

Women's Economic Empowerment Beneficial for State: Institutional Analysis of Administration in PakistanRashid Hussain¹, Dr. Noraiz Arshad², Sheema Iqbal³, Muhammad Aqeel^{*4}**Original Article**

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Abstract

Women empowerment is crucial for a country's development as it unlocks the full potential of half the population, fostering inclusive growth and social progress. When women are empowered through education, economic opportunities, and equal participation in decision-making, societies benefit from a broader talent pool, diverse perspectives, and increased innovation. Women's economic empowerment, in particular, leads to improved family welfare and community development. Moreover, by ensuring equal access to education and healthcare for women, a nation invests in the well-being and productivity of future generations. Empowered women also contribute to political stability and social cohesion. In essence, women's empowerment is not just a matter of gender equality; it is a strategic imperative for sustainable and comprehensive country development. Institutions play a pivotal role in women's empowerment by shaping the legal, social, and economic frameworks that either facilitate or impede gender equality. Establishing and enforcing laws that guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women is essential. Moreover, institutions can promote inclusive policies, such as affirmative action measures, to address historical disparities. Economic institutions, including financial systems and businesses, can contribute by providing equal access to resources and opportunities, fostering women's economic independence. Educational institutions play a critical role in dismantling gender stereotypes and ensuring that girls have the same educational opportunities as boys. Furthermore, institutions can create support networks and spaces for women's voices to be heard, fostering a culture that values and promotes gender equity. By actively engaging and reforming institutions, societies can create an environment conducive to women's empowerment, enabling them to contribute fully to social, economic, and political development. This study examines the role of institutions in Pakistan, challenges and opportunities for the development of women and suggests suitable measure to empower the women.

Keywords: Educational Institution, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Reproductive Health, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)

Introduction

Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the creation of conditions for women to have equal opportunities, rights, and agency in all aspects of life. At its core,

empowerment involves the enhancement of women's capacity to make choices, influence decisions, and participate fully in societal, economic, and political processes. This empowerment extends beyond mere access to resources and education; it includes the dismantling of discriminatory structures, cultural norms, and legal barriers that perpetuate gender-based inequalities. Women's empowerment is intertwined with the notion of gender equality, emphasizing the need for a fair distribution of power, resources, and opportunities between men and women. It also involves fostering a supportive environment where women can exercise their rights without fear of discrimination or violence. Achieving women's empowerment requires concerted efforts in areas such as education, economic participation, healthcare, and legal reform to create an inclusive and equitable society where women can thrive and contribute to the betterment of their communities and the world at large (Reshi & Sudha, 2022).

Women's empowerment is closely linked to improved health and education outcomes. When women have control over their reproductive health and family planning, it leads to healthier families and communities. Educated and empowered women tend to invest in the education and well-being of their children, contributing to the development of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce for the state (Moulton, 1997).

In terms of governance, the inclusion of women in political processes and decision-making structures enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of institutions. Gender-diverse leadership fosters more comprehensive and representative policies, ensuring that the needs and concerns of the entire population are addressed. Empowered women are more likely to advocate for policies that promote social justice, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

Women empowerment offers a multitude of benefits to the state, fostering societal progress, economic development, and enhanced governance. First and foremost, empowering women contributes to the overall well-being of society by promoting gender equality, which is not only a fundamental human right but also a cornerstone of a just and thriving community. When women are empowered, it results in a more inclusive and diverse decision-making process, reflecting a broader range of perspectives and priorities.

From an economic perspective, women constitute a significant portion of the workforce, and their empowerment can lead to increased productivity and economic growth. Providing women with equal access to education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities not only enhances their individual economic status but also contributes to the overall economic development of the state. Studies consistently show that empowering women in the workforce positively impacts innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness (Miles, 2013).

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National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)

The National Commission on the Status of Women is an autonomous statutory body that works to ensure the implementation of women's rights and to address gender-based discrimination. It advises the government on policy matters related to women and monitors the impact of legislation on women's lives. The NCSW in Pakistan is a pivotal institution contributing to the empowerment

and protection of women by addressing a spectrum of issues related to their rights and well-being. Established as an autonomous statutory body, the NCSW holds the mandate to monitor the implementation of laws, policies, and programs that affect women's status in the country (Rai, 2017).

NCSW plays a critical role in advocating for legislative changes and policy reforms to promote gender equality. By reviewing existing laws and proposing amendments, the commission contributes to the creation of a legal framework that protects and enhances women's rights. Through its research and advocacy efforts, the NCSW engages with policymakers, influencing the development and implementation of laws that directly impact women's lives.

The NCSW is actively involved in raising awareness and fostering dialogue on issues affecting women. Through seminars, workshops, and campaigns, the commission works to sensitize communities and stakeholders to the challenges faced by women, encouraging societal discourse on gender-based discrimination and violence. This educational outreach is instrumental in changing societal attitudes and fostering support for women's empowerment (Khan, 2023).

