Gender Discrimination and Inequalities in Higher Education: A Case Study of Rural Areas of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the status of gender in higher education and the rationales behind the gender inequalities and discrimination in higher education in rural areas of Pakistan. Objectives of the study are 1) To find out the reasons behind the gender discrimination and inequalities in higher education. 2) To investigate the role and impact of gender discrimination on gender development in higher education. 3) To point the prospects for the future. Various studies exposed that number of female students starts lessening gradually in rural areas from higher secondary to undergraduate and graduate level. It is suggested that there is need for significant paradigm shift in the way that government, parents and scholars should plan how to increase the number of female in higher education trend in public sector universities. There is need to provide equal access for higher level of education without any discrimination in order to develop female in the rural areas of Pakistan. There is need to create awareness among parent about the importance of higher education of female.

Keywords: Female higher education, gender inequality and discrimination, development, main streaming strategy

INTRODUCTION

Despite the worldwide expansion of higher education during the second half of the 20th century, inequalities of access persist nearly everywhere. Inequalities are also due to selective education systems, which so operate that from higher secondary level to university level, young people from the most disadvantaged economic, social and cultural backgrounds are rejected or discouraged. All these factors or often found in various combinations, which perpetuate and aggravate inequality (UNDP, 2003).Rees (1990) observed that discrimination towards women was still prevalent in society including in the current labor market provisions for women, e.g. career progression and an inequality of pay, the attitude towards childcare, the ideology of gender equality and the existence, and the impact of gender equality legislation. In that context a higher education system that lead opinion in society, gender related discrimination towards women students and staff members was observed. Female students faced traditional access issues such as perceived stereotypes and a lack of positive role models in all areas of their graduate careers. Those included application procedures, assessment and lack of flexible entry and exit points to higher education that family commitments can require.

Women academies and university staff members faced similar rather more diverse discrimination. Not only was this inherently damaging the careers and ambitions of those women, but also had a negative effect on future generations of female research students, academic and professional staff and more generally the academic discipline (Farooq 1996).The study indicates that disparity in higher education exists in rural areas of Pakistan which on many grounds affects gender development. For females there is no equal

opportunity in higher education in the rural areas of Pakistan. Females are facing difficulties in getting higher education cause of gender discrimination. Gender equality in higher education can help in reducing the economic problems and can plane the path of gender development.

Educated female always play a significant and essential role in all fields of life. The development of female higher education practices has led to worldwide discussion of how to convey an equal education opportunity for all without any sort of discrimination. The female higher education is left behind in spite of the fact that it is most effective and smart investment for economical growth of and development of any country around the globe

There is need of policy formulation focused on women empowerment in higher education for the purpose of career development, employment, decision-making and providing legal, political, economic and social rights to women. Terry and Thomas (1997) are of the view that equal treatment of genders (female/male) of our society who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of higher educational opportunities. All students and adults have the equal opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to society.

RATIONALES BEHIND GENDER INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Co-education

A significant and increasing proportion of higher education institutions have been established by the private sector, and most are co-educational. This inhibits the access of women and girls from traditional communities. In some areas there are many co-education institutions where female/males can get higher education but due to strict family, tribal and religious customs prohibit female to get education with males. This is main hurdle in female higher education which creates differences.

Interface between Gender and Wealth-Based Disparities

The inter-relationship between poverty, livelihood and investment decisions at the household level operate in different ways in different societies. In some, parents do not invest in the education of their daughters and in very poor households, girls are withdrawn from school.

Mostly of the families do not allow and invest on the girls higher education but give preferences to invest on boys because according to them instead of girls, investing on boys is beneficial output because girls are not permitted to do job so its waste less investment on them.

