

Women Involvement in Economic Activities in Balochistan: A Case Study of District Mastung and Pishin

Dr. Jahangir Achakzai¹

Abstract

There is a growing realization that sustainable development cannot take place without the active role of women in the economic activities of the province. Although women in Balochistan, are contributing more, the official documents badly underestimate her contribution in economic activities. At district level both in Mastung and Pishin, along with her daily chores at home, women equally participates in the economic activities like handicraft, poultry rearing, cattle rearing, sewing and teaching. Women in these two districts receive very meagre amount of income out of these activities. The main factors responsible for this state of affairs include limited marketing facilities, small scale production, poor access to credit institutions, and limited mobility of women.

Introduction

Women involvement in economic activities is one of the important indicators of gender development. Their economic empowerment is crucial if sustainable development is to be achieved. The higher the rate of involvement in economic activities, the greater will be their access to social services. It strengthens their social and political position in the society. Their involvement in income generating activities build up their decision-making capacity and thus make them more productive in the development process. Though women involvement in economic activities is substantial, their contribution is undervalued.

Women play far more active role in the rural economy than is generally believed. Contrary to the common perception and belief that women are "just housewives and are not playing any significant role in the economy" various studies show that women play a crucial role in the rural economy, including agriculture, livestock, and cottage industries. Women undertake a wide range of activities both in the field and at home. Although their involvement in farm work is lowest in the earlier stages of crop production when field preparation is largely undertaken by men but in the later stages of the production cycle in

¹ Associate Professor(TTS) Economics Department University of Balochistan, Quetta.

the harvesting and post harvesting phase their participation is very high. Home based post harvest operations such as drying, cleaning, and storage of grains are almost exclusively carried out by women. Their contribution is also significant in seed preparation, collecting farm yard manure, weeding, harvesting, and various other farm operations.

They are also involved in the care of livestock and poultry. Women take primary responsibility for cutting fodder, cleaning sheds, processing of animal products and care of sick animals. They look after the herds, do the milking, collect wool, spin it and make bi-products, and are also involved in weaving and so on.

In addition, on direct income generating side many women are engaged in rural non-farm economic activities like handicrafts, embroidery, quilt making, wool spinning, and tailoring, etc.

But unfortunately, there is a massive underestimation in most official data on women's work in the rural economy. The Annual Labour Force Surveys also do not present the real picture of women participation in economic activities and show implausibly low female labor force participation rates. Also the 1981 population census gives a low rural female labour force participation rate of 3%.

Various research studies on women involvement in economic activities in rural areas show, that women's participation in such activities is much higher than reported in the official data. Ibraz (1993) found that rural women are extensively involved in many agricultural and livestock rearing operations, processing of dairy products, poultry and handicrafts. Besides these productive activities they also perform household chores. Chaudhry and Khan (1987) found that the activity rates of rural women depend to a large extent on the social status of the household concerned. In rural areas, women have remained involved in a variety of agricultural activities for a long time, such as land preparation, seed preparation, collecting farmyard manure, weeding and harvesting. Women also undertake the responsibility of cleaning, drying, and storage of grains. Taking care of livestock is by and large the responsibility of women. They collect fodder, clean sheds and process animal products [Khan and Bilquees (1976); Ahmad, Asghar and Khan (1993); and Sarwar and Saleem (1993)]. Similarly, in the rural areas of Balochistan they were mostly involved in economic activities like Handicrafts, Sewing, Cattle rearing and Poultry rearing etc.

Nature of the Study

The research study mainly based on sample survey is undertaken to bring to light various economic activities women are involved in the province of Balochistan. For this purpose, the rural areas of two districts Mastung and Pishin were selected. Three clusters comprising villages with different characteristics were chosen from each district.

Data Collection Techniques

Questionnaire, Observations, discussions with key informants were the main information gathering techniques. Questionnaire being the main source of information was designed along with the objectives of the study. 300 questionnaires (150 from each district) were filled in by female enumerators. The task of data collection was completed in two months. In this regard 4 female enumerators were hired and trained. Random sample method was applied for the selection of households in the villages.

