saving in this brief rests, in the end, on that act of trust being made early rather than late. To protect and deepen it, by giving focal persons recognition and by keeping at least one woman in every forum, is a small investment against the disputes that cost the state, and communities the most.

5. What prevention saves

The heart of this brief is a single calculation: what does it cost to prevent a conflict, and what does that conflict cost if it is left to run its course? Interviews with the relevant government officials, together with the Social Return on Investment (SROI) study 20262 and the community focus groups, allowed piecing together an answer with real local figures rather than borrowed benchmarks.

Start with what a case costs once it reaches the police. The official schedule sets the cost of investigating a case by offence, ranging from PKR 700 (about GBP 2) for a minor case up to PKR 19,800 (about GBP 52) for murder. The reality, as an official described it, is far higher: about PKR 15,000 (GBP 39) for a land dispute, around PKR 100,000 (GBP 263) for an inheritance dispute, and PKR 200,000 to 300,000 (GBP 526 to 789) for an interfaith one. And here is the part that matters most for ordinary families. The amount the government budget covers only about a quarter of that true cost; the household carries the rest, paid to outsiders with expertise in police cases and court filing, in the worst cases, the transportation costs for a trip to a distant forensic laboratory for DNA testing. An unresolved dispute is thus not only a cost to the state. It is a heavy cost to the complainant and the household and includes the lost workdays and the damaged property that the conflict itself brings.

Now set that against the cost of prevention. The Aawaz II Early Warning System, covering training, coordination and running costs, was valued at PKR 425 million (GBP 1.12 million). Spread across the disputes it has handled, the cost of preventing a single conflict is very small. This is because the early detection is done by the community itself. The focal persons and resource persons who run the forums

2 The Social Returns on Investment study, commissioned by Aawaz II, estimated the impact of the programmes' interventions around ending child marriage, gender-based violence, social inclusion and social cohesion, in monetary terms. This policy brief draws on the study

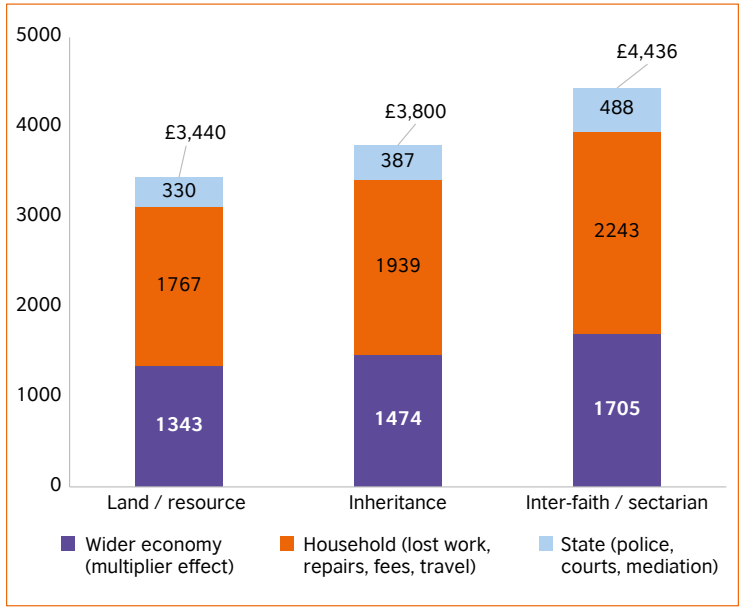
are members of their communities, who take on the role because they understand the local dynamics better than any outside person could, and who receive training and a small amount that covers the cost of a data card for mobile phone use. This is the distinctive strength of the model: the individuals best placed to notice a dispute forming, and best trusted to help settle it, are the ones doing the work. What conventional conflict response tries to buy, local knowledge and local trust, this model has included by design, because the community is managing its own affairs and has full ownership and steer of the process.

How the savings are calculated (Annex 1)

The figures in this brief come from a simple chain, set out in full in Annex 1. For each type of dispute, the number the forums handled is multiplied by the share that would otherwise have needed a police or court response, and by the costs of such a response, the share of the state and the household, and the knock-on loss to the local economy. A discount is applied to the state's share of costs, so that only the value generated by the programme when the conflict remains resolved, is counted. A separate, deliberately cautious estimation values the interfaith or sectarian disputes that could have ignited into community-wide violence, using the documented cost of the 2023 Jaranwala events as the reference. The headline figures are the sum of the two.

Put the two sides together and, for every dispute the forums catch early, the expected saving works out at about PKR 235,000 to 306,000 (GBP 623p to 808). This figure already allows for the fact that not every prevented dispute would have gone on to need a costly government response; some would have been contained sooner. That a dispute never reaches the police or the courts doesn't mean it was trivial; an interfaith flashpoint or a water dispute can threaten lives and fracture a community; it means the forums held it before it demanded an expensive external response. The saving thus achieved does not stop at the household, either. Money a family keeps instead of losing it to a conflict is spent locally, much of it on rebuilding and repair, and that spending passes on to other traders and businesses. The programme's Social Return on Investment study,[3] tracing household savings through a standard economic model of how spending in one part of the economy flows through to others[4], puts this knock-on effect at 1.76, meaning every rupee a household keeps generates an additional 0.76 rupees of local activity, because money saved from conflict goes heavily into construction and repair, which draw on many other trades in turn.