Security Issues

The location (rural, remote/hilly/desert) of institutions affects girls more than boys, in particular in countries where roads and public transport have not penetrated rural and remote areas. Availability of institutions/universities within reach is an important determinant. Travelling long distances in public transport is an important security issue and this is particularly significant in societies where girls are not permitted to travel alone or have to be escorted. It should, moreover, be noted that female teachers, as well as students, can be the victims of violence: a report by USAID in rural areas of Pakistan found that female teachers were frequently threatened or assaulted in the rural areas or far flung areas where they work and are frightened to leave the institute. As well as the severe impact on these women, this

will discourage other women from working as teachers, which in turn further damages girls' educational prospects.

Early Marriages

Early marriage, household responsibilities, pressure to work, family honor and related issues inhibit girls and women from access and completing school. Early female marriage is based on the assumptions that good marriage' is the most important way to secure a girl's well being, security and respect. Marriage of a girl is the second name of respect and fulfillment of desires and emotions in Muslim community. Additionally it is consider the duty of parents to make an early arrangement of marriage to fulfill the responsibility of being as parents in most of areas in Pakistan.

However, according to Islamic law, "a woman cannot be forced to marry against her will. After marriage she enjoys similar rights in most of the affairs. The Quran says; 'and they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them' (2:228). According to the Prophet (P.B.U.H) men have no preference over women and women have no preference over men, both have equal rights on each others.

"In many societies a young woman's place is seen as in the home after minimum education. Yet, she is doubly disadvantaged because her youth reduces her status within her household and community. Because she does not have the same standing as her male peers, she is not perceived to have the same skills or capabilities, higher studies, and so there is less value in educating her for higher studies. This inevitably contributes to the view that a 'good marriage' is the most important way to secure a girl's well being" (Juliette Myers and Rowan Harvey, 2011).

For families facing chronic poverty, marriage often seems like the best way to safeguard girls' futures and lighten their economic burden. The high costs of higher education and the perception of girls' potential to earn an income as comparatively poor, pushes girls out of their homes and schools and into marriage, marriage of school-aged girls was considered the main barrier to achieving higher education and promoting gender equality for girls, (Myers and Rowan Harvey, 2011).Higher education based interventions interrupt and prevents early and forced marriage.

Domestic Work As Well Entry Into The Workforce Prevent Female Towards Higher Education.

"Economic dependency upon men, and therefore the low level socioeconomic status of women had also limited their entry into the employees and out of higher educational Institutions" (Wikipedia, 2011).

"The world bank states that girl higher education is important for development of the nation. As the girl empowerment, equality and gender concerns are central to the new education strategy" (2020) Learning for all. Schooling of girls has much importance like income, employability, children growth and their own ability to for good livelihood.

IMPACT AND ROLE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION ON GENDER DEVELOPMENT

Gender discrimination exists in all parts of Pakistan but it is higher in rural areas and particularly in rural areas of KPK and Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan. Gender discrimination exists in family, marriage, children education, health and career development, in economic field and particularly in employment a women is working more hours and

earning less as compare to men cause of less qualification. Gender discrimination hindering the woman participations in getting higher education and women has no property & political right in the area, which is negatively affecting development. Most of the female are totally dependent on men economically, which is also the reason of their exclusion from development. Gender discrimination and inequality hinders poverty alleviation and female education helps in poverty alleviation. Women fertility right helps in poverty alleviation while discrimination in higher education and jobs, distribution of resources affect poverty alleviation. The study depicts that if skill enhancement opportunities through higher education not provided to women equally it would affect gender development. "Female higher education plays a very significant and crucial role in the development of a nation, especially in the economic development of a country. But female education in rural areas of Pakistan, its status and standard is mainly at the lowest level. Thousands of girls' otherwise intelligent and capable to get higher education are deprived because of diverse socio-cultural, economic reasons and gender prejudices. Due to this reason, they are unable to play an active role in the development of society" (Parveen, 2008).

The original WID (Women in Development) approach recognized that through higher education women's active role in the development process as reproductive, productive and community workers, and emphasis the fulfillment of their strategic needs through direct state intervention. Due to its political nature, this approach was soon replaced by and anti-property approach, focused on practical needs surrounding women's productive role. The equality and empowerment approaches have been labeled as GAD (Gender and Development) approaches because of their emphasis on strategic needs. The term empowerment has come to mean many different things to different actors in the development field (Andreson and Patricia, 1991).