Pre-Testing

Before finalizing the questionnaire, it was pre-tested in “Kakar Colony” (Quetta) on 8% of the total questionnaire (24 respondents). Then questionnaire was restructured in the light of results.

Data Analysis

In order to facilitate district wise comparison, the collected data were arranged in cross tabular form and simple statistical tools such as percentage, ratio, mean and range were applied. For illustration, data were also graphically presented.

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents:

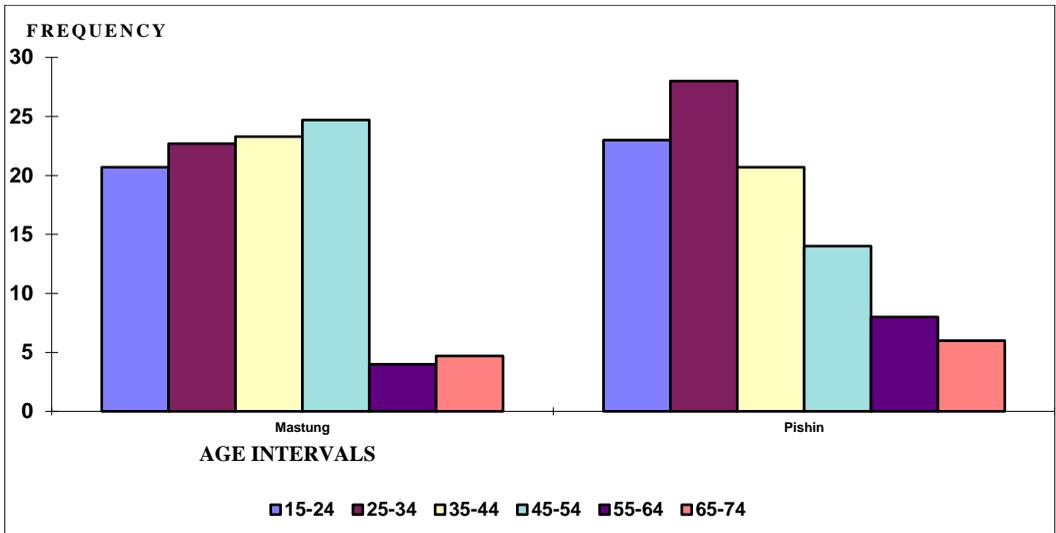
Without understanding the Socio-economic characteristics of respondents, it is difficult to identify the factors affecting their involvement in economic activities. In this regard, information on age distribution, marital status, family system, educational level, source of income was gathered. This background information will help us control the variance of the study and will facilitate data analysis.

Age Distribution

In the sample area of Mastung, the majority (24.7%) of respondents fall within the age group of 45-54 years. The second age group ranges from 35-44 years accounting for 23.3% of the respondents. About 22.7% respondents come under the age group of 25-34 years. Age group 15-24 ranks fourth, comprising 20.7% respondents. The remaining respondents fall into the age groups of 55-64 and 65-74 years. They constitute 4% and 4.7% respectively.

On the other hand the majority of respondents (28%) fall into the age group of 25-34 years in the study area of Pishin. More than 23% respondents belong to the age group of 15-24 years. The age group ranking third is 35-44 years, accounting for 20.7%. 14% respondents are associated with the age group of 45-54 years. The remaining age groups of 55-64 and 65-74 years account for 8% and 6% respectively

FIG 1
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS



The average age in the sample area of Mastung was worked out as 37 years. While in case of Pishin, it is 35 years. In both the study areas, most of the respondents fall under the first four age groups mentioned above. However, the dominating age group in Mastung is 45-54 years, while in case of Pishin it is 25-34 years. This difference is due to the fact that all respondents of Mastung are married, whereas in Pishin some unmarried respondents were also interviewed. In this regard, another reason may be early marriages in Pishin as compared to Mastung.

