
THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Government Policies and Development Plans and Programs

One of the ways to assess the gender concern of government policies is through the analysis of five-year plans to see how it is reflected in development approaches espoused in major policy and planning documents.

The identification of this problem in Pakistan has been fairly strong at the policy-making level and this is reflected in all the five-year plans, which recognize women's deprivation and gender disparities in the education, health, economic, and political spheres. However, the focus on women as beneficiaries of development remains in planning documents in the First (1955–1960), Second (1960–1965), Third (1965–1970), and Fifth (1978–1983)¹ five-year plans. The conceptual shift came later, that is, in the Sixth (1983–1988), Seventh (1988–1993), Eighth (1993–1998), and Ninth (1998–2003) plans, which essentially consider women as active agents in the process of development.

From 1947 until 1971, there was no separate chapter on women in the five-year plans. During this period, women were seen as a vulnerable segment of the society in need of social welfare support. The welfare programs were designed to relieve poor, destitute, and disabled women's needs in terms of their roles as mother and housewives.

In 1971, the PPP formed the government. The Bhutto era was a period of liberal attitudes towards women. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan that was adopted by the Parliament entrusted women equal status as citizens. Article 32 of the Constitution stipulates that "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone." All government services were opened to women including the district management group and the foreign service (in the civil service), which had been denied to them earlier. About 10 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and 5 percent in the provincial assemblies were reserved for women. An official delegation from Pakistan participated in the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, which led to the constitution of the first Pakistan Women's Rights Committee, which will examine conditions of women's lives and to suggest ways to improve women's status.

However, the liberal policy stance on women during this period was neither reflected in government policies nor in their implementation. Due to the war with India and consequent split of the country, the Government faced a financial crisis. It was not able to plan on a year-to-year basis and abandoned long-term planning due to limited financial resources.

A chapter on women in development was included for the first time in the Sixth Plan. The chapter was prepared by a working group of 28 professional women headed by Syeda Abida Hussain, chairperson of a Jhang district council at that time. The main objective as stated in the Sixth Plan was "to adopt an integrated approach to improve women's status, with programs integrated into each sector. Specific government interventions will focus on problems of illiteracy, constant motherhood, and the primitive organization of work."

¹ In the 1970s, medium-term planning was abandoned in favor of annual budgeting due to the split between East and West Pakistan. Due to economic difficulties, the Government was unable to plan in advance. Five-year planning was revived in 1978, when the Fifth Five-Year Plan was launched.

The Sixth Plan was full of policy contradictions. The martial law regime of Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1986) initiated a process of Islamization by introducing discriminatory legislation against women such as the Hudood Ordinance and the laws of evidence, *Qisas* and *Diyat*. He banned women from participating and from being spectators of sports and forced them to observe *purdah* by wearing *chaddars*. At the same time, Zia's regime took many steps toward institutional building for women's development to dispel the impression of its antiwomen policies. This included the establishment of the Women's Division in the Cabinet Secretariat, and the appointment of another commission on the Status of Women.

After Zia-ul-Haq's rule, there has been a visible change in the policy context in favor of women. However, all successive governments failed to resolve policy contradictions created during this period. Discriminatory legislation on women continues to coexist with a Constitution that guarantees equal rights to men and women, and five-year plans committed to create greater opportunities for women to promote gender equity remain unproductive.

The Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth plans formulated under various democratically elected regimes have clearly made efforts to include women's concerns in the planning process. Working groups were constituted to write a chapter on women and development to be included in the plans. Also, there has been an increasing recognition of women's productive roles in the informal and agriculture sector, and a deeper understanding of the linkage between human resource development of women and sustainable economic growth. In addition to a chapter on women and development, the integration of gender in all other chapters of the Ninth Plan is clearly an official endorsement of women's integration into national development.

However, in Pakistan, planned development has failed to address gender inequalities due to the gap between policy intent and implementation. Lack of political will, weak and corrupt governance structures, limited technical and intellectual capacity of the institutions, and resource constraints have been the main impediments in policy implementation.

Presently, Pakistan is a signatory to the CEDAW. With its ratification,² it has become obligatory for the Government to adapt this international instrument to local conditions by changing laws to conform with the principles of the CEDAW.

