Women, Development Planning and Government Policies in Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Development strategy in Pakistan particularly in the early period of the first three five year plans was motivated primarily by the objective of raising the growth rate of GNP. The growth oriented outlook left little room for questions of distribution which were shelved for some distant future while the issue of women’s development was viewed usually from a welfare perspective or with reference to the population problem. Family planning was a major concern in the 60s since it was felt that high rates of population increase would wipe out the gains of development. In this context education and to a lesser extent employment of women were seen as a very important means of changing attitudes and promoting small family norms. However, there was no mention of specific policy measures aimed at enhancing work opportunities for women.

It was not till the mid-seventies with the celebration of The International Women’s Year in 1975 that women’s issues were viewed from an equity or development perspective. The UN declaration placed a special emphasis on the integration of women in development with a special mandate to increase women’s economic participation in development. In response to the call of International Women’s Year a number of countries set up national machineries to deal with the problem of women. Pakistan was a signatory to the objectives of the Mexico declaration and was committed to promoting conscious public policies towards attaining this objective. This concern eventually led to the setting up of the Women’s Division in 1979 and the inclusion of a separate chapter on women’s development for the first time in the Sixth Five Year Plan.

The present study attempts an assessment of this later period when policy statements indicated a major shift in perspective towards women’s development. The paper is divided into two parts; the first section examines government inter-
ventions at the level of stated objectives in plan documents with a special emphasis on policies aimed at enhancing women's productive roles; the second part is concerned with the institutional context of women's development particularly with the objectives and achievements of the Ministry of Women's Development.

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH FIVE-YEAR PLANS

The approach (on paper at least) to women's development in the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans was significantly different from the welfare perspective of earlier planning exercises. The Sixth Plan for the first time after nearly three decades of development planning explicitly considered policies for integrating women in the development process and emphasised the need for strengthening employment opportunities for women. It reiterated the need for integration of women in development through the provision of equality of opportunity in education, health and employment and all other spheres of national life. Both the plans adopted a multi-sectoral approach to women's development whereby the bulk of the projects were to be integrated into operational policies of each sector and the Ministry of Women's Development (MWD) was to undertake some special programmes for women. In the Sixth Plan Rs 20 billion were to be allocated for the integrated programme while Rs 700 million were earmarked for the Women's Division for the Plan period. While the total financial allocation for the special development programme for women was raised to Rs 900 million in the Seventh Plan, no estimate was provided of the expenditure to be incurred under the integrated programme.

The plans' objectives of enhancing female employment and productivity was translated into policies which primarily aimed at expansion of training facilities for women through increase in the number of vocational training institutes and polytechnics as well as through increased training capacity for nurses and paramedical staff. However, there were some new initiatives; the Sixth Plan set a target of 10–15 percent seats to be reserved for recruitment of women in government service as compared to the current share of less than 3 percent of women in these jobs; provision of special credit facilities without collateral for poor women were mentioned for the first time in the Seventh Plan; mention was also made of an incentive schemes for hiring of women by public and private enterprise but no concrete measures were specified; a cadre of women development workers was also proposed in the Seventh Plan who would be organisers and planners of women's activities and would be employed in existing institutions like local government, cooperatives and NGOs and social welfare societies.

Although some new initiatives have been taken in the field of training, and
some tentative moves have been made towards evolving a more community-based approach to women’s development, closer examination of the Plans does not indicate any substantive change over the earlier approach towards problems of women’s participation in economic activity. Whereas both the Plans emphasised a multisectoral approach to women’s development, the integrated programmes were only incorporated into the areas of education, health and nutrition while the goals and policies for agriculture and industry did not address women’s roles in these sectors. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of women are employed in the agricultural sector and are likely to be there for the next decade the plans gave scant attention to this area of female employment. The Sixth and Seventh Plans continued to treat women as consumers rather than producers more in need of social services such as health, education and nutrition rather than deserving special attention in a productivity oriented programme.