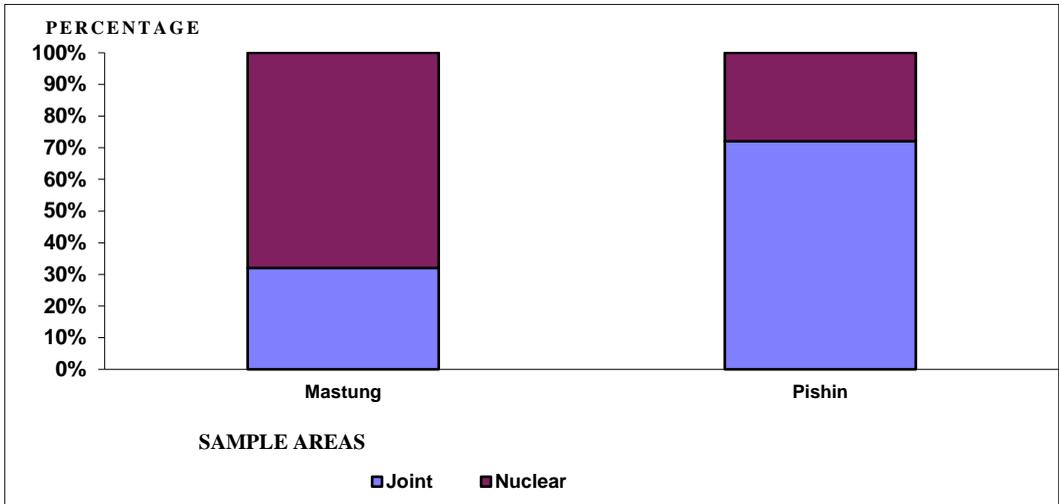
Marital Status

As far as marital status of respondents is concerned, the big majority of them are married. In the sample area of Mastung, 100% respondent are married. While in Pishin married women are 74%. Unmarried women constitute 14% of respondents. Moreover, 12% respondents were found widows.

Family System

Comparing the family system in both sample areas, nuclear family system was found dominant in Mastung accounting for 68%. While Pishin presents a different scenario, where joint family system is predominant mentioned by 72% of the respondents.

FIG 2
FAMILY SYSTEM



This difference is mainly due to different social structures prevailing in the areas. Generally people prefer to live in joint family system in Pishin. Their social values do not allow them to opt for nuclear family system. Besides, agriculture is the dominant activity in Pishin which keeps them live together in joint family. However it was observed that there is a growing trend of Nuclear family system in both the sample areas due to education, commercialization and development in communication.