Gender inequality and discrimination in higher education may reduce economic growth and gender development. Apart from these intrinsic problems of gender inequality, one may be concerned about instrumental effects of gender bias. Gender inequality may have adverse impacts on a number of valuable development goals. First, gender inequality and discrimination in higher education and access to resources may prevent a reduction of child mortality, of fertility, and an expansion of education of the next generation. To the extent that these linkages exist, gender bias in higher education may thus generate instrumental problems for development policy-makers as it compromises progress in other important development goals. Secondly, it may be the case that gender inequality reduces economic growth. This is an important issue to the extent that economic growth furthers the improvement in well-being (or at least enables the improvement in well-being). That economic growth, on average, furthers well-being (measured through indicators such as longevity, literacy, and reduced poverty) has been demonstrated many times, although not all types of growth do so to the same extent (Drèze and Sen, 1989; UNDP, 1996; Bruno, Squire, and Ravallion, 1996; Pritchett and Summers, 1996).Higher education in rural areas of Pakistan can be characterized by extensive gender inequalities. Girls/women have to face socio-cultural hurdles to acquire education. International community has developed a consensus through the Millennium Development Goals to eliminate gender inequality from education. The proponents of gender equality argue that it is not only humane and ethical thing to provide everyone easy access to education without any gender bias, but it is also essential for development and progress of a society that both men and women are educated. They also point towards empirical studies that have confirmed that gender inequality in education has significant impact on rural poverty in Pakistan, and female literacy is important for poverty alleviation. Feminists like Martha Nussbaum are arguing that there is an immediate need to

increase the public expenditures on female higher education in order to achieve gender equality at all levels. Gender inequality and discrimination is argued to cause and perpetuate poverty and vulnerability in society as a whole. Household and intra-household knowledge and resources are key influences in individuals' abilities to take advantage of external livelihood opportunities or respond appropriately to threats. High education levels and social integration significantly improve the productivity of all members of the household and improve equity throughout society. Gender Equity Indices seek to provide the tools to demonstrate this feature of poverty.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Gender Mainstreaming "Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. The government of Pakistan should also adopt this strategy to remove the inequalities and discrimination barriers in higher education of rural areas. It is a process rather than a goal of creating knowledge and awareness of and responsibility for gender equality among all education professionals engaged in tertiary education. It is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality in higher education institutions. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – education policy, curriculum, research, advocacy, resource allocation, facilities and planning, implementation and monitoring of tertiary education programs." (UNESCO strategy 2008)

Mainstreaming Gender In Higher Education Has Necessarily To Start With The Government (Political Leaders, Administrators, Heads Of Institutions Of Higher Education).

High level political and administrative commitment is essential to ensure it is done across the board and is not a small one- off project.

The first step is to get everyone on board. National and international institutions committed to mainstreaming gender need to create advocacy and research groups to gather, compile and analyze data (quantitative and qualitative) on gender inequality in access, participation, teaching-learning, gender and social stereotyping, safety and harassment and related issues. Recognizing the enormity of the challenge by all stakeholders is the essential first step towards mainstreaming.

I.   The second step is to identify what needs to be done – at which level, in which institutions, and the backward (elementary and secondary education) and forward linkages (higher education, employment and livelihood) that have to be built. Priority setting at this stage is critical to ensure that the goals set are not unrealistic and that the plan is feasible.

II.   The third step is to constitute an empowered group that will draw on the evidence and take the process forward.

III.   The fourth step is to develop a gender mainstreaming plan for different layers/sectors in higher education.

A Set of Non-Negotiable or Enabling Guidelines on Gender Equality in Tertiary Education should be Developed

I.   In order to make the process meaningful, gender issues need to be addressed along with issues of social disparities, ability related inequalities.