Figure 4: Who gains from the avoided costs?



3 British Council. Aawaz II Social return on Investment. June 2026
4 The Pakistan Input-Output Table.

Who bears the cost, and why the state still has a stake. As Figure 4 shows, across all three dispute types the forums settle, the state's share of the avoided cost per case is smaller than the household's; the bulk falls on the household, with a further layer rippling out into the wider local economy. A prevented interfaith dispute is worth about a third more than a prevented land one, chiefly because the investigation costs spared the household are higher. This does not mean the state has little at stake. Three things should be read alongside the per-case picture. First, a small state share multiplied across many thousands of prevented disputes is still a large sum, and it is the government's own money, police investigation budgets and court time, that is spared. Second, the households bearing the heavier cost are the state's own citizens; a system of justice that quietly shifts three-quarters of an investigation's cost onto complainants is a governance problem the government has every reason to fix, not a private matter. And third, the costs that fall most heavily and most directly on the state, the mass police deployments and the destruction of public and private property when a dispute ignites into community-wide violence, are precisely the ones this system is built to prevent, and they are counted separately in the flare-up figure.

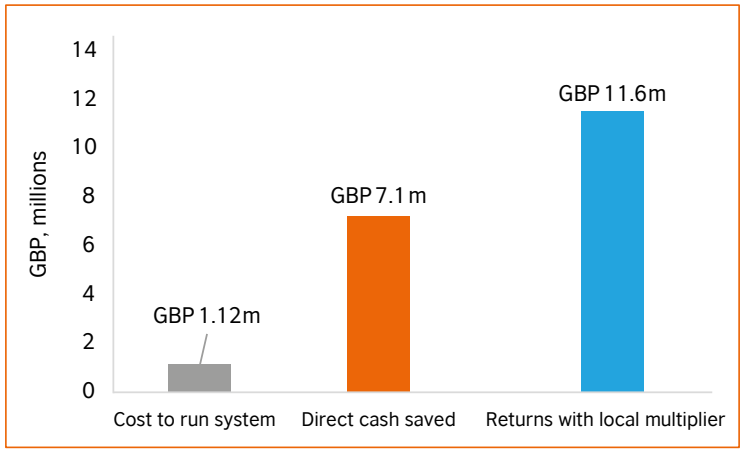
Programme-wide saving. Applying the costs set out earlier across the 13,700 community, minority and sectarian disputes, those that fall within the community's domain to manage, gives the programme-wide saving. The calculation is deliberately conservative. Where the field evidence offered a range for how many disputes would otherwise have reached the police or the courts, the brief uses the lowest, most cautious figures, and discounts the state's share further so that only the value clearly down to the programme is counted. The fuller reasoning and the alternative, higher readings are set out in Annex 1. The result is set out below.

Table 1: Avoided Cost by Conflict Type

Conflict type	Disputes	Share needing a formal response (proportion)	Needing response (number)	Avoided cost per case (GBP)	Avoided cost value (GBP)
Land / resource	9,503	0.25	2,376	3,220	7.6 million
Inheritance	3,959	0.20	792	3,549	2.8 million
Interfaith / sectarian	277	0.15	42	4,129	0.2 million
Total	**13,739**		**3,210**		**10.6 million**

Across the whole programme, the saving comes to around PKR 2.6 billion (GBP 7 million) for households and the state in direct cash, rising to about PKR 4.3 billion (GBP 11.3 million) once the knock-on local spending and the small number of prevented community-wide flare-ups are added. This is the programme-wide estimate, and it should be read as the upper end of a range: it applies the costs found in a smaller set of individually verified cases across the much larger set of responded disputes. Its firm lower end is the audited floor, the 1,699 conflicts the SROI study checked case by case, which alone avoided about PKR 481 million (GBP 1.3 million), a return of about nine to one. On either reading, against a running cost of just PKR 425 million (GBP 1.12 million) million, the system returns many times what it costs. Figure 5 below shows the costs and returns of the system.

Figure 5: The costs and returns



The saving estimated is from both KP and Punjab where the programme was implemented. Since there were more intervention districts in Punjab, the number of early warnings and preventive responses were more, hence there were higher savings attributed to Punjab. These shares should be read as each province's own avoided cost, not as a division of a single pooled figure; a precise provincial breakdown awaits the warning records split by province and dispute type.



