

# WOMEN IN PAKISTAN: EXPERIENCES FROM WOMEN'S LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE IN RURAL SINDH

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to highlight women's existing condition in Pakistan and a link between their education and empowerment. It is organized into two major sections. First, it portrays the conditions of women in Pakistan. With the help of national level existing statistics taken from secondary sources, it brings forth the positive effects of women's education on different indicators related to women's poor socio-economic and legal status in the country. Second, it focuses on women's literacy and empowerment initiative taken in rural Sindh to establish this link between the two phenomenons. It is based on ethnographic data collected by the researchers during their participation as field team members of the initiative for more than two years (2000-2002). Giving an insider's view of the experiences, evidences and learning from the initiative, it provides detailed description of program design, strategy, implementation, case studies and details of the field work to benefit future social workers, policy makers and practitioners striving for women's empowerment in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Women, Literacy, Empowerment, Pakistan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is part of the region called “patriarchal belt” (Caldwell, 1982). It has all the features of “classic patriarchy” ensuring and reproducing the domination of men over women in all aspects of society (Kandiyoti, 1988). Women are assigned with a lower status and suffering from low level of education and labor force participation. Despite much progress in health related indicators during last decade (NIPS, 2008; 2013), still women are faced with malnutrition, high fertility and maternal mortality rates. Women’s access to health facilities is hindered by the patriarchal social and economic setup within the family and broader society. Women’s status can be improved by promotion of education and awareness among women, their presence in the political decision making forums to alter the law and social practices, and proper policy formulation and implementation in the country. Therefore, it is essential to integrate literacy, education and awareness, as a prerequisite, in all policies and initiatives aiming to improve women’s status in the country.

The paper aims to describe Pakistani women’s social, economic, and political conditions and to describe a link between women’s education and their empowerment in all aspects of life. Accordingly, the paper is organized into four parts. First part gives an introduction to the problem. Second part explains the methodological consideration of the paper. Third part describes women’s vulnerable condition in Pakistan by focusing on poor education (i.e. literacy ratio, enrollment ratio, available educational facilities, etc), health (fertility rate, use of contraceptive, attendance by skilled staff for birth, and maternal mortality), political participation and legal protections provided. This part establishes link between women’s educational level and other vulnerable condition of women with the help of secondary data analyzed. Fourth part gives a detailed description of practical examples, experiences and learning from Women’s Literacy and Empowerment program designed and implemented by Sindh

Education Foundation in the context of rural Sindh for bringing social, economic, and political empowerment of rural women through promotion of literacy and education among them. It is followed by a brief conclusion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper is a descriptive research aiming to describe women's condition in Pakistan, in general, and to describe a link between education and Pakistani women's vulnerable conditions, in particular. The paper is based on data collected from two sources: 1) the review of already available secondary sources and 2) the primary data collected through researcher's ethnographic experiences gained in Women's Literacy and Empowerment (WLE) Program in rural Sindh as a member of field team for two years from October 2000 to September 2002.

First, the data collected from secondary sources comprises of the national level statistics taken from reports of census, demographic and health surveys, and national educational statistics etc. The relevant statistics collected from secondary sources were analyzed, changed into percentages and presented in the form of graphs to serve the purpose of building argument of this paper.

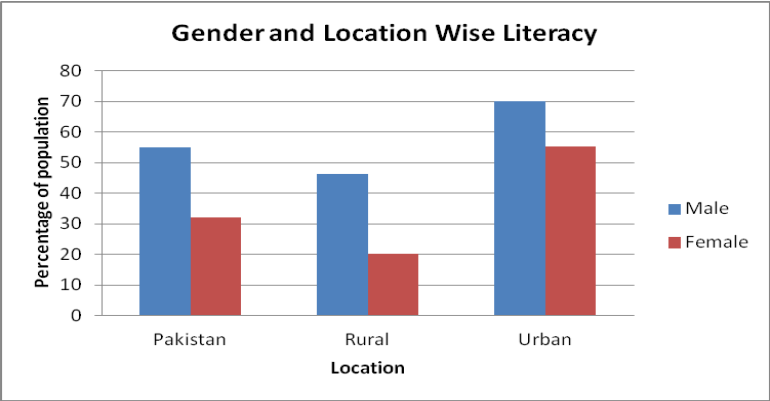
Second, the ethnographic data collected from WLE program presented in this paper are drawn from participant observations in the field, researcher's notes, program documents and reports, daily diary, reflexive memos, and village case studies developed on the basis of observation, filed notes and daily diaries written during field work as a member of field team. The researcher participated in the field work done for WLEP as a team member from October 2000 to September 2002. The WLEP field work was done by Sindh Education Foundation's WLEP field team with the financial assistance of Royal Netherland's Embassy and UNESCO. The ethnographic data collected as WLEP field team member enabled the researcher to give an insider's view on the phenomenon studied

here. The pseudonyms are used for individuals for the purpose of confidentiality.