In addition, the NCSW monitors and investigates cases of violence and discrimination against women, acting as a watchdog for women's rights. By addressing specific cases and advocating for justice, the commission contributes to a culture of accountability and ensures that perpetrators of violence against women are held responsible for their actions.

In the realm of policy implementation, the NCSW assesses and evaluates the impact of existing policies and programs aimed at women's welfare. Through these evaluations, the commission provides valuable insights to policymakers, ensuring that initiatives are effective, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of women in Pakistan.

Ministry of Human Rights: The Ministry of Human Rights in Pakistan has a mandate that includes the protection and promotion of women's rights. It plays a role in formulating policies and legislation related to women's issues, as well as addressing cases of human rights violations, including those affecting women. This ministry is a crucial governmental institution actively contributing to the empowerment of women through various initiatives and policy frameworks. One of its primary roles is to formulate policies and strategies aimed at safeguarding and promoting women's rights across the country. By actively participating in the legislative process, the Ministry works to ensure that laws are conducive to gender equality, addressing issues such as violence against women, discriminatory practices, and workplace harassment. Through this legislative advocacy, the Ministry contributes to the creation of an enabling legal environment for women's empowerment (Khan, 2009).

Another key aspect of the Ministry's contribution lies in its efforts to raise awareness and sensitize society to women's rights issues. Through campaigns, workshops, and educational programs, the Ministry fosters a broader understanding of gender equality, challenging traditional norms and stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination. By engaging with communities, the Ministry encourages societal dialogue and promotes a cultural shift towards greater gender inclusivity. The Ministry of Human Rights is actively involved in providing support and assistance to victims of gender-based violence. This includes the establishment of helplines, crisis centers, and legal aid services to ensure that women facing violence have access to immediate assistance and protection. These services not only empower individual women but also contribute to a broader culture of accountability and justice.

Moreover, the Ministry works on initiatives that focuses on economic empowerment for women. This includes programs that support women's entrepreneurship, vocational training, and economic inclusion. By addressing economic disparities, the Ministry contributes to reducing vulnerabilities that can lead to gender-based discrimination and violence.

The Ministry of Human Rights also collaborates with civil society organizations, international agencies, and other stakeholders to leverage collective efforts in advancing women's rights. Through partnerships and collaborations, the Ministry ensures a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges hindering women's empowerment.

Provincial Women Development Departments: Each province in Pakistan has its Women Development Department responsible for formulating and implementing policies and programs aimed at the welfare and empowerment of women. These departments often work on issues such as women's education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.

Provincial Women Development Departments in Pakistan play a pivotal role in the empowerment of women by formulating and implementing policies and programs aimed at addressing gender-based disparities and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

One of the primary functions of these departments is to design and execute initiatives that focus on women's economic empowerment. This includes supporting income-generating activities, providing vocational training, and facilitating access to financial resources. By creating opportunities for women to participate in the workforce and gain economic independence, these departments contribute to breaking down traditional barriers and enhancing women's overall well-being.

Education is another key area of focus for Provincial Women Development Departments. They work to improve access to education for girls and women, addressing challenges such as gender-based discrimination, early marriage, and lack of resources. Initiatives may include scholarship programs, awareness campaigns, and the establishment of girls' schools, aiming to increase literacy rates and ensure that women have equal opportunities for educational advancement.

These departments are also instrumental in promoting women's health and well-being. They may implement healthcare programs targeting maternal health, family planning, and reproductive rights. By addressing healthcare disparities and promoting awareness of women's health issues, these departments contribute to creating healthier communities and improving the overall quality of life for women.

Provincial Women Development Departments often take a lead role in addressing gender-based violence. This includes the establishment of crisis centers, help lines, and shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence or other forms of abuse. By providing essential support services, legal aid, and counseling, these departments contribute to creating a safer environment for women and survivors of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, these departments actively engage in advocacy and awareness-raising activities to challenge societal norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequalities. By fostering a cultural shift towards gender sensitivity and inclusivity, they contribute to the creation of an environment where women's rights are respected and protected.

Collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, and other stakeholders is another significant aspect of the Provincial Women Development Departments'

work. By working in tandem with various entities, they leverage resources, expertise, and networks to implement more comprehensive and effective programs for women's empowerment.

Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)

BISP is a social safety net program in Pakistan that aims to provide financial assistance to vulnerable and low-income women. It includes cash transfer programs designed to alleviate poverty and empower women economically. The BISP in Pakistan has been instrumental in empowering women by providing financial assistance and support to vulnerable and low-income households. Named after the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, BISP was established with the aim of alleviating poverty and promoting socio-economic inclusion, with a particular focus on women.

