

CHAPTER 9

GENDER AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Constitution of Pakistan, as per its Article 25 (2), makes it binding that there will be no discrimination on the basis of sex. In pursuance of this, planning and policies for ensuring gender equality, women rights and empowerment have evolved gradually considering their significant contribution to sustainable socio-economic development. Women constitute 51 per cent of the total population and 22.7 per cent of the labour force. Despite their recognised constitutional, legal and religious rights, the status of women remained under shadows. To enable them to contribute actively in the socio-economic development, their protection, well-being, empowerment and participation will have to be further encouraged.

The SAARC member states, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, are among the lowest ranking countries in terms of social economic development the region. However, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka have comparatively higher rankings, as per the Mahboob-ul-Haq Human Development Centre [MHHDC] Lahore University of Management Sciences.

The Vision 2025 and prospective 11th Five Year Plan approach to provide an enabling environment and equal opportunities to women for development of their full potential to enjoy the benefits of economic growth, prosperity and social development consequent upon the outcome of the initiatives taken by the federal and provincial governments, as well as by the stakeholders. The Pakistan National Policy for Development and Empowerment 2002 ensures women equal access to all development benefits and social services. The standardised framework and guidelines will be required for equitable development of women across all regions.

Pakistan has committed to meet the MDGs, particularly Goal 3 – ‘promoting gender equality and empowering women’ – and Goal 5 – ‘improving maternal health’ – and is also a signatory of the United Nations Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UNCEDAW). There has been a shift from the MDGs to the SDGs, and a lot of efforts need to be made for achieving sustainable goals for women development. The Pakistan National Policy for Development and Empowerment 2002 provides strength to ensure women equal access to all development benefits and social services.

Performance review 2014-15

According to Pakistan’s MDGs Report ‘Gender Parity Index in Schools’ (2013), the GPI at primary level is 0.9, secondary level at 0.8, youth literacy at 0.81, share of women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector 10.45 per cent and proportion of women participation and holding seats in the Parliament is at 22.2 per cent. Out of 342 seats in the National Assembly, 60 are reserved for women nominated from provinces (Punjab 35, Sindh 14, KPK 8, and Balochistan 3). In addition, there are 14 women in the National Assembly and total seats are 74 (20 per cent).

Pakistan has taken many initiatives during 2014-15 for women development and empowerment. Through key initiatives, participation has been given to women in the decision-making bodies, particularly in the Punjab, land reforms etc., and ensured ownership of women in land, day-care facilities for children of working women and establishment of women crises centres in the country. Remarkable women-friendly programmes include: National Plan of Action, Gender Reform Action Programmes, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal, First Women Development Bank and National Commission on the Status of Women. The women development departments have been established in provinces, which have been empowered under the 18th Constitutional Amendment. These departments take initiatives for the establishment of working women hostels, day care centres, women crises centres, shelter homes, etc.

Outlook 2015-16

The Annual Plan envisages a framework for equitable development of women living across the country and guidelines for preparation of policies, action plans and interventions by the stakeholders for achieving the objectives envisioned in the 11th Five Year Plan, which include: gender mainstreaming through development of gender-sensitive need-based projects, integration of gender dimensions into all sectors of economy, a women right based approach to strengthen women's economic, social and development rights and entitlements, sensitisation on gender issues for ensuring implementation and review of policies, plans, etc. Strengthening of support mechanism for women survivors of violence and in distress, creation of gender-based knowledge through research and gender disaggregated data (including third gender), day care facilities for infants and children of the working women to keep them comfortable, make them productive workers and provide them women-friendly workplace. Women with disabilities will also be included in all policies, strategies, planning and interventions of the federal, provincial and local governments.

Programmes

The government, civil society and international organisations have been designing plans to achieve gender equality and women empowerment through awareness raising campaigns and allocation of budget under their annual development programmes. Women's participation in employment will be encouraged, and ten percent quota for women employment will be ensured by the institutions concerned.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights has planned to protect women from violence by establishing a helpline for legal advice. The implementation of Harassment Act will also be ensured further. The National Commission on Status of Women will analyse and review gender policies, interventions to protect their rights and will give recommendation to the government on women issues.