Pakistan has also finalized the NPA as a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. The Prime Minister of Pakistan officially launched the NPA on 14 August 1998. The Ministry of Women's Development (MWD) is the implementing and lead agency for the CEDAW and NPA. The implementation of the CEDAW will be done through the implementation of the NPA. However, MWD has not made any operational plans or secured funds for the NPA thus far. After Beijing, Core Groups and Beijing Follow-up Units were set up with external assistance at the national, provincial, and district levels. These are the administrative bodies that are responsible for implementing the NPA that includes the CEDAW. However, this setup is a temporary arrangement funded by external agencies to help MWD and provincial women's development departments develop their institutional capacity. This setup ended in 1999 and MWD has no adequate resources to replace this institutional support.

Another critical policy document, the Pakistan 2010 Program published in 1997, includes the enhancement of women's status as one of the 16 goals listed in the document. However, the

² The Government signed the CEDAW with one reservation against Article 29 (1) and with the general declaration that it would be implemented in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan.

seriousness of the document is suspect as women's interests appear neither as a crosscutting theme in other sectors nor in the strategy. Finally, the document omits women while listing 21 major areas of interests.

Similarly, another major policy document, the "Human Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy" (1999), mentions women as a target group for poverty reduction but lacks gender framework. The report acknowledges women's economic potential and assumes that creating greater opportunities through the provision of credit and skills development will empower women and redress the gender imbalance. The report lacks the understanding that (i) due to the patriarchal base of gender social relations, men and women have different degrees of "embodiment," and (ii) women's subordinate position in social relationships with responsibility for reproductive roles has implications for their ability to make use of the opportunities created for them. The report does not deal with the systemic nature of gender inequalities and makes no recommendation for engendering the social, economic, and political institutions/structures, which continue to produce and reproduce gender inequalities in spite of affirmative actions. The flaw in the conceptual understanding of gender issues in the report leads to mere technical solutions to women's empowerment rather than the political measures that are required.

The formulation of programs and budget allocations is another important indicator to assess the effectiveness of the national policy on women. Initiatives in women's development have always suffered due to lack of resources. The policy level commitment to women's development has hardly been matched with resources allocated for this purpose. A study of the annual budget documents will reveal the tendency of the Government to push women's development issues to the back burner.

The Social Action Program launched in 1992/93 is perhaps the only program that has a programming focus on women as well as significant resource allocations for women. The main thrust of the program is on reducing gender disparities by improving women's access to social services. There are several project-level efforts at the national and provincial levels to reduce disparities in social, economic, legal, and political aspects of women's lives.

Women-Related Government Organizations and Institutions

MWD is the principal institutional mechanism for the advancement of women in Pakistan. In 1979, the Women's Division was established as part of the Cabinet Secretariat. The main objectives of the division were (i) to improve the quality of life of women in the country, particularly in rural areas; and (ii) to deal with problems peculiar to women especially working women.

In 1989, the Women's Division was upgraded to the level of a ministry. In 1997, it was merged with the Ministry of Social Welfare and became the Ministry of Women's Development. The main functions of MWD are as follows:

- (i) to formulate public policies and laws to meet specific needs of women;
- (ii) to register and provide assistance to women's organizations;
- (iii) to undertake and promote research on the conditions and problems of women;
- (iv) to undertake and promote projects for providing special facilities for women;
- (v) to represent the country in international organizations dealing with problems of women and encourage such bilateral contact with other countries;
- (vi) to ensure that women's interests and needs are adequately represented in policies formulated by various organs of government; and
- (vii) to ensure equality of opportunity in education and employment.

The major strategic role of MWD is that of a catalyst—a planning and monitoring body. At the provincial level, MWD works through social welfare and women’s development departments. However, these departments are weak in gender orientation and underresourced in staff and funding.

Similarly, MWD has established nearly 26 focal points in line ministries to coordinate and ensure that gender issues are addressed in planning. However, out of 26 focal points across ministries, only 7 of them are women. None of them has been trained in gender analytical skills. They do not possess the skills necessary to be able to screen sectoral policies and programs from the gender perspective and have no power to influence policymaking in favor of women and the disadvantaged sectors of the society.

Due to lack of political clout, weak coordination with other line ministries, and lack of institutional capacity, MWD has not been very successful in playing its catalytic role to advocate and mainstream women’s concerns across sectors at all planning levels. It has been ineffective in developing vertical and horizontal linkages with other ministries to ensure that other departments and ministries effectively introduce women’s interest to its planning processes. It is primarily because MWD itself lacks the capacity to provide intellectual and technical assistance to other ministries in mainstreaming gender. It has not been able to produce a national policy on women. Instead of playing a “watchdog” role, MWD has kept itself busy funding a large number of small projects. It has neither the capacity to monitor the progress nor the ability to assess the impact of these projects.

