



RESEARCH PAPER

Empowering Women through Educational and Economic Access Programs in Punjab, Pakistan with Reference to SDGs Goal 5

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the programs, initiatives, practices and the status of women empowerment in the perspective of SDGs 2030. The present study uses both primary and secondary data to dig down the reality. Research design of the study was descriptive and survey in nature. Data was collected through semi structured interviews from the policy makers, community leaders and Government stake holders. Study unfolds the rhetoric that programs and initiatives launched for empowering women were not aptly executed for rural marginalized areas of the Punjab, Pakistan. Findings of the study revealed that due to lack of proper dissemination of these programs, lack of bottom up strategies, low allocation of budgets for rural areas, lack of political will and commitment gap at the top up level to empower women in rural areas was the reason of erratic execution of educational initiatives programs and policies. This study recommends that women empowerment programs, initiatives and policies should be equity based considering the gender parity, and integration of gender mainstreaming is required in the national development policies for empowering women

Introduction

Quality of Empowerment is a multidimensional and composite word that usually highlights independence of women by choice and autonomy over resources to regulate their personal lives both at the individual and the household and societal levels politically, socially and economically. Improved information, self-assurance and consciousness of gender parity are the dimensions of women empowerment progression (Murphy-Graham, 2008). As an outcome of higher

education there is substantiation that these components are established (Maslak & Singhal, 2008).

Wilkinson (1998:56) describes empowerment as a capability to make your own decisions in life but also have well known knowledge and information to come up to the conclusion. Due to empowerment the communities and individuals are substantially linked. Shortage of finances can be assumed as a pattern of associations that have the collective effect of eliminating people from processes of growth and development. The factors like monetary, communal and disparity which negate enablers of women empowerment such as wellbeing, welfare, resources, accessibility and education (Aliber 2002:6). Alcock (1993:4) harmonizes with Aliber by opposing that shortage of finances has various gages, including inadequate earnings and prolific assets to confirm maintain a believing, malnutrition and starvation, inadequate or lack of accessibility to edification, homelessness and inadequate housing, social disparity and marginalization. Education and skills are sources of strategies for economic and social affluence. The basic awareness of females is quite insufficient, even in apprehension of matters as basic fundamental rights, and the legislation that is intended to safeguard them. In addressing issues pertaining to women empowerment and leadership it is substantial to harness their potential. These concerns might contain the dearth of learning and skill, insufficient official papers as for instance national ID Cards, does not have their bank accounts and even they lack their own marriage certificates. A significant feature to create awareness in rural women for self-realization and self-reliance is to alleviate rural poverty. In the financial domain mostly women are lagged behind by lack of finance and by their incapability to work in community. Numerous women, though trained in customary skills (e.g. in nurturing livestock, sewing, and culinary) are incapable of turning those expertise into feasible monetary accomplishments. They have no idea and ability to register a business, assets or access to microcredit. When it comes to women empowerment and leadership the women especially the rural women must realize to get themselves financially strong. But the decisions about girls are often in the hands of men. For assembling women empowerment initiatives taking into account their perspectives, the perceptions of other segments of their societies must also inform such interventions. Women constitute an integral component of society, with negative family and other household relations worsening their plight (Chaudhry and Nosheen, 2009).

According to Fonjong (2001), empowerment involves accessing basic needs and taking control over their processes for meeting them, including the benefits resulting from the initiatives. Therefore, it is vital to find out whether women are genuinely empowered considering the socio-cultural and political complexities existing in the communities they come from. The outcomes of the Mathaulula (2008) study reveal that marginalized women, men and community leaders believe that although there has been some noticeable development in various facets of life, women remain marginalized and have benefited only to a limited extent from

government programs introduced post-1994. Dlodlo (2009) observed that people (females in particular) in rural South Africa lacked accessibility and awareness on these opportunities. As a result, the women rarely take advantage of the opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

The Gender and Development Approach (GAD) appeared in late 1980s (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). This was a prototype modification from the "*women in development*" approach, which engrossed almost entirely on women and the impact of macroeconomic policies on their lives, to the "*gender and development*" perspective. To empower women the most common challenges has been the poor implementation of policies. Infrastructure in rural areas is inadequate to meet the requirement of these areas regarding attainment of education for females. Lack of dissemination of information for women is a main obstacle in rural marginalized areas which is obligatory to be addressed. Reinforcement of women empowerment required appropriate framework of coordinating plan. McEwan (2003) highlighted the shortcomings of developmental initiatives that the South African government implemented through local municipalities. Female members in this study felt that they were excluded from pronouncement. As a result, they were unaware of some program implemented in their communities.