6. What the findings mean for sustaining the system

The findings are clear: the system works. It prevents conflicts at a small fraction of the cost of responding to it, delivering avoided costs of the order of GBP 7 to 12 million across the programme against a running cost of GBP 1.12 million (PKR 425 million) and it reaches women, minorities and other vulnerable groups whom the traditional forums leave out.

It does this, however, within a resource-strained context, and that is where the risk to the gains lies. The government bodies that respond once a dispute is referred on, the police, the Meesaq Centres, the Dispute Resolution Councils and the protection units, are short of staff, funding, equipment and transport, and their mandates are built around responding to disputes rather than preventing them. No existing body is currently resourced or mandated to carry the early-warning function that the forums provide. If that function is left to depend on already-stretched institutions, without a settled place and allocation of modest resources, it is the first thing likely to fall away.

The forums are, by design, voluntary, run by community members who take on the role because they understand their own communities better than any outside body could. That is a strength of the model, but it is not without cost to the volunteers who often belong to communities that are poor. Volunteer effort of this kind endures when it is recognised and supported, through capacity building and some coverage of the costs volunteers bear, and weakens when it is taken for granted.

None of this is a reason to doubt the Aawaz II model; it is the case for giving it a stable footing. The requirements are modest: a settled home in government, recognition for the community volunteers, and enough resources to cover the system's small running cost and the volunteers' expenses. Set against the value the system returns, that is a small investment to protect a large and recurring gain.

7. Recommendations

These recommendations are built around departments, posts and budgets that already exist, not around new institutions, because the system's worth lies in fitting into district governance rather than adding to it. They share a common purpose: each converts a function that currently depends on donor funding and individual goodwill into a defined government responsibility, so that it endures beyond any one project, official or budget cycle. They are set out in order of priority, beginning with the step on which the others depend.

7.1 Give community based early warning a permanent home in government

With donor funding for Aawaz II now ended, the Governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should formally recognise and take ownership of community-based conflict early warning and response, so that the capacity built over the past six years is retained rather than lost. Aawaz II is the most developed example, but the recommendation is broader: it applies to the community forums and to the civil society organisations with volunteer networks across the districts of both provinces, which together form an early-warning layer the state does not otherwise have. Each province should designate a provincial lead department as custodian of the function, holding its mandate, its records and its budget line, with the district administration, through the Deputy Commissioner's office, as the operational home where the function is actually run. Because most disputes are identified and resolved at the community level, the function must sit at the district level in practice: the DC office is its day-to-day anchor, coordinating referrals to police, protection and welfare services. The provincial custodian holds the mandate, the budget line and the records above that, which provincial department is best placed to hold that role is for each province to decide. The

Social Welfare Department does not need a parallel early warning structure of its own because it acts as the designated responder for the protection cases the system refers to it, domestic and sexual violence and child marriage among them, under its existing mandate, just as the police and the Meesaq Centres respond to the cases that fall to them. One system raises the warning; the department whose mandate fits the case responds to it.

This can be given effect through a provincial notification that recognises the community forums as part of the district conflict-prevention architecture, names the provincial custodian and the district office that will run the function, defines how the forums connect to the police, the Deputy Commissioner and the protection services, and brings the early-warning records and standard operating procedures into the custodian's custody. Because the Aawaz II trained community volunteers are still in place, this can be done now by building on what exists, rather than reconstructing it later from nothing.

The value already created, the trained focal persons, the local knowledge, and the trust communities have placed in the forums, is not something a government can procure on the open market; once these structures disperse, rebuilding them is slow and costly. Placing the function within a named custodian and a defined district home also gives it a clear line of responsibility, so that referrals are handled consistently and the system does not depend on the goodwill of individuals who may move on.

7.2 Allocate resources for an effective system

Each province should allocate a modest, protected recurring budget for the operating costs of the early-warning and response system, placed within the annual budget of the lead department designated under 7.1. The purpose is to fund the running of the system, not to convert community volunteers into paid staff, so that the model remains both effective and inexpensive.

The budget should be drawn from the existing operational allocations of the lead department rather than requiring new fiscal space, and should cover a defined and limited set of costs:

- coordination and record-keeping at the Aawaz Aagahi Centre and district-forum level, including the staff time of the officials who run them;
- communication and travel costs for verifying and referring warnings, met against actual, documented expense rather than as a standing payment;
- periodic training and capacity building for community focal persons and forum members.

These are the running costs of the system, and they are modest. What the budget should deliberately not do is pay a per-person incentive or honorarium to focal persons across every forum: with community forums spread across the districts of both provinces, per-village incentives would run into very large sums and would undermine both the voluntary character of the model and its cost-effectiveness. The forums' value lies in being community-owned; the state's role is to support that, through recognition and coverage of genuine costs, not to monetise it by giving salaries.

A predictable operating budget is what turns the system from a donor-funded project into a permanent government function. Without it, the system depends on the goodwill and personal expense of volunteers and officials, which is neither fair nor durable; with it, at a cost that is small against the avoided costs documented in this brief, the function is secured. The resource required is modest and recurring; the cost it prevents is large and recurring.

