An analysis of different approaches to women empowerment: a case study of Pakistan

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AN ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN[1]

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment has attracted the attention of researchers as an active area of research since 1980s. It can be viewed as an ultimate end as well as a mean to achieve other development goals. The present study is an attempt to investigate how consciousness /sensitization of women about their rights, economic empowerment of women and women's overall development can be helpful in achieving the goal of women's empowerment. The study uses data for the period of 1996 to 2009 for Pakistan. Empirical results reveal that consciousness of women about their rights, economic empowerment of women and women's overall development have positive and significant effect on women's empowerment as measured by Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) index. Granger Causality Test confirms the existence of bi-directional causality between women's overall development and women's empowerment. A unidirectional causality exists between sensitization of women and women's empowerment.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, labour force participation, Gender Development, Gender inequality.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of women empowerment emerged conspicuously in mid 1980's. Earlier, protection of human rights had been advocated internationally as early as the existence of mankind. The United Nation Charter 1945, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, World Population Plan of Action (WPPA) adopted at the 1974 World Population conference on Population 1984 (Bucharest), International Conferences on Women 1975, 1980, 1985, International Women Year 1975, the Decade for Women, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were all steps to attract attention of the world for " that half of its population who carried out two-thirds of the world's work, received one-tenth of world's income, and owned less than one-hundredth of its property" [1].

Many International Agencies, national governments and organizations like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Organization of Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD), Development Alternatives with Women for New Era (DAWN), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Population Council became very active on this issue of empowerment of women. Similarly, research centres were set up in many well-reputed

universities of the world to explore policy measures for ensuring complete integration of women in the development effort.

The promotion of women's empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument: that social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing; and that women's empowerment is a means to other ends. Women empowerment is a multifaceted phrase. It views women as active subjects and agents and not as passive objects of social change. The very concept of empowerment implies its objective i.e. to rectify the power imbalance between men and women which severely constrains achievements of human development. Thus basically all governmental, personal, private and family based efforts to rectify past neglect of human development in the case of females are steps towards empowerment. This phrase has many dimensions: demographic, social, psychological, cultural and economic. Each aspect is interlinked with the other in a subtle, inexpressible yet strong string forming a logical coherent whole. All steps towards empowerment should, in the final analysis, be reinforcing one another. These require fundamental changes at many levels of society including those within households recognizing that women, just like men, make responsible decisions for themselves, their families, their communities and the rest of the world. Empowerment of women implies increasing the control of women over material, human and intellectual resources. This can be achieved by removing structural constraints and easing women's burdens through increasing women's education and income-earning opportunities. Another vital step is to break socio-cultural barriers.

"The concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions; agency, resources, and achievements. Agency represents the process by which choices are made and put into effect. It is, hence, central to the concept of empowerment. Resources are a medium through which agency is exercised and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency" [2].

Empowerment is both a process and a result of that process. It is manifested in redistribution of power between nations, classes and genders. Women empowerment also librates and empowers men in material as well as psychological terms. Women empowerment provides new energy, insights, leadership and knowledge benefiting men and children of their families, thus improving their quality of life. This process is spiral, changing consciousness, identifying areas of change, planning strategies, acting for change, analyzing actions and outcomes. This process means a new understanding of power that is democratizing and sharing power-building new mechanisms for collective responsibility, decision making and accountability. It also implies that women address global concerns, for example violence, environments, poverty, illiteracy, and rapid population growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature on gender issues there are several studies which discussed the issue of women empowerment. Some studies undertake human development approach to women empowerment while other studies use structural approaches to women empowerment [3]. The former group of studies focused on the health, education, reproductive health and living conditions of women and the later discussed the awareness of women about their rights, discrimination issues and social justice.

Wallace and March [4] initiated discussion on human development approach to women empowerment by explaining the impact of global issues on the living standard of women. The linkages of women empowerment and development are discussed by Moser [5] with special focus on policy formation regarding gender and empowerment of women. Shields [6] studied the women's empowerment from the women's viewpoint. The study used a descriptive framework to explore the meaning of women's empowerment theoretically as well as empirically.