The research is not without limitations. The WLEP program had adopted several methods for collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The Participatory Rural Appraisal and two baseline and household surveys were conducted as described in the fourth part of the paper just to give an understanding of what the field team was involved in with villagers. But to include the data from officially conducted extensive research and its findings are beyond the scope of this paper. This paper is limited to the program documents and the experiences and ethnographic evidences collected by the researcher during two years field work as a member of WLEP field team with the evidences recorded in several ways as stated above on individual basis.

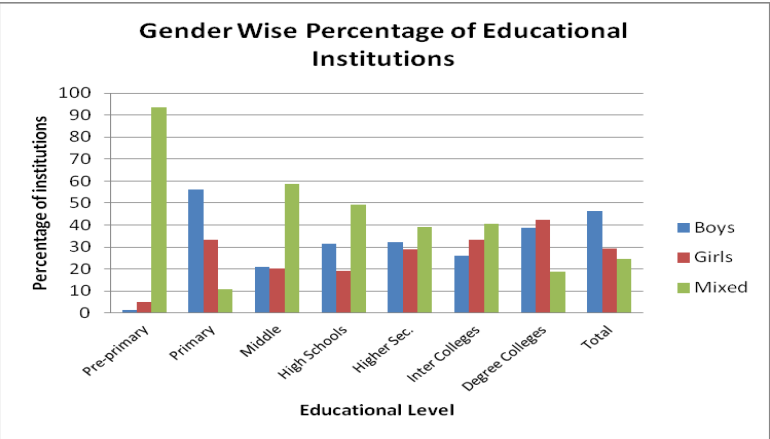
## **WOMEN'S SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND LEGAL STATUS IN PAKISTAN**

There is a lack of gender disaggregated data in Pakistan but whatever is available can give an idea of the situation women are faced with. The population composition shows that women are less in number than men in society. The Population Census Organization (PCO) in 1998 census shows men and women ratio as 108: 100 (PCO, 1998a; Nasar, et al., 1998, p.10). The educational status of women is also poor in the country. According to 1998 Census, overall literacy ratio among 10+ age group of women is low (32%) as compared to their male counter parts (54%) and gets lowest in Baluchistan (14% for women as compared to 34% for men) and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) (3% for women as compared to 29.51% for men) (PCO, 1998a). The literacy rate is very low (20%) in case of rural women and gets lowest for rural women in Baluchistan (7.9%) and in FATA (2.7%) (PCO, 1998b).



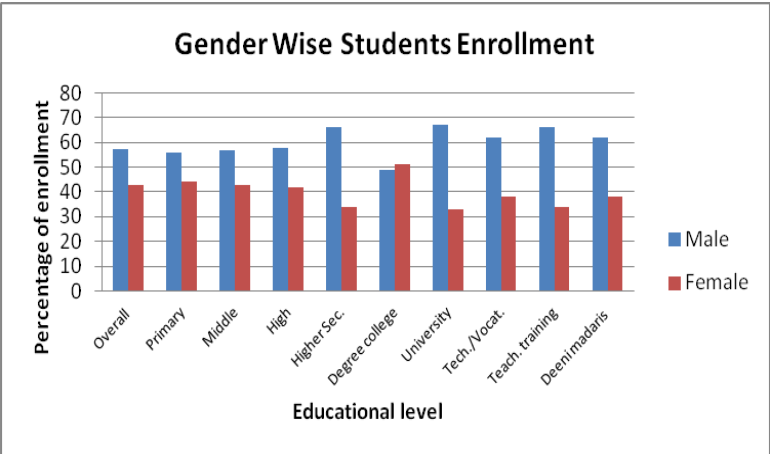
Source: (PCO, 1998a;b)

Similarly, the situation in formal education sector is not very promising. The number of all educational institutions (including all public and private sector institutions) in the country is less for girls than boys. According to National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), there are 46% educational institutions for boys, 29% for girls and 24% are mixed institutions (NEMIS, 2011). The primary level of education is crucial for achievement of Education for All. Even at the primary level the gender disparity is evident; as only 33% primary schools are for girls as compared to that of 56% for boys (NEMIS, 2011).



Source: (NEMIS, 2011)