Material and Methods

Structured interviews were conducted to collect data from 50 Policy makers, planners and political leaders to ascertain the plans and strategies undertaken by them in the implementation and execution of initiatives and programs for empowering women through education in rural Punjab. Secondary data from magazines, libraries, and e-Books was collected on the subject matter.

National Rural Support Program (NRSP)

NRSP stanch to support legislative reform that strengthens women's rights but many lope holes and lacunas were found in the legislature framework. Therefore, NRSP has provided a forum to enable all patrons to approve the legislature for rural women. NRSP promised in elevating women's 'voice' to encourage them by representing in public, societies, towns and Union Councils by increasing their participation of lucrative fiscal accomplishments. This is attained by confirming that women contribute in social Supervisions, Towns Organizations and Indigenous Provision Organizations and by means of microfinance, asset transfers in their names and the facility of occupational trainings. NRSP's Gender and Development sector is intricate in catering these and additional matters, through the field of Public stimulating events and in distinct ventures. National Rural Support Program is helping women to become economically independent to make them empowered but the barrier in accomplishment of this program in rural Punjab is its awareness to the women and girls of marginalized areas they are still deprived of these programs .

The union council based poverty reduction program (Mianwali, Punjab)

This was a 2-year program and was extremely pioneering in twofold: it was the program to associate and involve the Poor annotation and the first major program in which all impositions were carried out by women. There were many deterrents due to the conventional side of the people in the Union Council, the program had to meet resilient traditional barricades to alter mental approach, enable females' freedom of movement, support female protagonist roles, and enable women to have an opinion within their household and family circle and in Union Council matters. The program thrived to double up women's exemplification in mobilized society organizations and many womenfolk were capable to participate in occupational trainings and experience visits for the first time. They also get advantage from skill transfers. Women hinged Communal Organizations and took advantage from credits under the Community Investment Fund. Women also significantly helped by the Program Adult Literacy and Life Skills (PALLS) and believed they had improved their wisdom of self-awareness and freedom as a result. This was a bit successful strategy to make women educated and aware about the importance of participation at community level, this is how they can get their rights.

Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)

Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) made agreements with the Women Development Department (WDD), and Literacy & Non-Formal Basic Education Department (NFBE), Government of the Punjab, to encourage gender equality within its schemes with an emphasis on women empowerment to perform a bigger part in the socio-economic growth of the country. PPAF work in partnership in policy-grassroots ties over supportive nets of women and youth organizations to interrelate more diligently with WDD and Literacy Department and further government units, supporting programs and allocation on capacities such as community mobilization approaches, gender equality policies, growth of linkages and awareness rising promotions to expedite provincial rules and strategies relating to upgraded gender mainstreaming. PPAF involved youth helpers and communal organization participants from chosen districts in the Punjab province who will interact with women and youth at the masses level to encourage literacy among the women groups.

PPAF's inclusive strategy was to improve poverty affiliated strictly with Pakistan's assurance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Accepting an assimilated, multi-sectorial, communal-led, community driven strategy, PPAF methodology is to improve comprehensive, symbolic, crystal clear and liable organizations of the deprived. The protagonist part of women in program design, delivery and impact is the fundamental of all contribution, while social inclusion, political participation and women empowerment form the indispensable transformation and revolution by PPAF.

Punjab Women Empowerment Package (PWEF)

Women Development Department (WDD) initiated Punjab Women Empowerment Package (PWEF) for protecting women civil rights and escalating financial prospects. The division involved in acquainting with administrative and institutional reforms and emphasized women's perception across public policies, laws and programs. The Punjab government has begun consolidating its initiatives and endeavors regarding various facets of women-related activities to empower women in an effective way. The Punjab government's initiatives established linkages with broader national and international systems and partners to connect with the world in a holistic manner. The consolidation, coordination and collation of inter-agency Women Empowerment Initiatives with the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other international commitments is need of the hour.

Literacy and Non Formal Basic Education Program (LNFBE)

The program's instruction was to configure policies and plans for poor rural segments of illiterate population. For empowering women many skill programs are designed for girls & women right of entry to quality literacy and non-formal basic education. In the light of article 25-A & 35-B of the constitution of Pakistan, Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department is trying to eradicate the darkness of illiteracy with the collaboration of other organizations. It's utter reality that a large part of Punjab's population is unable to read and write. This program is striving hard to make rural marginalized areas of population literate.