UNDP [7] discussed women's empowerment, by focusing gender, in Human Development Report. The report warned that "Human Development, if not engendered, is endangered". The report presented the means and strategies to reduce gender inequalities and to promote gender equity. It also introduced new concept to quantify the gender aspects of human development. In addition to income and employment, this report gave weightage to the women participation in law making and professional jobs. Gender specific indices like Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM) were introduced in this report. Three different variables are used to calculate GEM. These variables include proportion of parliament seats held by women, female share in professional and technical jobs and female income share relative to male.

Anand and Sen [8] introduced the measure of gender inequality. Gender empowerment measure is criticised by Bardhan and Klasen [9]. In their view this index does not cover several aspects of women's empowerment and cannot be a sufficient measure women empowerment at aggregate level. Malhotra et.al. [10] discussed some methodological issues in measuring, quantifying and analysing the women's empowerment. Mahanta [11] focused on the integrated development approach to women's empowerment and also discussed and compares various means to achieve the objective of empowerment of women. The study mainly focused on the availability of basic needs, women access to health, education facilities, legal and institutional issues of women's empowerment, rights of women at work and violence.

South Asia Partnership arranged a workshop on empowerment of women through participation in political process and activities in 2003. The problem of proxy women- who are just symbolic part of legislative process and puppet in the hands of family men- was discussed in the workshop and need for training programmes for elected women was realized for making them capable to make independent decision and think freely. Mathew

[12] found that the human development approach for women's empowerment is a result of interaction between equity and empowerment approaches.

Issues of south Asian women were discussed in Assam Human Development Report by Government of Assam [13]. The report highlighted the inequality in the achievement among the men and women in different fields of life. The report also indicated poverty, lower level of political participation and violence as the major issues of South Asian women.

Kishor and Gupta [14] studied the women empowerment in India. The study found that common women in India were almost powerless as compared with men and process of empowering women was going on with very slow pace over time. The study realized the need for studying women's empowerment in India and evaluating and monitoring the programs which are aimed at empowering the women. Empowerment of women is not only necessary for better health and nutrition of women but also for the welfare of household in which women has control over resources. The study found that women's empowerment promotes equity, equality and contributes to the economic growth and development of an economy by enhancing women participation in labour force.

Ranis and Stewart [15] found that females spend most of their income on the household's human capital formation in Cote d'Ivoire. The results showed that increase in female share of household income led to increase in household spending on human capital. The study also found that female education significantly contributes to human capital formation of the society.

Blumberg [16] supported the economic empowerment of women as it is the source of welfare of society, gender equality and accumulation of wealth of nations. The study found that women's financial soundness ensures improvement in their decision making capacity. Finally, economic empowerment of women leads to reduction in violent conflicts and violence against female in the long run.

Women's participation in farming activities and their empowerment was studied by Kripa and Surendranathan [17] for the case of Kerala, India. The study found that women participation in such earning activities leads women to improve their social status and to prove their capabilities.

Trivedi et al [18] studied the women's empowerment through their economic empowerment by promoting the dairy sector in which women could put more labor and could avail better money earning opportunities. The study concluded that cooperative diaries can play their positive role in empowering women through economic self-reliance.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Batliwala [19] discern three major approaches to women empowerment i) Integrated Development Approach ii) Conscious Raising Approach iii) Economic Empowerment Approach. These are not mutually exclusive categories; nevertheless these show us the causes of powerlessness of women. Hence in order to empower women, it is essential to seek access to resources, lobby for changes in laws which are inaccessible or inappropriate and negotiate with public institutions [20]. Figure 1 below shows us means and strategies for achieving women empowerment.

For the purpose of quantitative measurement of theoretical framework presented in Figure 1, we develop the following three econometric models:-

$$GEM_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 GDI_t + \varepsilon_t \qquad (1)$$

$$GEM_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SSEF_t + \upsilon_t \qquad (2)$$

$$GEM_t = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 LFP_t + \mu_t \qquad (3)$$

Where,

GEM_t= Gender Empowerment Measures (used to measure women empowerment) at time t.

GDI_t= Gender Development Index (used to measure the Integrated Development of women) at time t.

$SSEF_t$= Secondary School Enrolment of female (used to measure Consciousness /sensitization of women about their rights) at time t.