7.3 Write early warning into the rules

Provincial governments should write the early-warning and response function into the rules that govern law enforcement, social welfare, human rights and child protection, so that it becomes a defined responsibility rather than a discretionary activity. Where full statutory change is slow, the function can be embedded in the near term through administrative notifications under the existing social welfare, human rights and child protection mandates, with formal amendment to follow. Placing the function in the rules, rather than leaving it to policy or practice, is what gives it a defined legal basis and a clear line of accountability within provincial government.

7.4 Formalise the referral pathway through Deputy Commissioner offices

Deputy Commissioner offices should recognise community forums as the first line of conflict prevention in the district and set out in writing how referrals are logged and handled and name the officials on both sides who will do it.

This can be given effect through a short district level standing order that defines the route between the forums and the police, protection and child welfare offices, specifies response timelines, and designates a focal officer in each receiving office. Recording referral activity within those officers' routine reporting would ensure the pathway is monitored rather than merely declared.

Attaching duty to the post rather than the individual is what allows the pathway to continue when officials are transferred, so that referrals do not stall each time a focal officer moves on.

7.5 Recognise focal persons, and preserve their inclusive composition

Focal persons should be formally recognised by the district administration, through a district-issued identification or a simple register of accredited focal persons, giving them standing when they approach a police station, a Meesaq Centre or a protection unit. Recognition of this kind costs almost nothing and makes it easier for a focal person to be heard when it matters.

The composition that makes the forums effective should be preserved as the function is taken into government. Each V/NF should retain one male and one female focal person dedicated to early warning and response, so that women can raise concerns to someone they are able to approach; and where the community includes non-Muslims, one of these early-warning focal persons should be drawn from that community, so that minority households have a trusted point of contact. Writing this composition into the membership criteria attached to the ownership notification, with the roles kept filled as individuals move on, ensures the inclusiveness already built into the model is not lost once it becomes a government function.

7.6 Maintain and support the forums through the district administration

District administrations should take responsibility for keeping the community forums functioning, through a light, routine system of oversight and support rather than one-off intervention. A designated officer in each district should maintain a simple periodic check on whether each forum is active, whether its focal persons are in place, and whether it needs refresher training or support, and ensuring that active members are protected from harm.

All forums need some support to continue; the aim is not to reward the strongest or rescue only the weakest, but to keep the network in working order. Where a forum is found to be struggling, the district administration should provide backstopping, refresher training, help in replacing focal persons who have moved on, and the modest operating support covered under 7.2, so that a temporary weakness does not become a permanent gap. Building this into a district officer's routine duties, rather than treating it as a special exercise, is what allows the system to be sustained at low cost within existing administrative capacity.

8. Risks and mitigation

The handover is designed to last, but four risks are worth naming, each with a safeguard already reflected in the recommendations above.

Table 2: Risks and their mitigation

Risk	Mitigation
Capture of the forums or the referral channels by dominant local figures.	Run the function through named, answerable officials with transparent membership criteria and defined focal person roles (7.1, 7.5); gives it a clear line of responsibility that an informal arrangement lacks.
Volunteer fatigue and attrition: focal persons drift away without acknowledgement and support	Formal recognition that gives the role standing, together with coverage of genuine, documented costs and periodic refresher training (7.2, 7.5, 7.6)
Forums lapse: forums become inactive as individual focal persons move on or support falls away	A routine district-level check on whether each forum is active, with backstopping, refresher training and help replacing focal persons where needed (7.6)
Staff transfers affect responses	Anchor referrals in a written standing order tied to the post, not the person, with referral and response activity part of routine reporting (7.4)

9. Conclusion

Government today funds conflict resolution almost entirely at the response end: the police investigation, the court case, the deployment once violence has broken out. This brief has set out the alternative. Preventing a dispute costs the state a fraction of what responding to it does, and the disputes prevented would otherwise cost households, the state and the local economy on the order of PKR 2.6 to 4.3 billion (GBP 7 to 12 million) across the programme, several times its running cost. These figures rest not on the value of the programme in general but on the specific conflicts it prevented, estimated against what those conflicts would have cost had they run their course.

The case for government is therefore **a choice about where to spend,** not whether to spend. The state will pay for conflict either way. It can pay a little, early, through a community-based system that catches disputes before they harden into cases and which reaches the women, minorities and vulnerable groups the traditional forums exclude; or it can pay far more, later, through the police, the courts and, in the worst cases, the aftermath of community-wide violence. Prevention is also the cheaper route to social cohesion: every dispute settled early is trust between neighbours preserved rather than repaired.

What this requires of government is modest and set out in the recommendations above: a permanent home for the function, a small recurring budget, and its place written into the rules. The capacity itself, the trained community forums and the trust they have earned, already exist. The decision is only whether to retain the system, and to shift from paying for conflict after the fact to preventing it before.