SMEDA

There was requirement of a visionary program to empower women and girls for their leadership, creativity and growth in Pakistan to enrich their prospective and expedite their accomplishments. Henceforth, SMEDA treaded in to provide the growth to this relegated sector of financial initiative. SMEDA instantaneously, grasped entrepreneurs countrywide through its strategies at key business townships everywhere in Pakistan.

The main undertaking of SMEDA includes:

Women Business Development Center (WBDCs): The tenacity of developing this center was so to provide equal chances of business loan to literate house wives so they can work on their own. WBDCs Customers are women belong to different areas and regions showing multicultural environment of Women Businesses development center.

Capacity Building Program for South Punjab: SMEDA's WED Cell planned a program during 2015-17 for Women empowerment of South Punjab for

the capacity building. The program initiated with the skill training program named as “Enhancing Exhibition Skills”

Marketing Assistance: SMEDA offers advice-giving facilities for empowering women to make appropriate marketing plans, disseminate information, cataloging, and website development.

Facilitation for Financing: SMEDA provide financial assistance to women entrepreneurs with collaboration of First Women Bank Limited.

Training programs for Entrepreneurship Development: It demeanors many training, management, technical and skill development programs throughout Pakistan for empowering women.

Industry Academia Linkages: SMEDA try to figure out liaison through various institution of higher education having women section to figure out internship programs, workshops, Entrepreneurship Courses & Seminars for empowering women.

Benazir Income Support Program

The Program shaped up through an Act of Parliament, President of Pakistan is the Chief Patron of Benazir Income Support Program and patronized by Prime Minister.

Objectives of Program are as follows:

1. Improve monetary capability of under privileged individual and the household members reliant on them.
2. Expedite and execute initiatives and programs to elevate the vulnerable, deprived and neglected people.
3. Decrease poverty and support the equal flow of wealth entirely for the truncated earning clusters.

To attain the auxiliary of empowerment of females, Benazir Income Support Program offers funding entirely to ladies. The recipients residing in the most neglected, deprived, downgraded and helpless parts of community, residing in miserable poverty. Financial scarcity, irrespective of radical empathy, ethnic identity, regional location and spiritual principles, is the only criteria for assorting BISP receivers. Its long period goals comprise of accomplishing the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eliminate sheer and ongoing shortage of finances and uplift the women empowerment.

Two programs launched under the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)

i. Waseela-e-Rozgar(WeR)

ii. Waseela –e-Taleem(WeT)

Waseela-e-Rozgar(WeR)

The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) launched Waseela-e-Rozgar for the unemployed youth and poverty stricken people of the country with the help of ‘Human Resource Development’ in Pakistan. Waseela-e-Rozgar program was premeditated an exodus scheme for BISP recipients to overcome the dependence of getting Rs 4700 per quarter. This program envisioned in women empowerment for female recipients or on her behalf to develop monetary independence by obtaining need based professional skills. The aim of the program was to organize training platforms in demand-driven skills in particular communal and private organizations. It was to be useful in carrying proficient growth and sustenance as financing and capacity building is perhaps the finest approach to progress its living and remunerations. The WeR provides a free-lance skill teaching program for each recipient female or her behalf nomination (from 18 to 45 years of age) related to her own family. WeR is authorized to impart one nomination from each UCT receiver family.

Waseela-e-Taleem(WeT)

Waseela-e-Taleem (WeT) was established by BISP in discussion with all the program share holders WeT Program, a Co-responsibility Cash Transfer (CCT) Program of BISP that was commenced to monetarily upkeep the key edification of children having age of 6 to 13 of Benazir Income support program beneficiary families for their registrations and retaining. Each receiver child attains cash transference of PKR 750 per quarter upon fulfilling the admission confirmation in 1st quarter and attendance prerequisite of 70% in consequent quarters till accomplishment of the basic education. It is fragment of the qualification scheme directing to connect the Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) to accomplishment of sustainable development goals. The WeT program is meaningfully donating to the subsequent three Sustainable Development Goals which in recent times have been signed by the head of the state of the country together with world leaders:

Community Driven Development project (CDDP)

CDD projects intends to strengthen societies exclusively women. The project was supported by World Bank in Pakistan with the collaboration of Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF). Project teams progressively identify that they need to emphasize more consideration to these scopes. CDD programs trail out the plan activities, such as the number of subprojects proposed by women or the number of women who received credit. Very few plans categorize and

explore findings in their outcomes frameworks to enlighten how plan accomplishments can alter the lives of women. Outcomes at this stage are analyzed by those appraisals that concentrate on both impacts “outside the plan restrictions” and predictable influences. Estimations of CDD, particularly arduous ones, are, nevertheless, primarily when related with other interferences (as for example, money transfer). Most events comprised in CDD plans provision of financial empowerment, and this is the emphasis of the common gages in outcomes contexts.