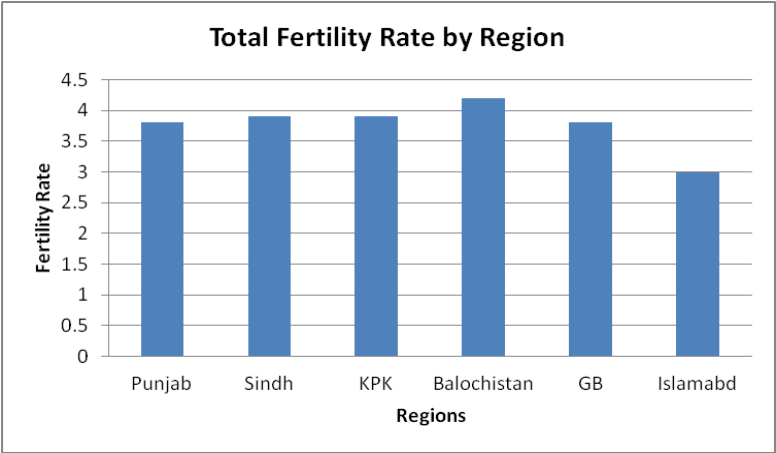
Girls’ enrollment at all formal educational levels is lower than boys. Census 1998 shows only 30% enrollment rate among girls as compared to 41% for boys (PCO, 1998a). Similarly, the report of national education management information system gives recent figures. Overall female enrollment in the country is 42.6% as compared to that of their male counterpart as 57.3% (NEMIS, 2011). Female enrollment is lower at all educational levels; but as the educational level increases the level of girls’ enrollment decreases. It is observed that only 29% of the girls first enrolled in class one could pass 10th class from public schools (NEMIS, 2011).



Sources: (NEMIS, 2011)

The health related indicators also show a poor picture of women in Pakistan. The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey reports provide more recent data than the census 1998. The most recent data presented by National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) in preliminary report of Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-2013 shows that the total fertility rate per women was 5.4 in 1997, coming down to 4.1 in 2006-2007, and finally reaching to 3.8 children per women in 2012-13 (NIPS, 2013, pp.11-14). It is evident that educational level of women affects their health status. The provinces having lower female literacy rates (e.g. Baluchistan) have poor health related indicators. The women with better educational

understanding are availing better health facilities than uneducated ones. The fertility rate is sufficiently higher in the provinces with low literacy rate among women; in Balochistan (4.2), Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KPK) (3.9), Sindh (3.9) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB) (3.8) (NIPS, 2013, p.13).

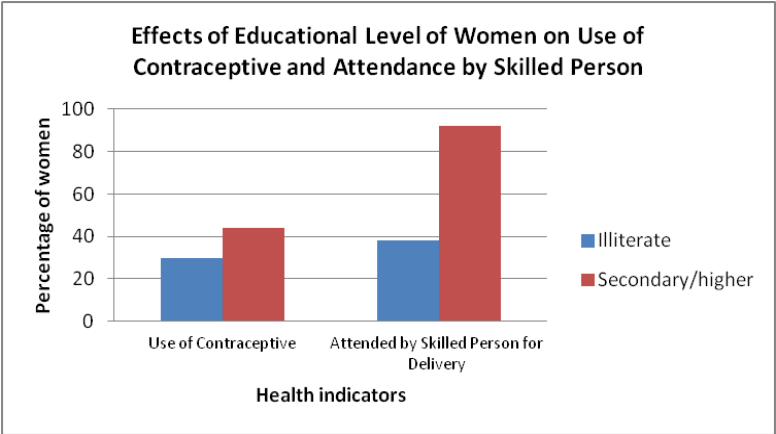


Source: (NIPS, 2013, p.13)

The rate of using contraceptive, attendance by skilled persons at the time of birth and delivery at hospital are low of Pakistani women. Besides that these rates are also determined by the educational level of women. Overall, only 35% of the married women in the country are using a contraceptive method; 26% use modern methods while 9% use traditional methods (NIPS, 2013, p.17). The use of contraceptive among women is lower in the regions with low literacy rate; in Baluchistan (20%) and KPK (28%) (NIPS, 2013, p.17). The use of contraceptive increases as the educational level increases among women; it is 30% among uneducated women, 41% among primary or middle level educated women, and (44%) among women with secondary and higher level education (NIPS, 2013, p.17).

Almost 48% women give births to children without any skilled health provider such as doctor, nurse, midwife or lady health worker (NIPS, 2013, p.22). Almost half (52%) of all deliveries

assisted by skilled person are actually done by Traditional Birth Attendants (NIPS, 2008, p.116). The chances of being attended by a skilled person at the time of delivery substantially increased with the increase in educational level of mother (NIPS, 2008; 2013). It is 38% among mothers with no education as compared to 92% among mothers with more than secondary level of education (NIPS, 2013, p.22).



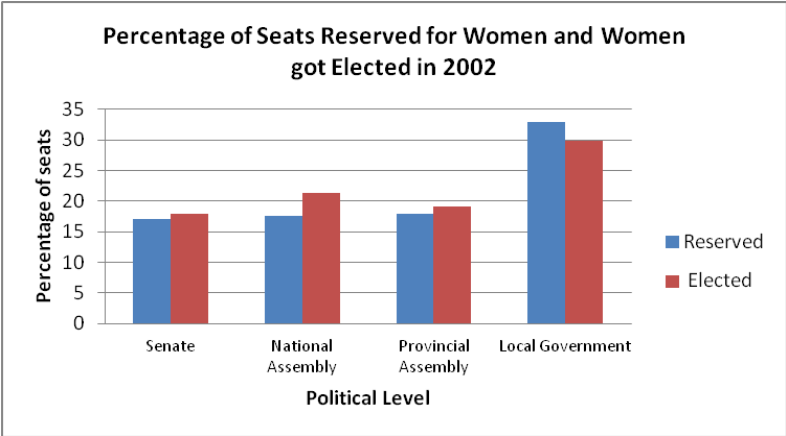
Source: (NIPS, 2013, pp.17-22)