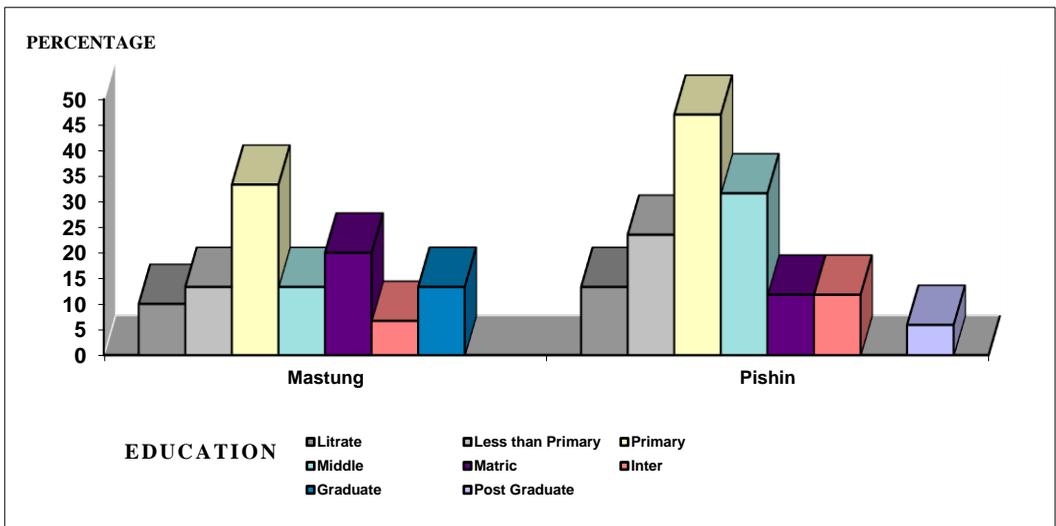
Educational Status

Education is an important component of development. It favorably changes the thinking of people towards progress. The ultimate purpose of education is to exploit the potential of people in such a way as to make them more active agent in development process. Increased emphasis on the education of women is the integral part of new development paradigm. It is well documented that education can improve the access of women to health services. As for as educational status of women in the study areas is concerned, a significant number of respondents were found illiterate. In Mastung sample area, out of

150 respondent, 135 cases were illiterate accounting for 90%. Similarly in the study area of Pishin 88.4% respondents were illiterate. A slight difference of 1.6% exists regarding illiteracy between the two sample areas.

As regards level of education, in the study area of Mastung 10% respondents are literate, out of them 33.3% have primary education, while 20% respondents fall into the category of Matric. The respondents having education level of less than primary, Middle and Graduation, account for 13.3% each. Moreover, 6.7% respondents were found with Intermediate education.

FIG 3
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL



On the other hand, in the sample area of Pishin the percentage of literate respondents is relatively high. Out of 13.3% literate, more than 47% fall under the category of primary level. Whereas 23.5% has education of less than primary level. Matric and inter account for 11.8% each. Respondents having post graduate education constitute 5.9%.

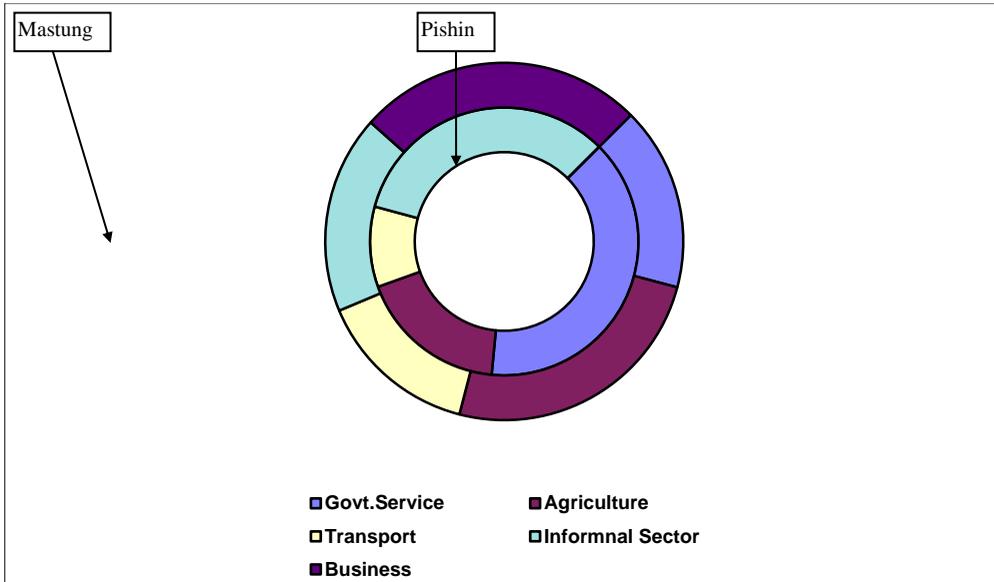
Source of Income

Source of income is an important indicator of economic status. The major sources of income in the sample areas include Agriculture, Government service, Business and transport.

