

Women empowerment through community Development programs in Balochistan

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Abstract

This research study examines women empowerment through community development programs in Balochistan. The study includes interviews and field studies with the women beneficiaries of NGOs to know the impacts of a community development program named, "women empowerment in Muslim context- gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out" launched by Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center in district Jaffarabad, Balochistan. Focusing on two key questions, how women achieved empowerment through this project, which can identify the forces that obstruct them and those that support their empowerment. On the other hand, how they made autonomous decisions to challenge or transform power relations that impede gender equality. Community Development is an approach to bring about changes in whole community. These changes are actually planned at development of the community. It involves all people, particularly of the areas in the development activities. Community development can provide opportunities to local people to improve the socio-economic condition and also use the existing resources in better way. Community development programs should be ready to meet changing needs of the target population to make them really independent after the completion of the program.

Key Words: Women; empowerment; Community Development program, Balochistan.

1.Introduction

Gender biasness across the world captures the concentration of the world policy and decision makers in women empowerment. As women empowerment is considered to be the main aspect of development in all over the world, particularly in underdeveloped countries, as a result many national and international organizations acknowledged that without women's empowerment there is no hope for social development. Moreover, gender

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discrimination is one of the key problem faced by women throughout the world, which creates it difficult for women to empower themselves for enriching their status. This research study focuses on how community development programs play its role in women empowerment.

In last few decades, government and non-government organizations (NGOs) have introduced a number of community development programs throughout the country to improve the socio-economic and political conditions of people particularly women.

According to Khan (2007), approximately, 51% population of Pakistan encompass with women and play a vital role for the welfare of their family and community at all levels. Unfortunately, our socio-cultural system limited women to improve their status in Pakistan. Women are still deprived of their basic rights specially at rule areas. They still don't have right to take self decisions about their lives. They still face the challenges of poverty, inequality, and earn hardly an acknowledgement of her role in serving her family.

A number of national and international NGOs have launched many community development programs in Balochistan including Aurat Foundation, Mercy Corps, Balochistan Rural Support Programs, National Rural Support Programs, Shirkat Gah, etc. Shirkat Gah Women Resource Center launched a community development project named "women empowerment in Muslim context- gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out" in 2008 at district Jaffarabad, Balochistan. The project of Shirkat Gah motivates women to access the decisions making process at community level and remove the imbalance socio-economic and cultural limitations and create a justice and equality society for all.

In this paper two aspects were discussed, first, how women achieved empowerment though this project, which can identify the forces that obstruct them and those that support their empowerment. On the other hand, how they made autonomous decisions to challenge or transform power relations that impede gender equality. In other words, the purpose of this paper was to highlight the NGOs' community development program regarding women empowerment.

2. Community Development

Community development is an approach to bring about planned changes in a community. It involves local community in a systematic way to improve their living standard. These efforts give a clear direction to strengthening community structure for human well-being. For past few decades, community

development programs have identified a discipline of interest to both academicians and practitioners. A good number of academicians believe it is a process to build the capacities of people collectively and improve their skills. While the majority of practitioners say community development as an outcome to improve the social, economic and physical conditions of the community (Phillips and Robert, 2008).

According to Pawar (2014) community development as a process, developing and enhancing the ability to act collectively, and an outcome, taking collective actions to improve the community various sectors such as physical, environmental, cultural, social, political, economic and etc".

3. Empowerment

Empowerment is connected to the word power. The notions of power may differ from place to place according to the requirement to investigate and clarify various contexts and may be dependent on the players participated in power relationships (Chandra, 1997). As Schuler (2006) stated that empowerment as "a participatory, developmental process through which underprivileged individuals, groups and communities get more control over their lives and environment, gain valued resources and basic rights, and get important life goals and reduced societal deprivation". Empowerment in its general sense refers to an individual's or community's raised "power". Whereas power means access to and control over matters, intellectual and ideological resources (Batliwala, 1994).

Empowerment is a process through which individuals, groups and communities achieve control over the variables that hamper their choices and grip them back from using their choices towards increasing the standard of their life (Ravallion and Shaohua, 2001). Bennett (2002), explained empowerment as improvement of assets and potentials of various individuals, groups and communities to keep control and hold accountable the institutions which influence them. According to Chen (1992) the key elements of empowerment were relationships, resources, awareness, and power differentiated by empowerment as "control over assets and ideas.

4. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the impact of a community development program named, "women empowerment in Muslim context-gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out" on women empowerment and to identify the forces that obstruct them and those that supported their empowerment and also to know the autonomous decisions they taken to challenge or transform power relations that impede gender equality.

5.Literature Review

Women empowerment is the most focused issue in the world that captures the concentration of policy makers and researchers in any field of life either social or economic feature of life. For this reason, in our country, the empowerment mostly control by men which results in the deprivation of women rights. To improve the present situation of our country it is very necessary to empower women. Empowerment of women is also one of the main issues in Pakistan. Where women have limited access on resources and challenging the existing men-dominated society to improve their living standard. As Noreen (2011) stated that " empowerment of women a worldwide issue, particularly for deprived women under the control of men. Nearly, 70% of women of the worlds are poor".

In this perspective, different scholars analyzed the concepts of ' women's empowerment' in a number of ways. According to United Nations (2001) "Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-respect; their rights to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives; both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally."Friendmann's (1992) recognized the women's empowerment in several ways of power such as social, political, economic and psychological. Social power refers access to specific bases of individual production such as financial resources, information, knowledge, skills and participation in social organizations. Political power means the access of individual household members to the process by which decisions, particularly those that affect their own future, are made. Economic power means access to income, assets, food, markets and decision-making power in the economic activities. Psychological power means the individual's sense of potency, which is demonstrated in self-confident behavior and self appreciate. As lined with above four kinds of power Kumar and Sreedhara (2004) acknowledged three key variables of empowerment as: general, economic and social empowerment. But on the other side Fayyaz (2002) fixed women's empowerment into three sorts as: economic, social and political.

Women's empowerment can be explained as a process in which women can get equal control like men over resources such as , financial, decisions making and knowledge and information, As Kabeer (2005) stated that" women's empowerment is the process though which they work to improve their lives through increase of their opportunities. Thus, they try to reject the previous

conditions where their ability has been denied". Women's empowerment process can make women capacity more strong to become economically independent with control over decisions disturbing their life choices and freedom from violence (Rao and Kelleher,1995).

Women empowerment is multidimensional term in the literature. Economically, it to access of material resources such as land, money, credit, income and availability of employment opportunities. Socially it refers to the recognition of the role played by women in serving her family and community on a long run. Politically, it refers to the freedom to make choices in life, representation in political and decision making bodies and enjoyment of basic rights granted in the constitution and international agreements (Aurat Foundation, 2011).

Cheston & Kuhn (2002) clarified the dynamics of women empowerment by arguing that the self-confidence of a women does not directly lead to her empowerment; rather it contributes to much more in women's capability and motivation to cope up with the social discriminations and unfair system they face. Decision making for credit and saving can increase welfare of women as well as their households. Moreover, investments on working women can add on employment opportunities thus decreasing the poverty.

In Bangladesh, community development programs played a vital role for empowerment of women. Women involvement in community development program increased quality level of education, health and livelihood and extremely useful to empower and strengthen the women in our society which is male dominated society (Pitt et al,2003). At the same, Rahmato (1991) stated that the role of community development program plays a essential role in women empowerment among working through opportunities and encouraging their potentials.

According to Kasali (2006), women are the basis of social mobilization and thus, empowerment of women is the most cost effective strategy for development if we give opportunity to them in community development programs then they can contribute to develop their areas. Describing the consequences of community development programs (Tauffiqu Ahamad, Hemlata and Ananta Narayana, (2015) stated that to progress of women's status in the society, NGOs play a key role and lunch community development programs to give employment opportunities, skills and right information for women. Renzettiand Curan (1992) said that in the process of developmental process women contribution is similarly valuable as men when we are speaking about development plan than we have to minimize gender discriminations. This can be useful for development process.

Williams (1991) presented a model of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, according to him three elements are very important for women's empowerment, which are agency, resources and achievements.

6. Women's empowerment in Muslim context- gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out program

Women empowerment is a process through which women raise voice for their basic rights and motivate them toward a quality life. We can't ignore women participation in the process of development. In the men dominated society, where women are being considered as their servants which is a negative sign for human development. Community development programs are being considered an essential approach to improve women status in the world. To develop the status of women in our society it is very essential to give equal opportunities for the getting a quality life. Therefore, community development programs play very important roles to improve women lives and empowering women by giving them control over resources and increase self-sufficient and make them independent.