Only 34% women delivered in any health facility, while 65% births take place at home (NIPS, 2008, p.113). The percentage of birth in health facility is also found related to education of women. The rate of delivery in health facility is lowest in Baluchistan (i.e. 18%) (NIPS, 2008, p.113). These conditions results in a high chance of maternal mortality. It is 276 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births; it means 1 out of every 89 women in Pakistan die of maternal causes (NIPS, 2008, p.177).

Beside the lack of facilities the major cause for lack of education and poor health of women are low level of awareness and attention which eventually comes from association of lower status to women, especially in rural society. The lack of education and income generation opportunities for women and lack of awareness threatens their decision making autonomy. 1998 Census shows that



only 2% of the total 10+ age female population was active as Labour force; the same gets lower in case of rural women (1.8%) (PCO, 1998c). For more recent figures, World Development Report shows that in the year 2000 only 15% of the total labour force was women. Women are mostly engaged in agriculture in rural areas. In urban areas they are also involved in small household production units (like bangle making, making packing bags, packing finished goods, tailoring etc. But all this contribution is invisible because of the traditional assumption that women do not work. Another reason is also the lack of data in this regard. There are sufficient evidences available that there is a positive relationship between women’s level of education and labor force participation in Pakistan (Faridi, Malik, & Basit, 2009, p.132)



Source: (Asian Development Bank, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1999).

For long the situation has been same in terms of women’s political participation. Till 1998 women’s political participation in Pakistan was low at all levels. Women’s participation was no more than 3% in national and provincial legislative forums during 1997 and 2000; it is only seven in the house of 217 members in National Assembly, one in the house of 483 members in Provincial Assemblies and only two in the house of 83 members in senate (Asian Development Bank 2000; Human Rights Watch 1999, 26; Amnesty International

1998, 2). The situation improved with the introduction of Legal Framework Order before elections in the year 2002. These initiatives led to 17% legal reservations at senate, National and Provincial Assemblies (Bano, 2009; Graff, 2003; Weiss, 2012). The number of women more than reserved quota seats was elected; 18% to 21% women were present in Senate, National Assembly, and Provincial Assembly. 33% of the local government seats were reserved for women but 30% could be filled in 2002 elections.

The root cause for lagging behind, especially for gender differentials, can easily be traced in prevailing unfavourable socio-cultural practices in Pakistan, especially in rural society, as more than 60% of Pakistani population belongs to rural areas. The most deeply rooted and negatively effecting is the practices of tribal, feudal and patriarchal norms throughout whole society. Some of these practices, just to name a few, are domestic violence, honor killing, dowry, watta satta, wanni, early or child marriages, exchange marriages, and marriage with Quran, etc (Jilani & Ahmed, 2004).

For long the law was supporting and fostering some of the anti-women social practices; especially the laws formulated during so called Islamization of society during General Zia-Ul-Haq's military rule in 1980s (Jilani & Ahmed, 2004). The law of evidence reduces woman's attestation of evidence, in financial cases, to half of that of man. The law also gives women unequal rights in inheritance, termination of marriage, minimum age of marriage and natural guardianship of children in case of separation. Polygamy is neither banned nor sufficiently restricted by the law. Qisas and Diyat Act allows for compromise and compensation as an easy way to get rid of any criminal accusations regarding hurt to a women. Mostly crimes committed against women (especially in case of honor killings if reported) are likely to be compromised under this law by her relatives. Hudood ordinance long served as a tool to victimize women and to get rid of their share in inheritance, or to curtail their choice in marriage and exercise of other rights. During the last

decade, with the increase in women's presence in political and legislative forums, Pakistan witnessed a series of seven pro-women laws passed from both the houses (Parliament) to positively affect women's status in society (Weiss, 2012). The awareness among women about these laws is crucial for maximum utility and benefit. The education system can help in this regards. It is inferred that literacy and education is a crucial prerequisite for improvement in women's social status. It helps to reduce the gender differentials by positively altering socio-cultural practices, and improving educational, health, political and legal status of women in the country.

Keeping in view the situation, Pakistani women are faced with four major challenges in order to improve their status in society. They are; 1) increasing their literacy, education and awareness, 2) gaining access to employment opportunities at all levels in the economy, 3) promoting change in the perception of women's roles and status in family and broader society, and 4) gaining maximum voice in public sphere; both within and outside of the political process, in order to become able to influence and alter unfavorable laws and ensure their effective implementation.