Annex 1: The Avoided Cost of the EWS-ERM

This annex details the calculation of the avoided costs The value that the system creates has two parts: the cost avoided when ordinary disputes are settled locally, and the cost avoided when a dispute that could have ignited into community-wide violence is caught and referred on in time. The two are calculated separately, in Equations 1 and 2 and combined in Equation 3.

The first equation calculates the per-case avoided costs, valued across conflict type

Equation (1), $V_c = \sum_{i=0}^{n} p_i N_i (a_i s_i + h_i + e_i)$ ---(1) where:

V_c = Total value created by the costs avoided from disputes settled case by case

N_i = Conflicts preempted

p_i = the share of disputes of this type that, without the forums, would have required a formal response from the police or the courts rather than being resolved in the community.

a_i = a discount on how much of the value is genuinely caused by the programme and durably retained.

s_i = avoided state cost, per referred case. This will be the sum total of the costs for police investigation, courts and ADR/protection tier.

h_i = avoided household costs per referred case. This would include lost productive time, property repair and access/transaction cost

e_i = avoided wider economic loss per referred case

The second equation values the cost avoided when a dispute that could have ignited into community-wide violence is prevented:

Equation (2) $V_f = N_r \times \mu \times C_e$ --- (2) where:

V_f = Avoided cost of a prevented mass event

N_r = Number of interfaith, sectarian and minority disputes carrying

genuine flare-up potential

μ The probability that such a dispute would have ignited into a community-wide event

C_e The cost faced by the community in the case of such an event.

The total value created is the sum of Equation (1) and (2), and is represented by Equation (3).

Equation (3), $V = V_c + V_f$ --- (3)

Using Equation (3), the net impact and cost benefit ratio are calculated by Equation (4) and (5) below

Equation (4), $I = V - K$ ----- (4)

Equation (5), $R = {}^{V}/_{K}$ ----- (5) where:

I = Net impact

R = Cost Benefit Ratio

K = cost of running the EWS-ERM[5].

How each term is estimated

N_i, the number of conflicts preempted. This is the count of disputes the forums detected and responded to early, the base on which everything else rests. It comes from the programme's own records, which log every early warning by category for all 22 districts from 2020 with 15 added in 2024: 28,634 warnings raised in total, of which 20,403 were responded to.

Not all of these belong in the calculation. The forums resolve some disputes at the community level and refer others to the police, the DC or the protection services, according to what response each dispute needs. Both kinds can carry an avoided cost, but the domestic and sexual violence and the child marriage cases are set aside from this

5 This is the cost of the whole programme in the fifteen districts covered in the SROI study, over a 21-month period.

calculation, for the reasons given below. Broken down by category, the responded cases are detailed in Table 3 below:

Table 3: EWS Cases responded by category

Category	Responded	In the calculation?
Community conflict	13,197	Yes
Religious minorities	184	Yes
Sectarian violence	93	Yes
Others	265	Yes
Domestic and sexual violence	5,443	No, counted as a protection outcome
Child marriage	1,221	No, counted as a protection outcome

Domestic and sexual violence and child marriage are left out because the forums refer these on for protection and prosecution rather than to avoid a cost; their value is counted separately as a protection gain. That leaves about 13,700 disputes, the community, minority and sectarian cases, that the forums handle before they require a formal response. This is the programme-wide figure for N_i.

These two protection categories are not small, and they are worth stating in their own right rather than simply removing. Over the life of the programme the forums responded to 5,443 domestic and sexual violence cases and 1,221 potential child marriages, 6,664 in all. These were surfaced early and referred, as each case required, to the police, the courts and the protection services, so that the person at risk was reached in time. Their value is deliberately given here as people helped rather than as a sum of money. The benefit of preventing a child marriage, or of a woman reaching protection before violence escalates, is real and often life-changing, but it is a protection benefit to an individual, not a cost the state avoids; indeed it is a cost the state should expect to meet, because meeting it is what protection requires. To fold these cases into the conflict-prevention savings would be to imply that the system saves public money by keeping violence against women away from the authorities,

which it does not and must not. They therefore sit alongside the monetised conflict figures as a separate, non-monetised outcome, and are excluded from every rupee total in this annex.

The calculation uses two values of N_i for two different purposes. For the audited floor, N_i is the 1,699 conflicts the SROI study verified case by case in the fifteen districts it studied over 21 months. For the programme-wide estimate, N_i is the roughly 13,700 divertible cases responded to across all 37 districts over the programme's life. The first is a near-complete count for a narrow slice of the programme; the second covers the whole programme but is less individually verified.