Several community development programs have also generally found positive impact in this connection. Women Empowerment in Muslim Contexts (WEMC) was a project which contributed very positive impacts on people lives in district Jaffarbad, Balochistan. Women's empowerment in Muslim context- gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out program was started in 2008. The program was formed to address a knowledge gap- that is, how to achieve women's empowerment. This gap was a concerned in terms of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (WEMC,2008). WEMC defines women's empowerment as an increase in their capacity to make autonomous decisions to challenge or transform power relations that impede gender equality. It contends that conventional development interventions ignore power structures standing between women and the state (WEMC,2008).

WEMC tried to develop a new narrative of women's empowerment that would indeed bridge the gaps between women's lived realities and decision-making at all levels. Their aims were following:

- Make visible the strategies that are indigenous and meaningful to women in asserting their rights
- Support women who resist oppressive systems, including Islamist political agendas and other forces that impoverish and marginalize women, and
- Promote women's empowerment as democratization from the inside out (WEMC,2008a).

WEMC suggested that women empowerment initiatives can best be strengthened. For this, it is first necessary to identify the obstacles women confront and how they manage (or struggle) to overcome these, the nature of support women are able to mobilize, the discourses used by women in their engagements, and the outcomes of such empowerment initiatives. WEMC also argued that national policies and programs that are supportive of women's empowerment cannot be effective if their implementation is blocked by meso-level power structures standing between women and state institutions. Such supportive policies and programs would include those related to the 'Beijing Platform for Action', the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals (WEMC,2008b).

According to WEMC" women's indigenous strategies of empowerment are particularly significant for the meso level. For this purpose, WEMC takes a critical approach to form local organizations at meso level to empower women

7.Methodology

In this study the impacts of a community development program named, "women empowerment in Muslim context- gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out" on women empowerment was analyzed. Beneficiaries belong to Shirkat Gah Women's Resource center were selected through pre- structured questionnaire. This study is based on primary data which was collected from people belongs to Jaffarabad. For this purpose, 50 respondents were selected from the universe. The population of interest consisted of all women who were part of the above mentioned program. Data was administered by descriptive survey method through questionnaire. The purposive and convenience techniques of non-probability method applied.

8.Results and discussions

It was observed that a number of women were fully confidence by taking decisions at household and community levels; they also started different kind of small businesses like beauty parlor and small shop and they run their own boutique and stitching shops. It was also noticed that if such more programs implement with the support of community than they can get more opportunities and also these programs have very positive and long-term impacts on women empowerment such as to make decisions at household and community levels, start own businesses, take part in politics, and improvement in their positions.

The participants were interviewed, they identified different forces which abstracted and supported their empowerment but all of them said some likeness as follows:

8.1. Abstracted Forces:

- **Tribal system**, is a great barrier for women and due to this women are being deprived from their rights. According to some respondents " we are living in 21st century but unfortunately, following hundred years old system which doesn't suit in this era"(Interview,2016).
- **Cultural and religious context**, according to the respondents culture is the one of the biggest challenge for women in our society because most of women loss their confidence to take part in social, economical and politics activities, particularly in community development programs. for example, traditions of veil (purdah), gender discrimination and other so-called customs. According to a respondent "when harmful people don't see any way then they use culture and religious as a tool to stop us" (Interview, 2016).
- **Negative attitude of influence people**, was also a barrier who mostly find unnecessary mistakes in our activities and connected them with religious and cultural context. Actually, they wanted to stop us. As one respondent said that such people are not ready to accept any change in our community particularly, on women's empowerment because they don't want to see a peaceful, equitable and justice society for all human"(Interview, 2016).