### **WOMEN'S LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE IN RURAL SINDH**

In response to these challenges, several initiatives were taken for women's empowerment in Pakistan by government, non-government and international organizations. A semi-autonomous organization named Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) took an initiative for Women's Literacy and Empowerment in two districts of Sindh (i.e. Malir and Dadu) (Munshi, & Bhatti, 2009, p.23; SEF, 2007). The program was envisaged and designed in a way to link literacy and empowerment of women in rural context. The program started in the year 2000 and is still in progress in rural areas of Sindh. This part of the paper deals with the experiences and learning of the researcher from the initiative as being its filed team

member. It discusses the program vision, objectives, strategy along with evidences from observations from field work, case studies and lessons learned from this initiative to help future social workers, policy makers and practitioners.

The program envisioned the “[p]romotion of literacy as an enabling learning skill for human well-being and gender equality in disadvantaged communities” (SEF, 2007). The main objectives of the program were as follows:

- “To initiate a context specific organizational structures, designed by women themselves for working towards human betterment and attitudinal change in society.
- To translate and disseminate motivational basic and post literacy materials in Sindhi addressing key needs identified by women themselves, especially in the areas of health & hygiene, environment, identity & self-esteem, gender issues in social and political context, citizenship skills and economic enhancement, etc.
- To generate and compile quality documentation to influence policy decisions at provincial and national levels and also new programs for women's empowerment and literacy” (SEF, 2007).

The WLE program progressed in two consequent phases. First phase was a yearlong research study for designing the program. This phase was undertaken in collaboration of SEF (for technical assistance) and Royal Netherlands Embassy (for financial assistance) (Jamil, 2007, p.69). The second phase was the realization of accordingly designed program through implementation with targeted communities in rural areas of Malir and Dadu. This phase was initially undertaken with the assistance of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for a short period. Then the mainstreaming phase, that is in progress, is done with collaboration between local communities and SEF.

## **WLE Program's Designing Phase**

The first phase was a fifteen months study for designing of the program (Jamil, 2007, p.69). It proceeded in four steps. First, it started with interviews of experienced persons, gender experts and practitioners throughout Sindh. Second, an extensive review of local, national and international literature for situation analysis was done. Third, two surveys (a baseline survey of villages in the two districts and a household survey in the villages selected on the basis of baseline survey results) were conducted for collection of primary data about the socio-economic conditions of villages and people living there. On the basis of interview data analysis and the literature review, two questionnaires were developed for data collection in baseline and household surveys. Multi stage cluster sampling was done. Initially two districts, Malir and Dadu, were sampled for the survey. The data was collected through baseline survey questionnaire in 22 villages, randomly selected in both districts. The data was analyzed using a computer software for statistical analysis (i.e. SPSS). On the basis of results from baseline survey, 10 villages were selected for household survey.

Four, in the communities selected on the basis of household survey results, a series of Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques (e.g. Social mapping, Wealth ranking, Venn diagram, Seasonal calendar, Daily activity clock/timeline and Priority matrix, etc.) were done with village men and women for participatory planning of the program design addressing their priority needs as identified by them, on the time and seasons they mentioned and with the human and material resources they identified with in their villages and networks (Jamil 2007, p.70). Finally, the findings of the research study and accordingly designed program was shared at national level in a Dissemination & Resource Mobilization Workshop with possible implementers, donors and representatives of concerned communities.

### **WLE Program's Implementation with Communities**

Accordingly designed program was structured to be implemented in two phases. First phase was of forming a local women's group and initiating a community based learning center for providing basic and post literacy to illiterate or semi literate women in the village. Program started with the formation of a Steering Committee of experts and development of basic and post literacy and training material in the light of priorities identified by the local people and findings of the research study within SEF. Initially, three basic literacy primers for Mathematics and Sindhi language along with three post literacy readers for neo-literates addressing the themes of health, hygiene, nutrition and environment, skill development, economic enhancement, conflict resolution, self esteem and civic sense with greater attention to cultural context and simple narration styles were developed by a team of experts (Jamil, 2007, p.71; UNESCO, n.d.).

Community mobilization started during the field work done for research study. Now formal meetings were held with the men and women in selected villages. The local women were mobilized and organized into formal groups (named as Goth Naari Sangat), which assumes all the village women as its members (Naari) (Jamil, 2007, p.72; UNESCO, 2009, p.74). Most active of them were chosen as representative through the vote of others to form a Core Group (named as Sartyoon Sath) (Jamil, 2007, p.72). The first step towards functionalizing a local women's group was establishment of women's learning and empowerment centers (Munshi, & Bhatti, 2009, p.23) within their existing resources and identification and arrangement of facilitators (teacher) from within the community (UNESCO, 2009, p.74) if not possible then from any nearby place. They were also entrusted for mobilization of community to bring them to the center. Initial coverage of the program was 22 villages with 24 WLECs and almost 800 women learners in these centers. Later on the coverage reached to 40 WLECs in three districts of

Malir, Dadu and Tando Allahyar (Munshi, & Bhatti, 2009, p.23; UNESCO, 2009, p.74).