Punjab Education Foundation (PEF)

The PEF is a gender-responsive organization and observed that its efforts are resulting in women-empowerment, poverty-alleviation as well as ensuring that girls from the indigent communities could easily go to schools. The PEF detailed review of various arrangements made by the foundation through its public private partnership based schooling programs and observed that these useful interventions are wholly helping the needy communities to send their children to PEF sponsored schools across the province. PEF launched educational facilities to all such communities and observed that ‘boat schools’ can be opened for the benefit of riverine communities living near to the bed of Indus River in Layyah, Bhakkar, DG Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur districts. PEF maintained that such mobile schooling facilities will definitely help out of school girls and persuade their parents. Such schools can be opened through local partners on public private partnership basis. She apprised the meeting about different interventions including pilot project of inclusive education for the physically-challenged children in PEF partner schools. She showed interest in early childhood education project in joint collaboration and said that PEF has ensured that all students get education in a congenial and conducive atmosphere as corporal punishment is strictly banned in all partner schools under strict instructions from the Punjab government. PEF has targeted to educate 2.8 million mostly out of school kids by 2018. This would help to achieve the targets of ‘Parho Punjab, Barho Punjab,’ she maintained.

Results and Discussion

Maximum third world countries have the identical problem relating to education and socio economic eminence of women and peripheral rural development, it is anticipated that the outcomes will be liable to valuable recommendations for planners, practitioners and scholars in the area of learning and improvement of women in the third world. The rural support program (RSP) in Pakistan has also gained worldwide acknowledgment. It has been entitled as one of 13 ‘ideas that toil in the World Bank’s book “Ending Poverty in South Asia”’. Rural Support Programs have a respectable rapport with both federal and provincial Governments. Many of them have been approved a government grant, and community mobilization and community-driven development are now fully elaborate into Pakistan’s poverty reduction approaches. The purpose is to take the scheme to nationwide attention. The Rural support program RSPs are well-known

for accomplished administration, devoted staff and a malleable, yet systematized scheme to their work. For the sustainable development of a country it is a dire need that the mentioned programs and projects taken up by the Government of Punjab, should emphasis on women empowerment as a leading part in the socio-economic progress nationwide. The Pakistan Rural Support Program (PRSP), Education Sector Reforms (ESR) Action Plan (2010 to 2015) has been fully assimilated into the PRSP and almost 80 per cent of the ESR package covers adult literacy, Education for All (EFA) and Technical Education. EFA is disparagingly imperative for financial decline and sustainable development. EFA goals are being followed as fragment of countrywide financial shortage plan. PRSP's stress on both access and quality intrusions is entirely and constantly entrenched in ESR and EFA documents.

The initiative like SMEDA is working with immense struggle to strengthen women financially. But it is not thriving for the rural women's financial support in the rural Punjab because of the constraint that is the freedom and control of female lies in the hands of male. Female can never get loans on their names due to non-issuance of their national identity cards, therefore on their behalf male counter parts get the loan. Benazir income support program (BISP) has the biggest databank of underprivileged folks in Pakistan which is the result of the leading and one of its kind analyses of rural poverty .BISP has a country wide existence with head office in Islamabad and 6 provincial bureaus at regional level, Azad Jamu Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. There are 35 head offices and 391 union council offices throughout the country. Decrease financial shortage and encourage impartial circulation of wealth especially for the little earnings clusters. To accomplish the auxiliary target of empowering women in a best possible way is through Benazir income support program (BISP).The recipients of this program are the most vulnerable segment of the society living in the remote areas living below the poverty line. Community Driven Development (CDD) is amongst precise ventures to ascertain and quantity effects in their outcomes contexts and conveys by what means venture can transform the lives of women. CDD deals with cash allocations and most events involved in CDD projects helps in financial empowerment of women. PEF is working in collaboration with plan Pakistan an international organization to empower girls through education by the name of project "I am a girl "especially PEF is working for Rural marginalized areas of Punjab. It is public -private partnership program. The PEF is a gender-responsive organization and observed that its efforts are resulting in women-empowerment, poverty-alleviation, as well as ensuring that girls from the indigent communities could easily go to schools. Its goal is to impart education for all specifically to eradicate girls drop out level at schools.