II.   Training a group of people drawn from different institutions in gender mainstreaming has limited value because the trainees have to go back and work among people who have not shared the same experience. They are likely to feel isolated and may gradually lose their enthusiasm. Training programmes that involve a group of people who work together and have different responsibilities in the same organization have greater impact. They don't only reinforce and encourage each other, but are also able to create a conducive environment for change.

III.   Analyzing the problem of limited impact of training programmes highlights that gender sensitization is not a one-shot event, but a long drawn out process. It may begin with a training programme leading to major managerial adjustments. Entrusting the responsibility for gender mainstreaming to an external group of facilitators does not leave a lasting impact on the organization. It can, at best, change the attitudes of a few individuals. Lasting impact can be achieved only if people from within the organization are oriented and empowered to address organizational and management issues simultaneously–the essential building blocks of a successful gender mainstreaming programme.

Once the Gender Mainstreaming Agenda is Agreed on, It is Important to Create Structures and Mechanisms That Facilitate the Process

Timely norms, guidelines, rules and regulations need to be framed or amended. Every initiative gets its initial momentum from leaders.

Within a group, there are always those who break the ice and make the journey less formidable for others. It is therefore important to identify such leaders in government, tertiary education institutions, among the faculty and students, encourage them, nurture them and create opportunities for experience sharing, and mutual support and encouragement.

Finally, the promoters and managers (in administration, in institutions, among the faculty and students) of the mainstreaming exercise have to prepare and continuously work on a dynamic checklist.

In the initial stage the checklist should start with the following:

I.   Has the process helped identify gender gaps in each sector / institution? •What are the underlying causes for these gaps? Are there other disadvantaged groups such as short-term and long-term migrants who may experience language barriers?

II.   Have the emerging gender issues been analyzed?

III.   What could be the best advocacy strategy to create a cocoon that could nurture and support the main streaming process?

IV.   Does the mainstreaming process and the concomitant implementation structure provide for equal participation of women and men and other disadvantaged groups?

V.   Has the feedback from the administrators, students and faculty been compiled and shared across the board?

VI.   Has the mainstreaming plan been reviewed in the light of the feedback?

VII.   Is the leadership (political, institutional, administrative as the case may be) on board?

Promote Research on Gender inequality

The research centers should make and the aim of these centers should be to encourage and promote research on women's studies and add to the body of knowledge that informs higher education.

Create and Support Women-Only Universities

Pakistan should create Women's University in rural areas to promote and encourage women to move from school to higher education.

Provide Stipends and Scholarships for Girls

The government of Pakistan institutes scholarships and stipends to meet the expenditure of higher studies for women and encourage women to move from higher secondary education to universities.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan has paid a little attention in gender equality in higher education. Female higher education has been an orphan child in our society due to the double standards. Still only 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is allocated for the welfare of female higher education in rural areas which is quite insufficient to meet the demands of higher education. No economic progress is possible without female higher education as it requires trained human resources. We cannot progress economically, socially and spiritually, until and unless we involve females. Gender equality is a key to all kind of progress. No country has progressed without involving women in education. The secret of many countries' development in term of education imbedded is imbedded to female education. Both countries' educational policy focus on gender equality. Therefore, in order to bring gender equality, it is essential to provide equal opportunities to both; men and women in education and higher education and to make female equally empowered as men in decision making in every mode of life. It is very essential to educate women in male dominated society such as Pakistan because "educating girls delivers a high return than other investment in the developing world" (World Bank Report, 2011).

It can be concluded that early marriage of girls, poverty, lack of awareness of parents about the importance of female education, domestic work prevented female new generations from entering into further higher education.

In the light of data analysis, interpretation and results: There is need to provide educational facilities to female population of deprived areas of the country. International non-governmental organizations and international organizations working for the promotion of education like UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank can be approached and they may be involved for this purpose. The government may make such policies that provide attractive incentives for increasing female enrolment in higher education. There is need to create awareness among parents, especially parents of under developed areas about importance of female education. There is need to introduce free and compulsory education from higher secondary education to higher education with provision of strong incentives.

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