LFP_t= Labour Force participation of women (used to measure the Economic Empowerment of women) at time t.
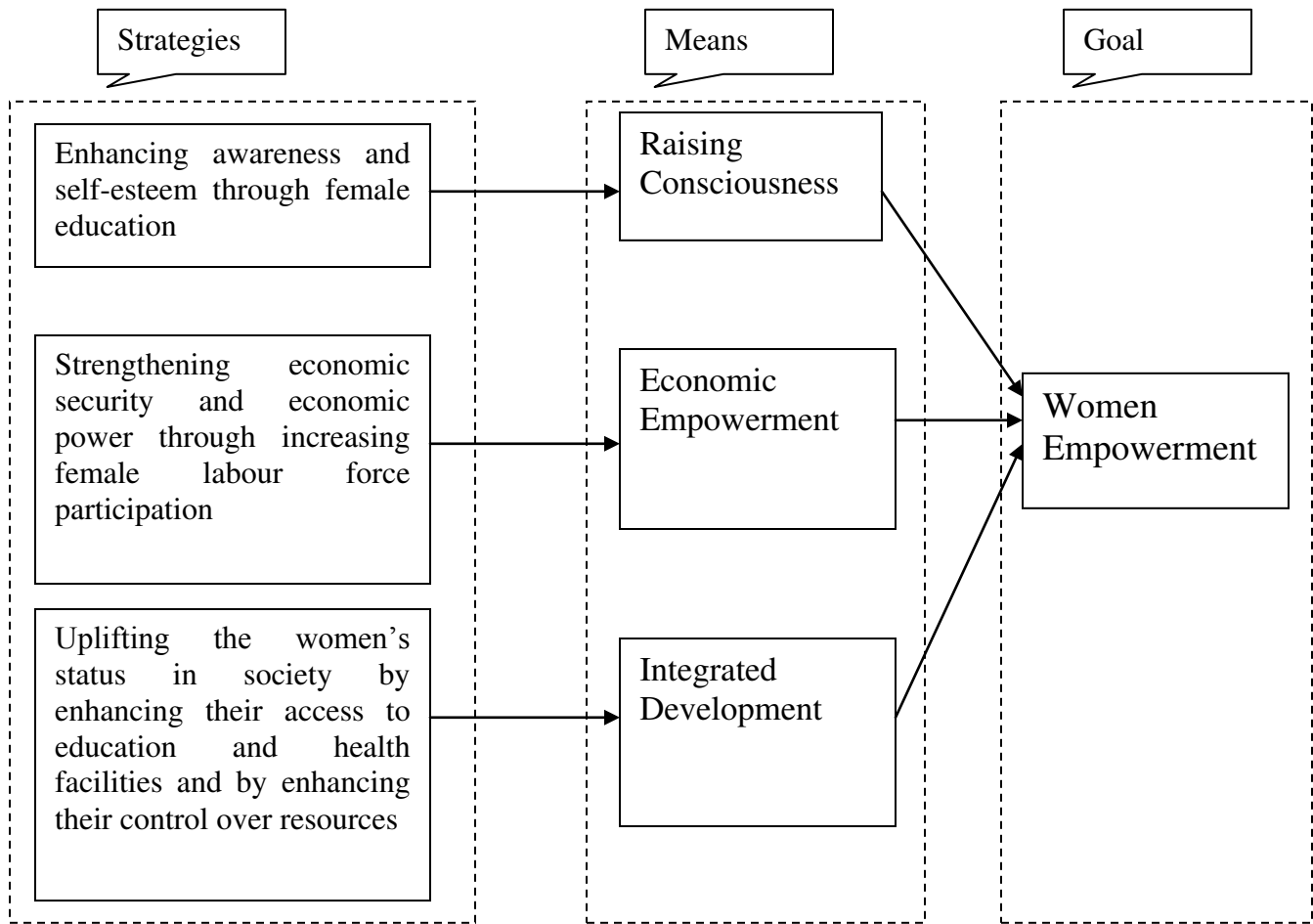
Strategies

Enhancing awareness and self-esteem through female education

Strengthening economic security and economic power through increasing female labour force participation

Uplifting the women's status in society by enhancing their access to education and health facilities and by enhancing their control over resources

Means

Raising Consciousness

Economic Empowerment

Integrated Development

Goal

Women Empowerment

Figure 1: Approaches to Empowerment

Data Sources

The data is collected from the various issues of Human Development Report by United Nations Development Programme [21], The Pakistan Economic Survey by Government of Pakistan [22] and World Development Indicators on line database by World Bank [23]. All variables are used in natural logarithm form due to non-uniformity of units of measurement of the variables used in the study.