Discourse Analysis of the Interviews

The discourse on the interviews conducted on empowering women in the wake of Sustainable Development Goal 5(SDGs 5) and the strategies taken by the policy makers, planners, and community leaders enlightened that Pakistan has

made accessible many initiatives during 2012-17 for female's progression and empowerment. All the above given initiatives, programs and policies launched for the females mainly in remote areas of the province Punjab in the contribution of the SDGs Goal 5 targets.

The targets of SDGs 5 are as given below

- i. End discrimination against women
- ii. End violence against women
- iii. Eliminate force/early marriages
- iv. Promote shared domestic responsibilities
- v. Ensure participation and leadership in decision making
- vi. Universal access to rights and reproductive health
- vii. Equal rights of property and ownership
- viii. Promote empowerment through ICT
- ix. Strengthen policies and legislation for gender equity

Target viii of SDG 5 states the empowerment through ICT training for all the females in a country must be ensured. In this regard many ICT incubation centers have been launched and provision of these facilities are given in rural areas exclusively. IT training by WDD (Women Development Department) through Punjab information technology board (PITB). Microsoft is also helping NAVTTC to instill ICT training centers for innovative digital skills especially for females. It covers 16 districts of the Punjab but not launched in Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur.

SDG5 target vii which indicates the provision of awareness to women regarding of legal and basic right females are ignored and disregarded in the remote marginalized areas of the Punjab due to the weak promulgation of the strategies and practices for female's initiatives.

SDG5 target v indicates that females do not participate in the initiatives and programs due to inadequate resources, lack of awareness, patriarchy, gender discrimination and lack of commitment gap. SDG5 target i-v indicates that due to prevailing conventional and orthodox traditions in the rural remote communities the women are still deprived of their basic rights in the form of welfare and wellbeing.

Government of Pakistan has join hands with many transnational organizations JICA, DIFD, UNICEF, and UNESCO to promulgate the importance

of female education. Policy makers tried to institutionalized the policies, practices and norms that perpetuate gender parity in society There is a dire need to have synergy and harmony between the various national and global organizations in the perspective of SDGs 2030.

Conclusion

It is concluded that by providing women with economic access, educational opportunities, and autonomy over resources may lead to overcome all the obstacles towards empowerment. Major obstacles confronting women belong to rural areas are poverty, lack of infrastructure, patriarchy, domestic violence, and feudalism. Government strategies at local level to empower women in the perspective of SDGs Goal 5 to ensure and provide women with legal rights, resources, welfare, and access to ICT, and ability of women to leadership positions but women remain sidelined and deprived from the educational initiatives and programs due to lack of proper dissemination and execution . For the progression and empowering females to be attained in rural areas of the country there is a dire need that policy makers, government stakeholders , and other top improvement organizations need to develop the grassroots level of implementation. Integration of gender main streaming in the development policies for women empowerment is a must for empowering women in the wake of SDGs 2030. Although substantial development has been made in creating a support in environs for women enablement but due to insufficient information and the dearth of monetary enablers rural women lagged far behind. It must be taken seriously and addressed urgently for empowering women particularly in rural areas. Lack of harmony and synergy between various public organizations working for women empowerment is the major missing link in on-going women empowerment initiatives.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study the following recommendations were made

1. Initiate rural literacy programs, ICT and skill development for women empowerment and leadership in true letter and spirit in all the remote marginalized areas of the country.
2. Entice the strategy by coordinating with all the stakeholders at all levels for instance public organizations , Non-Government organizations, civil society foundations, donor organizations, indigenous administrations.
3. Training programs should be held for capacity building of women empowerment in the areas of planning and development.
4. Figure out operative partnerships like the public private sector, transnational organizations and the media.

5. Analyze implementation and execution of these programs and initiatives by considering a “bottom up approach “means localization of these initiatives and programs.
6. Monitor accurate checking and evaluation mechanism and retain trail of up-to-date position of rural literacy programs in all the rural districts.
7. Make sure for ample monetary resources for rural areas in empowering women through education.
8. Integration of gender mainstreaming in all the development plans and its integration in National curriculum should be promoted.

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