

Chapter 20

Economic Empowerment of Women in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This chapter gives an account of the situation on the status of women in Pakistan. It studies the various steps taken by the Government of Pakistan to empower the women. It also studies the various ways to empower women in Pakistan. The chapter only studies the empowerment of women in economic sphere due to the limited time and resources of the author. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the problems of women to participate in economic affairs, the hindrances in achieving economic uplift/empowerment and equality of women in Pakistan and the existing laws and policies of the government regarding women's empowerment and their implementation. Furthermore, it gives a brief comparison of women's economic empowerment with the neighboring countries, India and Bangladesh as these countries have a similar institutional structure as Pakistan. It then seeks to learn from the successful examples of the countries mentioned regarding the matter.

INTRODUCTION

In the lead-up to the independence of Pakistan, it seemed as if the state would prioritize empowerment of women (Weiss, 2001).

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you: we are the victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanctions anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live. Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1944)

These are the words of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Quaid -e- Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He was well aware that women need to be empowered and their conditions improved for the betterment of the country. However, cultural constraints still prevail and restrict the mobility of major-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7510-8.ch020

ity of women in the country, particularly limiting their participation in the public affairs of the country; the economic conditions of the women are very poor. The income of women working in rural areas and women home-based workers as mentioned later on in the chapter are some notable examples. Men are considered bread-winners; they are regularly given preference when it comes to hiring professionals. However, in terms of 'breadwinners'; more and more women provide for their families as single parents, heading up the family. Women's share in national income despite increase in economic growth is less than 20% while that in formal labor force is 20% which is due to restrictions in their mobility, systemic discrimination, harassment, lack of access to productive and remunerative employment. (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2011)

There are a multiple reasons that make women to seek jobs; some to satisfy their economic needs while others provide additional support for their family income although they are not bound out of severe economic needs. Still more, women work out of choice, to utilize their skills and to provide financial independence and a degree of agency over their future. There are some women who begin their professional career before marriage and are likely to continue to work even after marriage while others don't (Mirza, 2002) because of social constraints, intensive childbearing and comparatively smaller family size of young women. (Khan, R. A. A. & Khan, T., 2009) While others re-enter the workforce after marriage and childrearing to financially support their families. In Pakistan, a small number of women work to satisfy themselves, with the majority of women working because of differing levels of financial pressure. (Mirza, 2002)

"Smaller gender gaps are directly correlated with increased economic competitiveness," says Saadia Zahidi, Senior Director, Head of the World Economic Forum's Women Leaders and Gender Parity Programme and report co-author. "With the world's attention on job creation and economic growth, gender equality is the key to unlocking potential and stimulating economies." Women being a significant proportion of society cannot be ignored for the development of the country— this has been elaborated later on in the chapter.

Nevertheless, the job opportunities have been squeezed for individuals in Pakistan with the Global Economic Recession. The country with one of the world's highest percentage of youth population 48% (Daily Times, January 7, 2015) is now faced with unemployment challenges that see both men and women suffering equally. The youth especially is facing a lot of problems due to this fact. (The News, September 7, 2013) Although there is a female and minorities quota for jobs in government sector, there is still a lot to be done in this regard.

Pakistan's ranking in Human Development Indices (HDI) remained unchanged since the country clinched 146th position in 2013 and 2014 respectively out of total 187 countries, according to the Human Development Report (HDR) 2014 released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) where its HDI value for 2013 is 0.537, placing the country at 146 out of 187 countries and territories. Pakistan was placed in the low human development category having lowest performance in terms of Gender Inequality Index (GII). Whereas, the 2013 female HDI value for Pakistan is 0.447 as compared to 0.596 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.750. While it's human inequality coefficient is equal to 28.7 percent and lowest performance in terms of Gender Inequality Index (GII) having the GII value of 0.563, positioning it 126 out of 149 countries in the 2013 index. The report reveals that women hold 19.7 percent of parliamentary seats, 19.3 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education as compared to 46.1 percent of their male counterparts. Female participation in labor market stood at 24.4 percent as compared to 82.9 percent of that for men. (Haider, 2014)

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