One of the primary ways BISP contributes to women's empowerment is through its cash transfer programs. By directly disbursing financial aid to women in eligible households, the program ensures that women have access to economic resources. This financial autonomy enables women to make decisions regarding their family's well-being, education, and health, contributing to their empowerment within the household.

Moreover, BISP recognizes the importance of women's economic participation and includes measures to promote financial inclusion. The program encourages the use of technology, such as mobile banking and biometric verification, making it more accessible for women to receive and manage financial assistance independently. This not only enhances their financial literacy but also expands their participation in formal economic processes.

BISP has also incorporated a strong gender-sensitive approach in its initiatives. The program prioritizes female beneficiaries and recognizes the specific challenges faced by women in impoverished households. This targeted focus ensures that women, who are often disproportionately affected by poverty, receive direct support, fostering a more equitable distribution of resources.

Additionally, BISP incorporates various conditionalities in its assistance programs, such as requirements related to children's education and health. By linking financial support to these conditions, BISP aims to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and improve outcomes for women and their families. This approach acknowledges the role of women as primary caregivers and decision-makers in family matters.

Beyond financial assistance, BISP has contributed to women's empowerment by fostering community engagement. The program facilitates social mobilization activities and awareness campaigns, encouraging women to actively participate in community development initiatives. This community involvement enhances women's visibility, leadership skills, and social networks, empowering them to play more active roles beyond the confines of their households.

Shelters and Crisis Centers:

Various organizations and government bodies operate shelters and crisis centers for women who are victims of violence. These include the Violence Against Women Centers (VAWC) and Darul Amans, which provide temporary refuge, legal aid, and counseling services to women facing domestic abuse and violence.

National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS)

NIPS is involved in conducting research related to population issues in Pakistan, including women's health, family planning, and reproductive rights. It contributes valuable data for informed policymaking on matters impacting women.

Research Methodology

To assess the impact of women empowerment on the state's institutions, a comprehensive research methodology will be employed, primarily focusing on literature review and institutional analysis within the context of Pakistan. The literature review will involve an in-depth examination of scholarly articles, policy documents, and reports related to women's empowerment and its correlation with state institutions in Pakistan. This will include studies on legal frameworks, policy implementations, and institutional mechanisms aimed at promoting gender equality. The institutional analysis will delve into the structures, roles, and responsiveness of key institutions such as the National Commission on the Status of Women, the Ministry of Human Rights, and Provincial Women Development Departments. Qualitative and quantitative data from official reports, surveys, and case studies will be analyzed to understand the effectiveness of existing policies and their impact on women's empowerment. This integrated approach will provide a nuanced understanding of how institutional frameworks contribute to or hinder women's empowerment in the Pakistani context, offering insights for policy improvements and systemic changes.

Significance of the Research

The significance of conducting an institutional analysis of administration in Pakistan within the context of women's empowerment lies in its potential to unveil the intricate dynamics between state institutions and the advancement of gender equality. By scrutinizing the policies, practices, and responsiveness of institutions such as the National Commission on the Status of Women, the Ministry of Human Rights, and Provincial Women Development Departments, this analysis aims to assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms in promoting women's empowerment. Understanding the strengths and shortcomings of these institutions is crucial for identifying barriers to gender equality and formulating targeted interventions. Ultimately, the research intends to offer actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, fostering a more robust institutional framework that aligns with the goal of women's empowerment in Pakistan, thereby contributing to broader societal progress and sustainable development.

Literature Review

(Manoj, 2014) discusses that women play a pivotal role in the development of a country across various sectors. Their contributions are integral to economic growth, social progress, and overall national well-being. In the workforce, women contribute significantly to diverse industries, fostering innovation, productivity, and competitiveness. Their involvement in education, healthcare, and community development positively impacts societal resilience and cohesion. Additionally, women's entrepreneurial endeavors contribute to economic diversification and job creation. As primary caregivers, women play a central role in nurturing future generations, shaping the human capital essential for a nation's progress. Recognizing and leveraging women's talents and perspectives is not only a matter of gender equality but also a strategic imperative for unlocking the full potential of a country and fostering sustainable development.

(Duflo, 2012) highlighted the women role in economic development in state, women constitute a substantial portion of the labor force, contributing to economic growth and productivity. Their

participation in diverse sectors, including technology, finance, healthcare, and entrepreneurship, brings a variety of skills and perspectives to the workforce. When women are economically empowered, it leads to increased household incomes, improved standards of living, and enhanced economic stability at both micro and macro levels.

(Khalid et al, 2023) mentioned that in Pakistan, various institutions play a crucial role in the development of women by formulating and implementing policies that address gender disparities. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) serves as a key advocate for women's rights, advising the government on gender-related policies and monitoring their implementation. The Ministry of Human Rights focuses on legislative reforms and initiatives to protect women from discrimination and violence. Provincial Women Development Departments work at the grassroots level, implementing programs for women's economic empowerment, education, and healthcare. The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) provides financial assistance directly to women in vulnerable households. These institutions collectively contribute to fostering an environment where women can access equal opportunities, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute significantly to the social and economic development of Pakistan.