The records give the split by conflict type but not by province. The Evidence Study's earlier provincial figures put roughly 70 per cent of warnings in Punjab and 30 per cent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Applying that same proportion to the responded cases, of the 20,403 responded across the programme, about 14,300 fall in Punjab and about 6,100 in KP; and of the roughly 13,700 divertible cases used in the calculation, about 9,600 are in Punjab and about 4,100 in KP. This is an assumption, not a count: it takes each province's share of responded cases to match its share of warnings raised, which the programme's records could confirm directly. Because of this, any provincial division of the saving is approximate.

***p_i*, the chance a dispute would have referred.** This is the share of disputes that, left alone, would have required a response from the police or the courts. It cannot be measured directly, because these disputes were resovled before that point, so it has to be judged by the people who deal with such cases. Three different values were available. A focus group in Hafizabad put it at 5 out of 10. An official at a Meesaq center, who works with Aawaz II forums, put it at 5 to 6 out of 10 of the cases the forums resolve. And a police official at a station with no programme activity gave a lower, type-by-type reading of how often each kind of dispute reaches the police on its own: 2 to 3 in 10 for land disputes, about 2 in 10 for inheritance, and around 1 to 2 in 10 for inter-faith cases as formal complaints.

The policy brief takes the police official's lower, type-by-type figures as the central estimate, because a station with no programme activity is the cleanest read on what would have happened without the forums. The higher focus group and Meesaq readings are held back as upside rather than counted. So p_i is set at the cautious end, about 2.5 in 10 for land disputes, 2 in 10 for inheritance and 1 to 2 in 10 for inter-faith cases, well below the five to six in ten the community and Meesaq readings suggested

***S_i*, the cost the state avoids per referred case.** This is what the government spends when a dispute reaches the formal system, and it is made up of three parts.

The first is the police cost. A police official gave the real cost of investigating a case by type, from PKR 15,000 (GBP[6] 39) for a land dispute up to PKR 200,000 to 300,000 (GBP 526 to 789) for an inter-faith one. But the official was clear that the government pays only about a quarter of this, the household covering the rest, so only that quarter is counted as a cost to the state: roughly PKR 3,750 (GBP 10) on a land dispute, up to PKR 50,000 to 75,000 (GBP 131 to 195) on an inter-faith one.

The second is the court cost: the figure of about PKR 117,000 (GBP 308) from the Aawaz II Social Return on Investment study for a case that reaches a magistrate, family or session court.

The third is the cost of mediation, roughly PKR 1,000 to 1,500 (GBP 3 to 4) a case, worked out from the staff time recorded in the earlier Meesaq and Women Protection Unit interviews.

Added together, the state avoids somewhere between about PKR 122,000 (GBP 321) for a land dispute and PKR 181,000 (GBP 475) for an inter-faith one, depending on the type.

***h_i*, the cost the household avoids per referred case.** This is what the household caught up in a dispute would have spent and lost, and it has two parts.

6 All figures are converted at PKR 380 to GBP 1, the average official exchange rate for the programme period, as used in the Aawaz II SROI study.

The first is the loss already costed by the Aawaz II Social Return on Investment study and the focus groups: lost working time and property damage, about PKR 632,000 (GBP 1,663) per referred case. This was built from roughly fifteen people kept from work for about two weeks, and repair bills that the Hafizabad focus group put at anywhere from PKR 50,000 (GBP 131) to several million, taken at the middle of that range.

The second part comes from an interview with a police official, which described the household bearing about three-quarters of a case's costs. These include the travel, the evidence, the fee paid to someone who knows how to draw up the case in the form the courts require, any visits for forensic testing and a focus group described, two to five trips to government offices at up to PKR 6,000 (GBP 16) each. Adding this to the working-time and property loss brings h_i to between about PKR 654,000 (GBP 1,721) for a land dispute and PKR 830,000 (GBP 2,184) for an inter-faith one.

One limitation of h_i should be stated plainly, because it makes the estimate a floor rather than a central figure. The household cost is built from the losses of a single household: the working time its members lost, its property, its trips and fees. For most land and inheritance disputes that is the right unit, since the dispute is between identifiable parties. But many of the minority and interfaith disputes the forums resolve concern shared community assets: a graveyard, a place of worship, access to common water. A dispute of this kind touches every minority household that depends on the asset. In the programme's own fieldwork, a dispute over a Christian graveyard site in Sialkot, resolved through the DC Office, is a documented example. Where the asset serves the minority community of a whole district, the affected population is larger still. The calculation nonetheless counts each such prevented dispute at the cost of one household, because no defensible multiplier exists for the number of households affected. The avoided value of the interfaith and minority cases is therefore understated, and by an unknown but potentially large factor.

e_i, the wider economic loss avoided per referred case. When a family keeps money instead of losing it to a conflict, it spends that money locally, and that spending passes on to other traders and businesses. This term captures that knock-on effect. It is not worked out separately but taken from h_i. The Aawaz II Social Return on Investment study traced household savings through the Pakistan Input-Output Table and found that, for social cohesion, every rupee saved generates about 1.76 rupees of activity once the knock-on spending is counted, the highest of the programme's three monetised themes, because money saved from conflict goes heavily into building and repair, which draws on many other trades. So e_i is the extra 0.76 generated on top of each rupee of household saving, roughly PKR 497,000 to 631,000 (GBP 1,305 to 1,660) a case. Because it is built from h_i, it is shown on its own line, so that a reader who wants only the direct cash saved can leave it out.