ECONOMETRICS METHODS

Johansen Co-Integration Test

Co-integration test is used to check the existence and stability of long-run equilibrium relationship among the variables used in econometric analysis. Engle and Granger [24] initially, introduced the idea of co-integration. After that many econometricians worked on that and developed new tests of co-integration. The tests o co-integration developed by Stock and Watson [25], Johansen [26, 27, 28, 29], Johansen and Juselius [30] and Pesaran et al. [31] are among the famous tests of co-integration. Johansen's test of co-integration is used in this study to check the co-integrating relationship among the variables involved in the econometric analysis. The advantage of using Johansen and Juselius [30] test of co-integration over residual based two steps test of co-integration is that it uses maximum likelihood procedure to check the number of co-integration vector in Vector Autoregressive setting. The general form of VAR is as under:

$$x_t = \alpha + \beta_t x_{t-1} + \ldots\ldots + \beta_k x_{t-k} + \varepsilon_t,$$

where x_t is an $(n \times 1)$ column vector of ρ variables that are integrated of order 1, α is a $(n \times 1)$ vector of constant terms, $\beta_t \ldots .\beta_{t-k}$ are parameters and ε_t is an independently and identically distributed error term. The general VAR model presented above can also be reformulated in the following form of Vector error correction model (VECM) for testing the short run dynamics of long run equilibrium.

$$\Delta x_t = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^{\rho-1} \Gamma_i \Delta x_{t-i} + \Pi x_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$

where x_t is a $(n \times 1)$ column vector of ρ variables, α is a $(n \times 1)$ vector of constant terms, ε_t is $(n \times 1)$ vector of usual error term, Δ is difference operator and Γ and Π represent coefficient matrices. The coefficient matrix Π is also termed as impact matrix and it tells about the long run relationship. It captures the long run impact whereas coefficient matrix Γ captures the short run impact.

GRANGER CAUSALITY AND THE VECTOR AUTOREGRESSIVE (VAR) MODEL

The Granger Causality test developed by Engle and Granger [24] and Granger [32] is estimated by using the following Vector Autoregressive (VAR) Model:

$$Y_t = \alpha_1 + \sum_{i=1}^{q} \beta_i Y_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{q} \gamma_j Z_{t-j} + \varepsilon_t \tag{4}$$

$$Z_t = \alpha_1 + \sum_{i=1}^{q} \theta_i Y_{t-i} + \sum_{j=1}^{q} \delta_j Z_{t-j} + v_t \tag{5}$$

For finding the optimal lag length Schwarz Information Criteria (SIC) or Akaike Information Criteria (AI) is used.

Following the equation (4) Z_t does Granger causes Y_t if $H_0 : \gamma_j = o$ is rejected there is no causal relation and H_A : at least one $\gamma_j \neq o$ may be accepted stating that there is causal relation and for equation (2) *LHSE* Granger Causes *LGDP* if $H_0 : \delta_j = o$ is rejected there is no causal relation but H_A : at least one $\delta_j \neq o$ then we accept the alternative hypothesis there is causal relation between variables. Toda and Yamamoto [50] Granger causality test is not used because it consumes more information as compared with the Engle and Gran test used in the analysis.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Data Stationarity

We have used Ng-Perron [33] unit root test to check the stationarity of time series data in logarithmic form. Schwarz Information Criterion has been used for maximum lag selection for applying Ng-Perron unit root test. This test also named as test of size and power as it is considered the best test for small samples and it has lowest chance of type two error in testing the unit root hypothesis. The results of Ng-Perron test have been reported in table 1. According to these results variables of GEM, GDI, LPR and SSEF are not stationary at level. This implies that null hypothesis of unit root at level cannot be rejected for all variables. However all the variables are stationary at first difference. This shows that the null hypothesis of unit root for all variables is rejected when we use the first difference of the variables. Thus the variables have same order of integration and all of them are I(1) (integrated of order one).