(Ahmad et al, 2021) described that the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Pakistan plays a crucial role in the development of women by addressing economic vulnerabilities and fostering financial inclusion. Through its cash transfer programs, BISP directly provides financial assistance to women in low-income households, empowering them with greater economic autonomy. This support enables women to make decisions regarding their families' well-being, education, and health. By employing technology for disbursement and encouraging financial literacy, BISP promotes financial inclusion, ensuring that women can manage their resources independently. Additionally, the program contributes to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty by linking financial aid to conditions related to education and health, recognizing the pivotal role of women in family dynamics. In this way, BISP serves as a catalyst for the economic empowerment of women, contributing to their overall development and creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

(Sharma, 2010) discusses that state plays a pivotal role in strengthening women by formulating and implementing policies that address gender disparities and promote equal opportunities. Legislative reforms aimed at protecting women's rights, addressing violence, and ensuring workplace equality are integral aspects of the state's role. Investments in education, healthcare, and economic empowerment programs contribute to enhancing women's overall well-being and socio-economic status. Additionally, the state's commitment to creating an inclusive and safe environment, coupled with active measures to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, fosters a society where women can thrive and actively contribute to the nation's development.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in women's empowerment in Pakistan by implementing programs and initiatives that address a range of gender-related issues. These organizations often focus on education, vocational training, and skill development to enhance women's access to economic opportunities. By providing financial literacy and entrepreneurship training, NGOs contribute to women's economic empowerment, enabling them to participate more actively in the workforce. NGOs also play a significant role in advocating for women's rights, raising awareness about gender-based violence, and providing support services for survivors. Their community-based initiatives often include healthcare programs, legal

assistance, and the establishment of shelters for women facing domestic violence. Additionally, NGOs work to challenge societal norms and discriminatory practices, promoting a culture of gender equality and inclusivity. Through their multifaceted efforts, NGOs contribute significantly to advancing women's empowerment and fostering positive social change in Pakistan (Zafar, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, women's empowerment is undeniably beneficial for the state, contributing to overall societal development. The institutions in Pakistan, particularly the National Commission on the Status of Women and the Ministry of Human Rights, play crucial roles in formulating policies, ensuring legal protections, and monitoring the implementation of initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. Their effectiveness is contingent on strategic collaboration with Provincial Women Development Departments, creating a comprehensive institutional framework. Additionally, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) facilitates direct financial assistance, alleviating economic vulnerabilities and promoting financial inclusion. Meanwhile, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) complement government efforts by addressing grassroots challenges, offering education, healthcare, and advocacy programs, and challenging societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The collective impact of these institutions, government bodies, and NGOs is pivotal in fostering an environment where women can exercise their rights, contribute actively to economic growth, and participate fully in shaping the future of Pakistan. As these entities work collaboratively, their coordinated efforts hold the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable society, where women's empowerment is not just a goal but a reality with far-reaching benefits for the entire nation.

Suggestions

To enhance the performance of government institutions in empowering women in Pakistan, several key suggestions can be considered. Firstly, there is a need for continued efforts to strengthen and enforce existing laws related to women's rights. This includes stringent measures against gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities. Institutionalizing gender-sensitive training for law enforcement officials, judiciary, and other relevant personnel can ensure a more effective implementation of these laws.

Government institutions should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive and inclusive policies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by women. This involves a holistic approach, covering education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protection. The policies should be designed with input from women themselves, ensuring that they reflect the diverse needs and realities of different segments of the female population.

Promoting gender equality within government institutions is crucial. This includes increasing women's representation in decision-making roles and fostering a gender-sensitive workplace culture. Initiatives such as mentorship programs and affirmative action can contribute to breaking gender barriers within government agencies.

Moreover, investing in gender-disaggregated data collection and research is essential for evidence-based policymaking. Comprehensive data can help identify specific areas of concern, measure the impact of policies, and guide the allocation of resources for targeted interventions.

In addition, collaboration and coordination among different government bodies, especially between federal and provincial institutions, should be strengthened. This ensures a cohesive and synergistic approach, avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that women across the country

benefit equitably from empowerment initiatives. Fostering public awareness and education campaigns is crucial for challenging societal norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. Government institutions can take the lead in promoting positive narratives around women's roles in society, breaking stereotypes, and encouraging a cultural shift towards gender equality.

By implementing these suggestions, government institutions in Pakistan can enhance their effectiveness in empowering women, creating an environment where women have equal opportunities, rights, and protections, and contributing to the overall development and progress of the nation.

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