a_i, the discount for what the programme really achieves. Not every saving on paper is real or lasting, so the calculation applies a discount to count only what the programme genuinely brings about and what actually holds. The Aawaz II Social Return on Investment study uses a discount of between one-half and seven-tenths, set against the field coordinator's judgement that the system's chances of lasting were about four or five in ten. The annex uses that same half-to-seven-tenths band and applies it at its midpoint. The Meesaq Centre official's report that none of the disputes he settles come back argues against the bottom of the band; the Women Protection Unit's seeing very few cases that began with the forums is a reminder not to go to the top. The midpoint reflects both. This discount is applied only to the state costs, which rest on a single official's estimates. The household and economic figures are not discounted a second time, because the caution is already built into their inputs: the share of disputes counted as needing a formal response is taken from the lowest of the three field readings, and the cost components at the middle of their observed ranges. Applying the realisation discount on top of these would double-count the conservatism.

K, the cost of running the system. This is the figure the avoided value is measured against. It comes straight from the Aawaz II Social

Return on Investment study, which valued the Early Warning System at PKR 52.6 million (GBP 138,363), the cost of building and running an equivalent system: training, the coordination and the day-to-day running of the system. This valuation corresponds to the scope the SROI study, which was 15 districts over 21 months. Spread across the 1,699 conflicts the study verified in those studied districts, it works out to about PKR 31,000 (GBP 82) per conflict. For the programme wide comparison, the same cost per conflict is applied to the total number of 13,700 cases, resulting in a total value of PKR 425 million (GBP 1.12 million). The programme wide return is measured against this scaled figure, not against the SROI study figure alone, so that the value generated at the programme level is set against the costs at programme level. K is taken directly from the SROI study, not worked out by this annex; the scaling is this annex's addition, and it assumes that costs arose in proportion to the number of cases.

N_r, **the number of disputes with flare-up potential.** This is the small subset of disputes that carried a real risk of igniting into community-wide violence, the kind the forums should not try to hold at community level because doing so puts forum members in harm's way and calls instead for the authorities to act. It is drawn only from the interfaith, sectarian and religious-minority cases, since these are the disputes that spread along community lines, the 277 such cases the forums responded to across the programme (184 religious-minority, 93 sectarian). Of these, only a fraction carried genuine flare-up potential, the rest being ordinary local frictions that were never close to igniting. There is no published figure for how often a local interfaith or sectarian dispute escalates into community-wide violence, in Pakistan or elsewhere, because the disputes that resolve quietly are never counted, which is the very gap the forums fill. What the wider evidence does establish is the shape of the risk: such flare-ups are rare relative to the large number of everyday frictions, but when they do occur, the harm falls on a whole community at once. The annex therefore sets the share of disputes with genuine flare-up potential low, at 1 in 20, giving about 14 disputes across the life of the programme. This is a deliberately cautious judgement rather than a measured rate.

μ, **the probability such a dispute would have ignited.** Even a dispute with flare-up potential does not usually become a mass event; most are contained one way or another. This term is the chance that one of the at-risk disputes would actually have exploded into community-wide violence had the forums not caught and referred it in time. The annex sets it at 1 in 5. Applied to the roughly 14 at-risk disputes, this implies the forums prevented on the order of three mass events over the life of the programme. Like , this is a judgement rather than a measurement, set low on purpose because such events, though catastrophic, are rare even among tense disputes.

C_e, **the cost of one mass event.** This is what a single community-wide flare-up costs, built from components anchored to the documented Jaranwala event of August 2023. The largest part is property. The Faisalabad district administration's itemised estimate put the damage at about PKR 67 million: PKR 29.1 million for at least 22 churches and PKR 38.5 million for 91 houses, torched across eleven localities in a single day (Dawn, 22 August 2023[7]; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2023[8]). To this the annex adds two further components, both its own estimates rather than reported figures: about PKR 5 million for the heavy security response, some 250 police and paramilitary deployed over a week, and about PKR 15 million for a week of halted local commerce. Together these give a per-event cost of about PKR 87 million (GBP 228,820).

This is a conservative figure, and the property component is likely understated. A petition to the Supreme Court recorded 146 houses damaged against the 80 the government first counted, and roughly 40 per cent of affected families were still awaiting compensation a year on (Amnesty International, August 2024[9]). The true property loss was therefore higher than the official estimate, so the per-event cost used here, and the flare-up total that rests on it, should be read as a floor rather than a central figure.