Table 1: Ng-Perron Unit Root Test

At Level				
Variable	**Ng-Perron Test Statistics**			
	MZa	MZt	MSB	MPT
GEM	-2.75808	-1.10331	0.40003	8.60346
GDI	-3.96783	-1.28491	0.32383	6.22926
LSSEF	-0.23876	-0.10793	0.45203	15.8778
LPR	0.29152	0.18940	0.64972	28.7845
At 1st Difference				

Variable	Ng-Perron Test Statistics			
	MZa	MZt	MSB	MPT
ΔGEM	-8.64383**	-2.07206	0.23972	2.85829
ΔGDI	-11.5059**	-2.37327	0.20627	2.22012
ΔLSSEF	-9.61859**	-2.19258	0.22795	2.54870
ΔLPR	-5.56843*	-1.64445	0.29532	4.45905

*, ** and *** represent that we may reject the null hypothesis of unit root at 10%, 5% and 1% level of significance respectively.

Keeping in view the number of observations, number of variables to be studied and lags requirement of the cointegration test maximum three lags are allowed to select the optimum lag length in Vector Auto-Regressive (VAR) process. Schwarz Information Criterion (SIC) suggests that an optimal lag length of 1. Thus the lag length 1 has been used in our analysis.

Johansen co-integration has been used to check the long-run dynamics of GEM, GDI, LPR and SSEF. The results of Johansen's co-integration test have been reported in table 2. Trace statistics λ_{trace} and Maximum Eigen statistics are used to check the number of co-integrating vectors. Both statistics test the null hypothesis of no co-integration against the alternative of co-integration. Starting with the null hypothesis of no co-integration ($r \leq 0$) among the variables. The probability value of trace-test statistics is 0.0000 for model 1, 0.0074 for model 2, and 0.0267 for model 3. These probability values suggest that we can reject the null hypothesis $r \leq 0$ and accept the alternative hypothesis $r = 1$ for all three models with more than 90% level of confidence. Similarly, the null hypothesis of $r \leq 1$ can also be rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis of $r = 2$ for model 1, but it cannot be rejected for model2 and model 3. All of this shows the existence of two cointegrating vectors for model 1 and one cointegrating vector for each of model 2 and model three based on Trace test statistic. Same is the case when we use Maximum Eigen test statistics, it also confirm the existence of two cointegrating vectors for model 1 and one cointegrating vector for each of model 2 and model three based on Maximum Eigen test Statistic . Similarity of the results based on two different test statistics shows that results presented in the study are stable and consistent.

Thus the analysis of data confirms the presence of long run relationship among GEM, GDI, LPR and SSEF in Pakistan.

Table 2: Results of Johansen co-integration Test

		Model 1 GEM GDI		Model 2 GEM SSEF		Model 3 GEM LPR	
		Unrestricted Co-integration Rank Test based on Trace Statistic					
H0	H1	Trace Statistic	p-Value [a]	Trace Statistic	p-Value [a]	Trace Statistic	p-Value [a]

R = 0	R ≥ 1	34.82219*	0.0000	32.08153*	0.0074	17.27546*	0.0267
R ≤ 1	R ≥ 2	3.595946	0.0579	7.997241	0.2519	1.116453	0.2907
Unrestricted Co-integration Rank Test based on Max-Eigen Statistic							
H_0	H_1	Max-Eigen Statistic	p-Value [a]	Max-Eigen Statistic	p-Value [a]	Max-Eigen Statistic	p-Value [a]
R = 0	R ≥ 1	31.22625*	0.0001	24.08429*	0.0096	16.15901*	0.0248
R ≤ 1	R ≥ 2	3.595946	0.0579	7.997241	0.2519	1.116453	0.2907

[a] MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values

As co-integration exists among the variables of our interest, therefore, the estimates of long run coefficients obtained through Johansen normalized co-integrated vectors are reported in table 3.