Initial Coverage	
• Numbers of villages covered	22
• Numbers of households covered	2300
• Targeted population	21109
• Numbers of women organization	22
• Numbers of WLEP Centers	24
• Number of Learners in WLECs	803
• Number of Facilitators in WLECs	24

The establishment of centers was basically a way to functionalize women’s group, establish grounds and basic structures in the villages needed for mobilization and triggering change for future initiative by the community. The learning centers became a common space for expression and action of local women. The basic and post literacy material was disseminated, the learning facilitators identified from within the communities and trained by SEF. Small scale libraries were established in each center for creating initial flow of information to neo-literate local women and women’s groups (Jamil, 2007, p.72). Moreover, a book “Maloomati Asbaq Baraye Shaoor-o-Agahi” (informative lessons for awareness and consciousness) was compiled and used in awareness sessions organized in the centers (UNESCO, 2009, p.74). The aim of all these initiatives was enhancing knowledge and critical thinking of communities for attitudinal change in key priority areas of social development as identified by them in designing phase. It is further supported by initial and time to time trainings of community, women groups and literacy facilitators.

The second phase was of need based sector wise interventions in different priority areas identified by communities, such as health, income generation, social and political rights and basic infrastructure, as and when the community becomes ready to do so. At this stage, after acquiring literacy skills and building some rapport with the community, women groups started gradually shifting to need based interventions as and when they felt the need for. Different activities were introduced in collaboration with women organizations and different line departments such as ministry of health, National Data Processing & Registration Authority (NADRA) with continuous facilitation provided from SEF (SEF, 2013). For example, initial steps towards health improvement were taken through arrangement of periodical health screening camps for women learners in their centers, setting up the ID card camps in villages, and celebrating national and international days. As the number of learners increased in learning centers, old learners were encouraged to voluntarily take a lead role in facilitation of new learners in literacy classes. Similarly, women groups from different villages made alliance on local bases in order to form two CBOs; one named as 'Goth Nari Alliance for Community Development in Malir' in district Malir and the other named as 'Alliance for Goth Nari Sangat for Community Development in Sehwan' in district Dadu. CBOs formation was done through election process within women groups at village and district levels. These CBOs became affiliated with SEF through signing of memorandum of understanding for technical support.

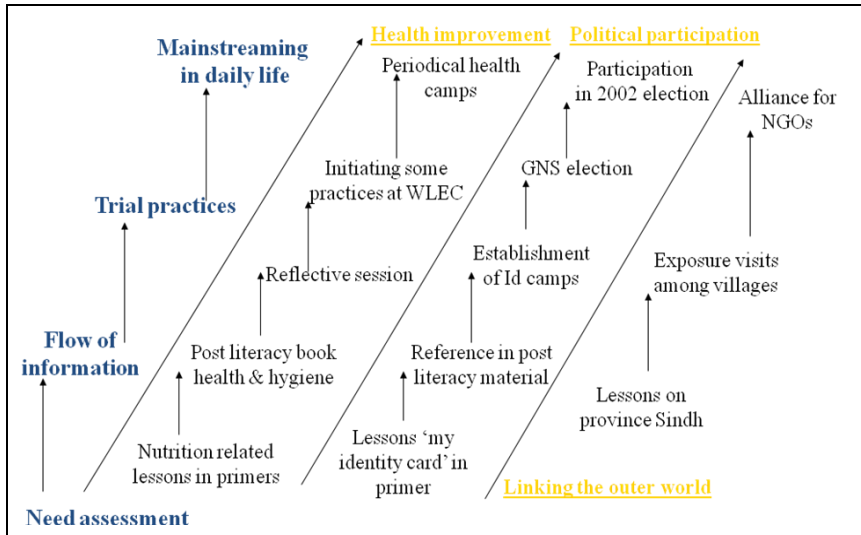
### **Analyses of the Program Strategy: Linking Targets at all Levels**

There was an effort to link targets at all the phases of implementation. The way of progress in each sector passed through three major steps: 1) creating a flow of information (through education), 2) trial practice, and 3) mainstreaming in daily life. The initiative for access to improved health started with inclusion of health and nutrition related lessons in literacy primers. Then, a post literacy reader for neo-literates titled health and hygiene



complemented with reflective sessions and some initial practices at WLEC level followed it. Finally, it led to arrangement of periodical health screening camps in collaboration with ministry of health.

### WLEP Strategy-Linking the Targets at All Levels



Development of a political understanding also started from inclusion of lesson titled “Mera Shinakhti Card” (my identity card) in primer relating its importance and acquisition procedure followed by references to its utility in post literacy readers on economic enhancement. Then, arrangement of ID card camps in collaboration with NADRA to facilitate provision of ID card and a trial practice to understand the political voting system through election for establishment of CBOs was done. Finally, women took part in 2002 elections in a better way than ever before in these villages. Similarly, the effort for linking village women with outer world was also started with the inclusion of information about province of Sindh as a complete chapter in primer. Then, organizing exposure and collaboration visits and activities among women groups of different villages and finally forming an alliance through establishment of CBOs. These conceptual linkages were intended for women’s gradual awareness and empowerment.