8.2. Supported Forces:

- **Family**; was the first force which encouraged them to participate in community development programs. As one participant said that " if family support be continued than no force can stop us toward development. Therefore, family is the most essential element on women's empowerment". According to another participant" without family support it is not possible to empower women and educated family mostly give more support to their female on women empowerment".
- **Community-Based Organizations**; CBOs were considered supported forces on women's empowerment. CBOs are a vital platform for women empowerment, People, through these organizations, can change policies and effect planning for the empowerment of the oppressed sections of society. Actually, community organization approach is one of the more applied approach in this era. Forming community based organizations like Self Help Groups, youth groups,

village forest committees, etc., are some of the major activities that come under the purview of this approach. Organizing people into groups has wide-ranging advantages to the community in specific, and the society in general. Once the people are organized, they can be made actively aware as regard to their rights, contributions, responsibilities, and so on. It provides a platform to act upon and gives strength to fight against exploitation and injustice.

- **Political parties:**

Mostly women face great opposition from their family and political parties. The two key aspects want to keep women out of the development process. The Balochistan women's low educational level, lower social status, and lack of independence are reflected in their low participation in development. But in this context, political parties supported women to become empower. As one respondent said that all political parties gave them great value them in last two local election if this be continued then those days are not so far for women to play lead role in politics (Interview,2016)ⁱ.

8.3. Strategies adopted

Four key strategies adopted by them to get autonomous decisions to challenge or transform power relations that impede gender equality as follows:

- **Established a resource center:** with the support of Shirkat Gah they established a resources center where women skills were developed
- **Joint approach:** joint approach was used by respondents to counter the barriers and work for women in community. Actually, this process is a sign of working in good way and can be useful for different issues. It is trying to understand each other's views and interests in an open way. It is true people have different thoughts and interests, the approach to how these are discussed and resolved is important to a good and lasting resolution. The approach involves exploring the issues and brainstorming options before leaping to conclusions! It also entails demonstrating behavior that is respectful and reasonable so that organizations promote trust and positive relationships.
- **Negotiation approach:** mostly issues link openly to cultural and religious thoughts about women. In this context, it is a hard process to convince community members for community development programs but they adopted negotiation approach to discuss problems and try to solve them through dialogue in order to reach a resolution. Negotiation approach occurred on micro and macro levels.

- **Community development approach:** with the support of national and international NGOs they adopted community development approach to work for women in their communities. This idea of community development links social, cultural and economic needs at the community level as well as at the individual level. While making decision this approach applied for community activities and take care all parts and every group of people in the community (male, female, young, old-age and etc). This approach has very acceptance in whole community because it is based on the 'bottom-up' rather than the 'top-down strategy. According to one respondent " government's programs failed because they don't adopt bottom-up approach for community welfare. Secondly, we see lack of community participations in them".

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study provided an analysis of role of a community development program to empower women. The research explores that a number of women were fully confident by taking decisions at household and community levels; they also started different kind of small businesses like beauty parlor and small shop and they run their own boutique and stitching shops. It was also noticed that if such more programs implement with the support of community than they can get more opportunities and also these programs have very positive and long-term impacts on women empowerment such as to make decisions at household and community levels, start own businesses, take part in politics, and improvement in their positions.

The responses verified that women's contribution in family income enable them to support their children to get education. Moreover, community development program has changed the living standard of women in both districts. In addition to that, community development program have beneficial impacts on women's empowerment such as, improvement in women's capability to participate in family matters, capability to decide for themselves , improve self-confidence, decrease gender based discrimination, decreasing in domestic violence and uplift their social status.

To ensure women's empowerment in Balochistan, the research suggests the following recommendations:

1. To increase women contribution, it is very essential to develop their skills. Federal and provincial governments should play facilitators role to make them skilled and useful citizens. Facilitation will help to address new technology.

2. Keeping in view the needs of deprived community women, priority sequence should be adopted. Beneficiaries should be given involvement in the program plan and implementation.
3. In our society, gender discrimination on its peak need empowered. The federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders should initiate gender awareness sessions. Administration systems should encourage women industrialist's networking which will be beneficial in sharing knowledge as well as in building confidence.
4. At district and provincial levels proper coordination should be made for the purpose of successful working the women's welfare projects/programs.
5. Government and NGOs should make a need based assessment of problems which related to women and look for their solutions. In addition, they should implement result-oriented programs for the welfare of the women.
6. In the study role of family was given much important toward women's empowerment, so if the family develop a positive or friendly environment and support women, they get more opportunities to be empowered.
7. Government and NGOs should make community development programs according to women's needs.
8. Cultivate new women leaders through different programs.

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