Table 3: Long Run Normalized Coefficients based on Johansen Method

Dependent Variable = LGEM						
Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	p-Value	Coefficient	p-Value	Coefficient	p-Value
GDI	2.426086	0.0000				
SSEF			0.880512	0.0256		
LPR					6.323575	0.0483
Constant	0.6184	0.0105	-6.990263	0.0096	-27.01636	0.0971

The results of all three models are reported in the table 3. The results of model 1 show that ceteris paribus, improvement in women living standard measured by the value of Gender Development Index has a positive and significant effect on women empowerment in Pakistan. The second model shows that there is positive relationship between sensitization of women about their rights through education and their empowerment. The model two also indicates that the effect of women sensitization is significant as the probability value of this coefficient is 0.0256. As the role of labour force participation of women in their empowerment is concerned, the third model indicates that increase in participation of Pakistani women boosts their degree of empowerment. The probability value for the coefficient of LPR in the third model reveals that the relationship between women empowerment and their participation in labour force is significant.

Table 4: Pairwise Granger Causality Test

Models	Null Hypothesis:	F-Statistic	p-Value
	GDI does not Granger Cause GEM	4.92960	0.0461
Model 1	GEM does not Granger Cause GDI	4.81601	0.0484

Model 2	SSEF does not Granger Cause GEM	86.4649	0.0805
	GEM does not Granger Cause SSEF	1.17235	0.5920
Model 3	LPR does not Granger Cause GEM	0.48112	0.6371
	GEM does not Granger Cause LPR	12.6170	0.0048

After ensuring the existence of long run relationship among the variables of our study and assessing significance of the relationship among them, testing the nature of causal relationship and direction of causality will provide the important information regarding policy measures to empower the women in Pakistani society. Pairwise Granger Causality Test is used for this purpose and the results of the causality test are reported in table 4. The results of Model 1 point out that there exists a bi-directional causality between GEM and GDI. Improvement in gender development through better health, education and economic empowerment of women leads to increase in the degree of women empowerment in Pakistan. Similarly, the results show that when women are more empowered then they are more concerned about their health, education and their living standard and his leads to gender development in the society. The estimates of second model indicate that there is unidirectional causality between sensitization of women about their rights and women empowerment. This causality runs from women sensitization to women empowerment but not from women empowerment to women sensitization. This indicates that sensitization of women about their rights is essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment and increase in sensitization leads to empowerment of women in Pakistan. As the positive relationship between labour force participation of women and women empowerment is concerned, our third model shows that the empirical results support the idea that there is unidirectional causality between women empowerment and their labour force participation. The causality runs from women empowerment to female labour force participation but not from female labour force participation to women empowerment. It means there is positive and significant relationship between women empowerment and their participation in labour force. But the policies aimed to increase female labour force participation will not prove to be effective to enhance the empowerment of women in Pakistan. Women empowerment can play its effective role in enhancing female labour force participation in the country. The

empowered women can positively and effectively play their role in economic development of the country though more participation in activities of the country.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment has attracted the attention of researchers as an active area of research since 1980s. It can be viewed as an ultimate end as well as a mean to achieve other development goals. The present study empirically investigate three major approaches to empowerment of women, Integrated Development Approach, Conscious Raising Approach and Economic Empowerment Approach, by using three different and independent models. The study uses data for the period of 1996-2009 for Pakistan for the purpose of empirical investigation. Results reveal that secondary school enrolment of female, female labour force participation and women's overall development positively contribute to women's empowerment. Johansen co-integration test is used to investigate the long run equilibrium relationship between women empowerment and gender development index, women empowerment and economic empowerment of women and women empowerment and consciousness of women about their rights. The results of co-integration confirm the existence of long run equilibrium relationship between the variables. Granger Causality Test is used to check the pairwise causality between women empowerment and the other three variables, secondary school enrolment of female, female labour force participation and women's overall development. The results of causality test confirm the existence of bi-directional causality between women's overall development and women's empowerment. A unidirectional causality exists between sensitization of women and women's empowerment. The direction of causality is from sensitization of women to women's empowerment. Similarly, unidirectional causality has been noted between female labour force participation and women's empowerment. In this case the direction of causality is from women's empowerment to female labour force participation.

From our discussion, we can conclude that the goal of women's empowerment can be achieved by making them conscious about their rights through the provision of education, by making them economically empowered through labour force participation and by focusing on integrated development through enhancing women's overall development. Thus women's empowerment may be taken as a sub-theme of a wider perspective of development as suggested by Haq [34, 35]. Many complex issues i.e. family, class, caste, religion, political, cultural and ethical have to be resolved for a holistic strategy of empowerment. However we can focus on more vivid paths to empowerment by bridging the gender gaps in educational and employment opportunities in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Women constitute half the labour force hence education and health of women needs to be improved as a policy measure to improve social and economic indicators of growth in our economy. Gender equality, girls' education and employment are vital for economic empowerment of women. Promotion of employment opportunities, income generating activities for women and equal provision of education for men and women will go a long way in enhancing empowerment of women. Women's participation in decision making is also a critical issue for empowerment. In general, gender mainstreaming should be the strategy of our policy makers as indicated by Chaudhary [36, 37, 38].