The above analysis of the program strategy clearly shows that WLEP presents a practical example for showing linkages between and bringing improvement in women's social, economic and political status through educational advancement. It shows education as a prerequisite for women's empowerment.

### **Case Studies from the Field: Experiences and Learning of the Field Workers**

Jamil (2007) has given some case studies from the programme showing its achievement. This part of the paper gives some other village and individual case studies from author's experience and program documents focusing on the process of program showing the way inside a village, the work done, relations built and challenges faced in the field to benefit future field workers, policy makers and practitioners striving for education, social, economic and political empowerment of women in Pakistan.

Chashma Goth is a village in Malir. Before entering the village, it was essential to negotiate with the gatekeepers. The first meeting of the field team was in a backroom of a side the road small hotel (Dhaba) at the very entrance of the village with some local men. It is because the men do not want to take the team inside village. The second meeting was done in a person's living room with only village men. These gatekeepers men were continuously keeping watch on the team to satisfy the concerns of the community and simultaneously also facilitated the team to maximize the benefits community can acquire from the program. They served as mediators between community and the field team. The local teacher of the boys' school was one such person in this village.

As soon as some access inside the village was acquired, the team was faced with resistance from women who have accommodated themselves in this very patriarchal society. For instance, in a meeting a boy of 12 years came and started beating his 18 year old sister with a stick just to take her home back. During the discussion, a woman Zebul (most outspoken and continually making fun of

the team) said, “it is right. He has the right to beat his sister because he is her ‘brother’”. She verbally abused the team saying that you are bad girls who are so frequently coming to our village while there is no body who is your relative. Once a man on the way in the village tore the reporting performa and survey questionnaires team was used to fill saying “never come back here again”.

After negotiating with gatekeepers and gaining access inside the village, the second important thing was to maintain the presence in and building the rapport with community. Despite a number of such incidences at initial level, the field team continued visiting houses in the village and participated in marriage ceremonies, funerals and condolences. They spent hours and hours every day in their houses to understand and penetrate the community; sometimes just meeting and discussing daily things with women on different streets, houses and clusters or on public places like water collection points, etc. Gradually community became acquainted with and started accepting the field team members. Zebul also became lenient in her behavior. This process took long time as of more than one and half year. During this period besides rapport building with community, other tasks like baseline and household surveys, the PRA techniques, and collaborative designing of the program activities were done. The time spent with community enabled the team and the community to have trust on each other and arranging and participating in time to time formal meetings with village women. The stability in relations with community and mobilization helped in formation of women organization through identification and selection of candidates by the community women.

After the women group took its shape started its first project to open a literacy center and bringing the community there. They decided to use the girls’ school building (lying dysfunctional) for their center; as it will be convenient even for those who are not ready to go to one another’s house due to some family conflicts. With the guidance and facilitation of the field team GNS took

permission from education department for the use of school building for literacy center. Eventually, the center was first open only with few girls but gradually increasing in number. The women (e.g. Zebul) who initially rejected the program and the field team also started paying visits to the center and the facilitator. Finally, they showed willingness to be the part of center and got enrolled as a learner there. Despite her age factor (a middle aged person) she was the first in her center to complete primers.

Amina, another girl belonged to a family who had buffalos and supplied milk to the village always showed her inability to join the women group and WLE center due to workload. Soon after the WLE center started and gained some enrollment, she herself came to the facilitator and asked her if she may come just to take lesson every day. Later on, she also became interested in and arranging time to attend the awareness and reflective sessions conducted in the center.

The women also gradually started developing a critical thinking as a collective work. Once, the team visited a family along with some learners, the household woman just came back from city after making payment of the interest money to a gold smith from whom she had taken a small amount on interest by keeping her gold jewelry to him for some need in past. She had to pay a certain amount to that gold smith every month. They thought to have paid many times more than what actually they have taken and still the balance shows that the interest is growing so fast that they still have to pay more than original amount. The learners during reflective session found that if we start saving a small amount by every learner in the center, we can deal with such problems in future. This was a good suggestion to think about but its implementation was difficult. Because initially all the women were not ready to contribute. Initially, it remained a voluntary contribution. It supported the learning and reflective activity in the center by the maintenance of its record by learners.

The center also enhanced women group's capability to influence the existing social setup in the village. There was a community dispute on equitable distribution of scarce water resources leading to gradual decline in attendance at the center. The community in village is settled on two different levels of land. Due to excessive pumping by the high settlers there was a rapid depletion of water resources of lower settlement area. The women settled on the lower level were compelled to fetch water from the top. Given the difficulty of the task and the time it took for women from the lower settlement were unable to attend the Center. GNS facilitated a decision to ensure equitable distribution of water by exclusive access to it by both settlements on alternate days.