It is critical that MWD concentrate on its original mandate of policy formulation on women and the integration and mainstreaming of gender in planning and programming across the entire government structure.

In addition to this institutional arrangement for advancement of women, there are some women-related support and educational institutions in the country. Some of them are mentioned below.

MWD established Women’s Studies centers at five universities in Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar, and Lahore in 1989. The main objectives of the project were

- (i) to introduce and promote the disciplines of women’s studies in Pakistan;
- (ii) to develop some introductory or foundation courses in women’s studies for university students;
- (iii) to promote both academic- and action-oriented research on women in development;
- (iv) to critically examine concepts, theories, models, and methodologies that have been responsible in scientific investigation and scientific development;
- (v) to identify, replicate, and translate relevant materials from other languages into the national language; and
- (vi) to redefine curricula at the university, college, and high school levels with a view to incorporating knowledge on women and the contribution of the women scholars.

None of these centers could take off due to lack of financial and administrative support from MWD and the universities. With the exception of the center at Karachi University funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to run a master of arts program, no other center had been in a position to offer high degree teaching programs in women’s studies. Out of five, four centers have become almost nonfunctional due to reasons mentioned above.

In the absence of teaching programs in women's studies, it is difficult to produce research on this subject, as there are not many people who are familiar with the disciplinary perspective. In the absence of people who have the academic qualification to understand gender issues and formulate strategies for gender equity, it is difficult to integrate or mainstream gender in policies and planning within the country.

Recently, the Institute of Women's Studies started functioning in Lahore in the private sector. It is important that these centers in the public and private sectors are fully supported by the Government to generate the body of knowledge that is essential for promoting gender equity in the society.

The FWBL was established in 1989 to address women's financial needs. FWBL, a nationalized commercial bank, was given the role of a development finance institution, as well as of a social welfare organization. It operates 38 branches across the country, managed and run by women. MWD provided a credit line of Rs48 million to FWBL to finance small-scale credit schemes for disadvantaged women. It has disbursed Rs142,146 million for such projects, which have created employment for 21,606 women so far. It has also established business centers for women in Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. UNDP, in collaboration with FWBL and NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs), is implementing The Women in Urban Credit Project. An export house for women entrepreneurs has been established in Lahore in collaboration with FWBL and an NGO. In 1997, the Government decided to privatize FWBL. The Women Action Forum took a stay order from the Lahore High Court as FWBL was established under affirmative action.

There are two export trade houses, one at Lahore and the other at Islamabad, run by NGO committees under the supervision of MWD. MWD does not support these trade houses financially; it only provides logistical support.

In view of the high incidence of custodial rape, women's police stations have been established in Abbottabad, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. However, there are complaints that the women officers assigned to these police stations lack the authority to register cases. They are also underresourced.

The country's first all-women university, Fatima Jinnah, has started functioning in Rawalpindi. The university was inaugurated on 6 August 1998. It is suffering from delays in the release of development funds from the Federal Government.

The public sector has 13 shelters for women, all of which lack the resources to provide support services to women. A national study on shelters for women reveals that these shelters are unable to meet women's urgent needs for support and rehabilitation. The administrative policy of the shelters established control of the management over women's lives and converted them into subjails.³

MWD has established two crisis centers for women, one in Islamabad and the other in Vehari. Both were started on an experimental basis but could not function according to their mandate due to lack of resources.

³ Farzana Bari (1998), "Voices of Resistance: The Status of Shelters for Women in Pakistan," Islamabad.

There are 74 women's hostels and 39 computer centers, 2,843 technical vocational training institutes, 46,691 primary schools, 6,425 middle schools, and 3,367 secondary schools for women functioning in the country.⁴

Multilateral and Bilateral Agencies, NGOs, and Women's Programs

For the purpose of writing this section of the report, a number of multilateral and bilateral agencies were contacted and information was requested on women's programs. The display of reluctance, delay, and discomfort in furnishing information to a partner agency was indicative of the fact that very often the internal documentation of development agencies lacks gender analysis of the country program and financial resources invested in gender-neutral and gender-specific programs.