A significant number (39%) of households are doing government service in Mastung. The second Major source is agriculture which accounts for 18%. That is followed by transport contributing 9.7% to the source of income.

Moreover, a considerable number of 50 household are engaged in various activities of informal sector.

FIG 4
SOURCE OF INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS



Unlike Mastung the major source of income is business in the sample area of Pishin. About 26% of households were involved in the said activity. While the second source of income springs from agriculture accounting for about 25%. The third source of income is informal sector engaging 18% of households. Besides, Government Service is another source of livelihood employing 16.7% households. 14.7% of them mentioned transport as their source of income.

In short Agriculture is the second dominant source of income in both the study areas. However in Pishin business is the major source of income, while in Mastung Government Service comes first in this regard. This difference can be attributed to the fact that the people of Pishin are comparatively more business minded.

Results and Discussions

Comparing the two sample areas of Mastung and Pishin regarding women involvement in economic activities, a small number were found engaged in activities like handicraft, poultry rearing, cattle rearing, sewing and teaching.

Low involvement of women in economic activities is due to the fact that social and cultural barriers do not allow them to take part in any economic activity particularly outside the house. Women doing economic activities account for 27.3% in Mastung, while in Pishin it is 17.3%. Mastung has the higher rate of involvement for the reason that social sanctions are relatively less severe.

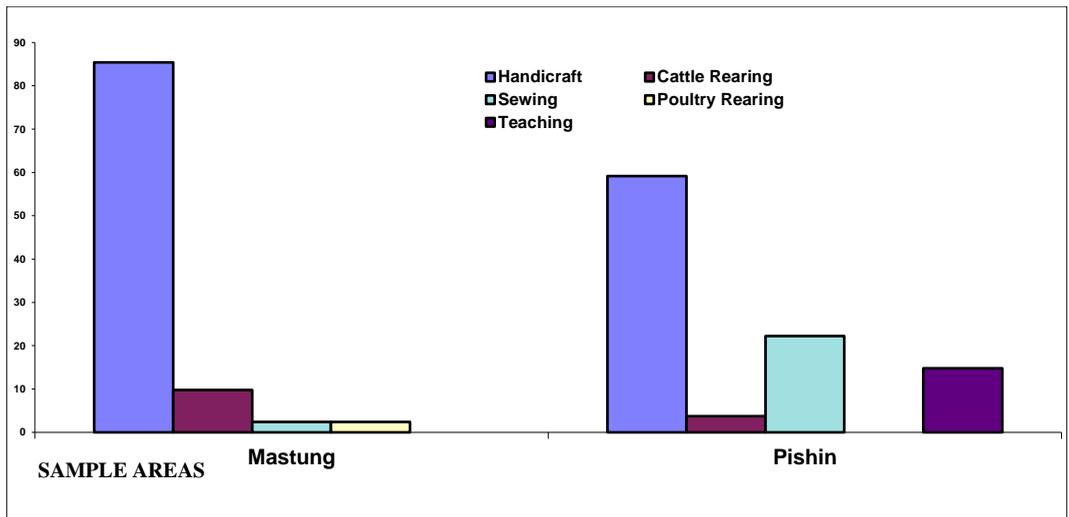
Major Economic Activities

As regards major economic activities in Mastung, handicraft ranks first involving 85.4% respondents. Which is followed by 9.8% in Cattle rearing, whereas poultry rearing and sewing account for only 2.4% each.

FIG 5

MAJOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

PERCENTAGE



Similarly in Pishin study area, 59.2% women were engaged in handicrafts. Sewing is the second major economic activity accounting for 22.2%. Moreover teaching and cattle rearing were other economic activities constituting 14.8% and 3.7% respectively.

Looking back at the figures, one can conclude that handicrafts including sewing are the dominant economic activity in both the study areas. In fact these activities are carried out within the house and are consistent with the cultural values.

As far as income from economic activities¹ is concerned, normally they earn very meager amount. The reasons for low income include.