Women also tried hard for self development by adjusting related factors. Usually married women visiting the center with their children were not comfortable. And absenteeism was very high among this group. As a remedy to it, GNS decided to recruit the only primary pass girl of the village as care taker & teacher for their children. So the mothers can learn with peace of mind and environment. Apart from this teacher for children, when WLEC became crowded with 58 women learners, the women enlarged the facilitation circle by adding some volunteers to it. Some brilliant learners were asked to voluntarily facilitate others in learning. Therefore, some experienced ones rose to a leadership role causing changes on their social standing within center, family and village. Though whatever is achieved was little but precious to fuel the enthusiasm for some large scale changes.

In another village named Khalifa Jat, the team started with a meeting with some men at a grocery shop. Here some of the male members were educated and were also members of a nearby Basic Health Unit (BHU) established by Aga Khan University. The women in the village were in very deprived condition. The infrastructure was very unfeasible for women's mobility and autonomy. Women rarely had any chance to see the outer world.

They had very different dress codes and family values. The highest death ratio among learners was observed in this village.

A center was started but women were not ready (actually not allowed) to go to even one another's house. Keeping in view this inability to access the whole area in a general manner, initially 2 centers were started addressing two extended families. In one center there were 18 learners. Zenat was the most brilliant girl. She was learning so quickly. The male members of the community wanted her to become the teacher for their center after completing her course (because they were not comfortable even by the presence of an outsider among their women). Field team started to involve her in teachers training but it was difficult to take girls outside the village. After a lot of mobilization team succeeded in convincing the community to let 2 girls accompanied with an aged women (who use to stay in the training hall) and a men (who was use to sit by the door of training hall throughout the day). It was the first time for that area that some girls went outside for such an activity.

A joint marriage ceremony was planned for 12 learners. They got married. Zenat was one of them. Soon after marriage most of them become pregnant. It was not a practice to visit the doctor. But after few months, once the team was unable to go back to the village for four days when reached there, team came to know that Zenat had died. Before her death her body turned blue for 2 days and she got her head twice big than that of its real size. Actually her baby died in her abdomen and the poison was spreading throughout the body, but they (even the family men who were members of the BHU) did not take her to the doctor and she died. Asima, another learner was very young about 12 years old. She was a diabetic patient. Later on she also passed away due to diabetes.

In the above two case studies, it is easily observed that where the educational arrangements were gradually absorbed the women and community got benefit of it in their social and political life. While on the other the place where educational arrangement was the least

priority they are experiencing very slow change rather dire consequences in terms of women's empowerment.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper aimed to show women's vulnerable social, economic and political condition in Pakistan and the link between women's education as a prerequisite for their empowerment in all walks of life. An effort was made to describe women's existing condition in the country and the suggested link between education and empowerment with the help of secondary and primary data collected during ethnographic participant observation done by the researchers during field work of WLEP.

It can be concluded on the bases of above discussion and data analysis that women do not see their own identity (empowerment) separate from the social context i.e. their family and community within which they exist. Women living in a village without clean water and health facilities cannot even imagine her own empowerment (through literacy/education) without addressing the fundamental needs of her community, her family and the context from where she derives her own identity. They relate the consequences of empowerment with all aspects of their lives. For them empowerment means power to access basic facilities; health, drinking water, etc. Empowerment is primarily a collective dimension for them, limited to their surroundings. For them, empowerment is located within "self-reliant" model, they does not challenge and question any existing societal norms.

Literacy or education by itself is not empowerment but certainly is a means to it. It is beneficial in terms of rights, capabilities and development such as; better employment, enhanced self-confidence and autonomy, improved health and lower fertility, and better status in family and society. But initiatives limited to only one aspect like literacy or education can not serve the purpose, unless it is linked with women's basic minimum needs. Therefore, there is a

need of integrative and harmonious efforts in different directions to address all the issues linked with women. The learning affirms the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) definition of empowerment:

Empowerment is about people – both women and men-taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance, it is not only a collective, social and political process, but an individual one as well – and it is not only a process but an outcome (CIDA, 2010, p.5).

It is learned that the best way to empower is not to serve people but to facilitate them achieve what they need. Despite all hurdles, we have several women role models to be followed by young generation in all walks of life, from technical to political, literary to financial and from social welfare to bureaucratic fields. Pakistani women are growingly realizing where they stand. This realization is the first step toward reconstruction of society, as is evident in the activism and achievements of Pakistani women in terms of political participation and legislative appropriations.

Finally, this paper recommends that the community, especially women, should essentially be involved in planning and implementing community based educational and social empowerment initiatives. It is also desirable to systematically study with the help of empirical data to explore the innovative and efficient ways of engaging local communities for participation in national and international development initiatives.



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