Among those who responded to the request were UNDP, European Union, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Department for International Development (DFID), Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Save the Children, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). With the exception of JICA, all others mentioned gender equality as one of the objectives of their programs in Pakistan. All of them asserted that gender was a crosscutting theme in their multisectoral programs. This shows that a conceptual shift from a women in development approach to a gender and development one has already taken place at the policy and programmatic level among external funding agencies working in Pakistan. Gender mainstreaming through integrating gender issues in planning and programs across sectors has also been mentioned as a key strategy by all the agencies.

An analysis of the projects funded by these agencies shows that there is a good mix of gender-integrated and gender-specific programs. However, it was learnt that some of the gender-integrated projects include a section on gender appraisal but none had a project-specific gender strategy attached to the project documents.

UNDP has an independent section both on gender and governance. Similarly, DFID has a very strong poverty, gender, and governance focus in its programs. Because of shared program priorities, there are strong possibilities for collaboration between UNDP, DFID, and ADB.

The NGO sector in its present form is hardly a two-decade-old phenomenon in Pakistan. It is difficult to assess the exact number of NGOs working in Pakistan as no database of this sector has been maintained or updated. Likewise, there is no system whereby nonfunctional NGOs are struck off from the registration records.

There are five different laws under which organizations can be registered. These are the Societies Act (1860), The Trust Act (1882), Charitable Endowment Act (1890), The Cooperative Act (1925), and The Voluntary Social Welfare Registration and Control Ordinance (1961). According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) report, in 1998 there were about 14,000 registered NGOs in Pakistan, half of them in Punjab and over 4,500 in Sindh.

The nongovernment sector is not homogenous in its outlook, vision, and perspectives. It is difficult to categorize these NGOs as some of them have an integrated approach. However, these could be compartmentalized into development, women's rights, human rights, research, advocacy,

⁴ Please see Appendix 3 for more details.

professional women's organizations, support or capacity-building NGOs, and sectoral/service delivery NGOs working in health, family planning, and education.

More than 50 percent of NGOs are working at the community level. These CBOs are usually rural-based, male-dominated, hierarchical, and have social welfare orientation due to lack of exposure to alternative development models and discourse. The majority of these CBOs do not have access to external funding sources. Some of them are linked with medium-level NGOs, from which they get their funds. CBOs are gradually beginning to change their approach to development.

The medium level NGOs working at *tehsil* or district level are usually urban-based and dominated by the middle class. These NGOs have the capacity to promote gender and social equity discourse. They have access to multilateral and bilateral funds. However, these NGOs have a limited popular base as most of them are involved in advocacy and research work. Some of them with better outreach are service delivery NGOs working in the areas of family planning, reproductive health, and education such as PAVNA, FPAP, Bunjad, NGORC, etc.

Various leading women activists from the women's movement have established their own NGOs. The majority of them come from upper-middle class background. Applied Social Research, Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation, Bedari, Simorgh, and AGHS, are all cases in point. Women who started/joined these NGOs were disenchanted with the mainstream space provided through employment with state or semistate entities such as universities and decided to create an alternative space where they could work, debate, and dialogue on issues that were foremost for them.

However, women's NGOs' selection of geographical areas for operation and focus on issues of women's rights reflect the continuity of class bias in the NGO sector as well. The majority of NGOs run by women activists are concentrated in urban areas. The nature of work is primarily research-based leading to documentation, printing, and publication for a civil society in which overwhelming numbers of women and men are illiterate. Some of them are beginning to develop their links with CBOs.

Women's development is one of the stated objectives of more than 2,000 NGOs in Pakistan.⁵ They have an enormous potential to push the social agenda. The gender and poverty focus of the funds from external agencies can push many of these NGOs to work with socially and geographically marginalized rural and urban communities. In order to involve NGOs as equal partners in development, investment are needed to build and strengthen the capacity of this sector.

The Government's relationship with the NGO sector has been one of cooperation and conflict. There has been a mutual suspicion. Despite a favorable legal and policy environment, NGOs are insecure because of the Government's wish to control the sector. The State is relatively comfortable with the service delivery role of NGOs. It is the advocacy work that the Government finds unsettling, especially NGOs' recent public protest on the nuclear issue and the Fifteenth Amendment.

Recently, the Government tried to regulate the NGO sector through the introduction of an NGO bill. On the face of great resistance from the NGO sector, it has been shelved. However, recently, the Punjab and Sindh governments have deregistered 1,944 and 304 NGOs, respectively. The Punjab government has formed a working group that includes representatives from NGOs to prepare draft legislation on NGOs. This has been a source of friction between NGOs and the Government.

⁵ *Women's Yearbook*, 1994–1995.