- (a) Limited marketing facilities,
- (b) Small scale production,
- (c) No access to credit institutions,
- (d) Poor bargaining position due to poverty,
- (e) Lack of knowledge about prevailing prices of their products.
- (f) Limited mobility of women.

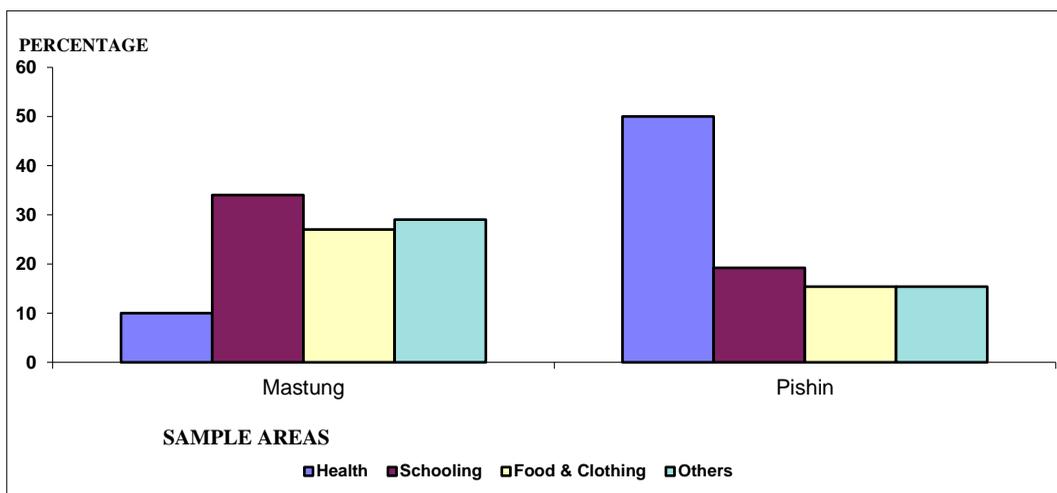
On average, each woman earns Rs.2575 per month in the sample area of Mastung. While for Pishin, it was worked out as Rs.2942 per month. This difference is mainly due to involvement of some respondents of Pishin in teaching, where they receive higher salaries.

Pattern of income spending:

Pattern of income spending differs in both districts. In Pishin, majority (50%) of respondents spend their income on health. On the contrary, only 10% respondents are spending income on health in Mastung sample area. This implies that people in Pishin are more conscious about their health than that of Mastung. However, in Mastung income on schooling is two times higher than that of Pishin.

¹ Though women are involved in a number of economic activities, only those activities generating income have been taken into account

FIG 6
PATTERN OF INCOME SPENDING



Food and clothing are the other items where income is spent. In Mastung 27.2% respondents spend their income on food and clothing. While in Pishin 15.4% respondents set aside their income for this head. Moreover, in Pishin 15.4% respondents spend their income on dowry, while 29.3% respondents use their income on other items of daily use in the study area of Mastung.

From the above comparison, it is evident that health and schooling are the important areas of spending on the part of respondents indicating their changing attitude towards social development.

Conclusions

There is a realization in almost all sections of the society that sustainable development would remain a dream unless women are not stream lined in the development process of the province. In Balochistan, the official documents badly underestimate women contribution in economic activities. In practice she is contributing far more than the government quoted figures.

Women in the two district of Mastung and Pishin, along with her daily chores at home, equally participates in the economic activities like handicraft, poultry rearing, cattle rearing, sewing and teaching. These are mainly the activities carried out within the house and are in line with the cultural values of the area.

As far as income is concerned, women in these two districts receive very nominal amount out of these activities. Mainly, limited marketing facilities, small scale production, poor access to credit institutions, and limited mobility of women are the factors responsible for this state of affairs.

One of the positive changes that was observed in these two areas and which the data also strongly supports is the social change in the form of increase in spending on health and education. It shows their degree of awareness that the best investment is in human being.

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