2. Literature on women's education suggests that educated mothers are more likely than less educated mothers to adopt safe hygienic practices and medical treatment leading to lower infant mortality rates [39, 40]. Similarly women employment increases resources devoted to children leading to better health and education of the children. So improving women education is the most crucial step for improving health status (World Development Report 1993). Domestic activities consume about seven hours a day even for working women causing considerable health risk to women because of their high activity levels coupled with low nutritional intake [41]. These issues need to be addressed in depth for easing the structural constraints and women burdens [42, 43].

3. Generally, agriculture is the largest provider of economic opportunities and employment outlets for women. Rural women should be the focus of all public and private policies. They should be provided basic, technical and professional education to run small agribusinesses, to raise live stock, poultry and fish. Every day, millions of women and young girls collect water and fuel for their families - thus reinforcing gender inequalities in employment and education. Malnutrition and ill-health undermines productivity and consequently economic growth. Current patterns of globalization are conspicuous for economic inequalities and trapping vulnerable households (poor people in general and women in particular) in cycles of poverty [39]. Livelihood and general conditions of women and girls in South Asia have worsened as a result of macroeconomic stabilization policies.

4. In order to strengthen women's position as workers and income earners, their economic vulnerability should be attacked. For this, gender-based discrimination in wages and employment opportunities has to be eliminated [44]. There is also a need to organize women to recognize the challenge in both public and private sectors. They should struggle for greater access to employment opportunities and resources to challenge gender based discrimination in both public and private sectors [45]. As mothers, grandmothers, sisters, wives and daughters women shoulder all the responsibilities of child-care regardless of their involvement in economically productive work and household maintenance.

5. In Pakistan, women, especially poor women, are powerless. Steps for promotion of women empowerment through facilitating educational and employment opportunities for such women are urgently required. The ultimate objectives remain promotion of quality of life, human welfare and social justice for all [46, 47]. This would strengthen world peace, ensuring women's rights, honouring their legal and moral personhood- treating them as principal actors and decision makers [48].

6. Women empowerment is the key to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG). These emphasize promotion of gender equality as an effective way to combat poverty, disease and stimulate truly sustainable development. Most objectives of MDG are interlinked reinforcing one another with the core objective of protection of women's rights as human beings (see Global Monitoring Report 2007). The poor and disadvantaged women have suffered too long. Knowledge is power and money is power too. So enabling the women to be equipped with knowledge and earning capacity is empowering them [45].

7. In Pakistan, status of women is among the lowest in the world [49]. Social and cultural norms restrict women's access to education, employment, training opportunities and social services. Un-Islamic, brutal and local customs e.g. "karokari", marrying with the Quran, exchange marriages ("watta satta") and many more such customs aggravate the situation in the patriarchal structure, creating insurmountable bottlenecks in women empowerment. All social, economic and political policies should reinforce one another to break this vicious circle to make way for a just society guaranteeing human rights to all citizens. Women's rights are better protected in more enlightened Islamic societies e.g. Malaysia, Iran, Indonesia etc. Islamic Jurisprudence provides protection of women's rights as human beings, including her rights to better education, better nutrition, inheritance and employment. Confusion of religion with local patriarchal culture has to be clarified.

8. With improvement in female education, women's awareness of the importance of independence increases. This encourages them to participate in economic activities. Hence the emergence of cycles of higher female education, more female employment and enhancement of economic growth takes place. With economic growth, cultural factors may undergo changes to promote women empowerment, eliminating gender biases in wages and avenues of employment. It is encouraging to note that during the last two decades female representation in high level occupations has increased in South Asian countries [44].

Thus, we can conclude on an optimistic note that the focus on quality of life issues ensuring equity for everyone will promote empowerment of women leading to decent living standards for all in Pakistan.

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