7 https://www.dawn.com/news/1771458
8 https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2023-Mob-led-destruction-of-churches-in-Jaranwala.pdf
9 https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/pakistan-one-year-since-jaranwala-attack-minority-christians-await-justice/

The cost of a case, by type

Putting s_i, h_i and e_i side by side shows how sharply the value of preventing a dispute rises with is the kind of response it would otherwise have needed. The first column is the full cost borne, in rupees; the rest are in pounds:

Table 4: Relevant factors by Conflict Type

Conflict type	Land / resource	Inheritance	Inter-faith / sectarian
Borne cost (PKR)	15,000	100,000	200,000–300,000
State s_i (GBP)	321	377	475
Household h_i (GBP)	1,721	1,888	2,184
Economic e_i (GBP)	1,308	1,435	1,660
Total per referred case (GBP)	3,349	3,700	4,319
Share needing a formal response (p_i)	2 to 3 in 10	2 in 10	1 to 2 in 10

The totals here are before the realisation discount is applied; the discounted figures used in the final calculation appear in Table 3. In PKR, the total avoided per case runs from about PKR1.27million for a land dispute to PKR 1.64 million for an interfaith one. A prevented inter-faith dispute is worth about a third more than a prevented land one, mostly because the investigation costs it spares the household are so much heavier. And this per-case figure captures only the cost of an ordinary dispute that would have needed a police or court response; for the small number of inter-faith and sectarian disputes that could instead have ignited into community-wide violence, the far larger cost of a prevented flare-up is counted separately, under the flare-up element below.

The result

The amount the system avoids for each conflict it prevents stays steady

across the three types it handles, between about PKR 233,000 and 309,000 (GBP 613 to 813). It barely moves by type, because the household cost, which makes up most of the total, is similar across them. So the figure does not hang on getting the exact mix of disputes right.

Applied across the full set of community, minority and sectarian disputes, about 13,700 responded to over the programme's life, the calculation runs as follows, following Equation 1. Each conflict type is split out; the share that needed a formal response (p_i) is applied; the state cost is discounted by the realization factor (a_i); and the discounted state cost is added to the household and economic costs to give the avoided value per case.

Table 5: Avoided Value by Conflict type

Conflict type	Land / resource	Inheritance	Inter-faith / sectarian	Total
Cases (N_i)	9,503	3,959	277	13,739
Share needing response ()	0.25	0.20	0.15	
Referred cases (×)	2,376	792	42	3,210
Discounted state cost ($a_i s_i$) (GBP)	198	232	293	
Household (GBP)	1,767	1,939	2,243	
Economic (GBP)	1,343	1,474	1,705	
Avoided per referred case (GBP)	3,307	3,645	4,241	
Avoided value, (GBP)	7.9 million	2.9 million	0.2 million	10.9 million

avoided-per-case figure is the discounted state cost ($a_i\ s_i$) plus the household and economic costs ($h_i + e_i$); the discount a_i is applied to the state share only and shown here at the midpoint of the 0.5 to 0.7

band. Multiplying each type's referred cases by its avoided-per-case figure, and summing, gives the per-case value v_c of about GBP 10.9 million.

Following Equation 2, the flare-up component values the mass events prevented when the forums caught and referred on the small number of inter-faith and sectarian disputes that could otherwise have ignited into community-wide violence

Table 6: Avoided cost of a mass event

N_r (at risk disputes)	μ (flare up probability	Events prevented	C_e per event	Avoided cost of a mass event (v_f)
14	0.2	2.8	PKR 87 million (GBP 228,819)	PKR 241 million (GBP 0.63 million)

Following Equation 3, the total value is the sum of the two components: v_c (GBP 10.6 million) + v_f (GBP 0.63 million) = V (GBP 11.2 million).

Table 7: Avoided Value and Return

	Value avoided, V	Return, R = V ÷ K
Direct cash only (state and household)	PKR 2.6 billion (GBP 7 million)	6 : 1
Including knock-on local spending (×1.76)	PKR 4.3 billion (GBP 11.3 million)	10 : 1

Against a programme scale running cost of PKR 425 million (GBP 1.12 million), the system avoids on the order of PKR 4.3 billion (GBP 11.3 million) in household, state and wider economic cost once the local knock-on spending and the prevented flare-ups are counted, and about PKR 2.6 billion (GBP 7 million) in direct cash alone. The net impact, the value avoided less the running cost, is about GBP 10.2 million (Equation 4), and the return about ten to one with the wider economic effect or about six to one on direct cash alone (Equation 5).

Put simply, the system spends about PKR 31,000 (GBP 82) to prevent one conflict and avoids, on average, close to PKR 290,000 (GBP 769) when it does.

This programme-wide figure applies the costs found in the verified cases across the full set of responded disputes, which is far larger than the SROI study audited case by case, so it is best read as the upper end of the range. The audited floor, drawn from the 1,699 cases the SROI study checked individually, is PKR 481 million (GBP 1.3 million) at about nine to one.



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