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT

Scope of Functions

The Women’s Division was created in January 1979 as a special organ of the Federal Government directly under the President and later the Prime Minister. Recently in 1989, it was upgraded to the level of a Ministry.

The main objectives of the Ministry of Women Development (MWD) are to formulate public policies and make laws to meet specific needs of women; to ensure that women’s interests and needs are adequately represented in formulation of policies by various organs of government; to ensure equality of opportunity in education and employment and fuller participation of women in all spheres of national life; to undertake and promote research on the conditions and problems of women; to undertake and promote projects for providing special facilities for women.

The primary role envisaged for the organisation was that of a catalyst which was to initiate action by other Government agencies. It was to ensure that in the formulation of policies the relevant Ministries were responsive to the needs of women and thereby to ensure that women’s concerns were integrated into the overall development programme and not confined to some special programmes for women. It had a watchdog role of scrutinising the plans and programmes of policy formulation bodies from the perspective of their impact on women.

Performance of the Ministry of Women’s Development

Influence of Policy Formulation

The influence of the Ministry of Women’s Development on policy-making
or on programmes in Departments and Ministries where the MWD is not financing or sponsoring projects has been minimal and in effect the ministry has not addressed this role with any degree of seriousness. This is not surprising since no institutional mechanisms or other means of leverage were specified through which a junior ministry like MWD was expected to exercise this power and influence over the policies and programmes of the whole range of relevant Ministries and Departments.

The ineffectiveness of the MWD in influencing policies is clearly demonstrated in its failure to take action on specific measures which are included in the Sixth and Seventh Plan documents. For instance the Sixth Plan had set a target of 10–15 percent of jobs in the Federal Government to be reserved for women. Given this guideline of the Plan, initiatives were needed to put the case forward and ensure that official directives from the relevant authority were circulated to all the Departments/Ministries of the Federal Government. The MWD, however, failed to take any steps towards translation of this policy into action. Similarly the Ministry was unable to influence the Statistics Division to improve methods of data collection on female labour force participation. Although the need to use female enumerators to address questions on employment directly to female respondents was strongly emphasised in a specially organised seminar by the Ministry in 1985, as well as in many other forums, the Statistics Division had not hired any female enumerators on their regular staff till the end of 1990.

Financing of Special Projects for Women
Implemented by Provincial Departments

In practice the Ministry of Women Development has mainly concentrated on sponsoring special projects for women while its original mandate of influencing policies and programmes across all relevant ministries has been pushed to the background. The role of the Ministry has been that of a financier while the projects have been implemented by various provincial line departments and by NGOs and in most cases have also been designed by them. In this capacity The Ministry has sponsored a total of 448 projects between 1979 and 1989 comprising predominantly of small, low cost schemes [Government of Pakistan (1990)]. The financial outlay in most cases was in the range of Rs 50000 and Rs 3 million.

According to its original mandate the funding of projects by the Ministry of Women Development was to be limited to schemes which were new and innovative and therefore not likely to be considered by the regular line ministries. The idea was to try out these new approaches on a pilot basis and if successful they were to be replicated on a larger scale. However by and large the MWD's
programme did not live up to its potential of a different development oriented approach to women's projects. In the majority of cases it continued along the lines of earlier government schemes which to some extent was to be expected since the majority of projects were designed and implemented by the same line ministries which have traditionally been involved in government schemes for women.

The main executing agencies were the Departments of Social Welfare, Education, Local Government and Health although their relative importance varied by province (Table 1). In the Punjab and Balochistan more than 40 percent of the projects were implemented through the Department of Social Welfare while in the NWFP the Department of Local Government and Rural Development was the main executing agency for the MWD programme (35 percent of total expenditure). The projects executed through other departments comprised a relatively insignificant share of the MWD’s programme allocation. Thus the proportion of expenditure on projects implemented through the Small Scale Industries Corporation, through the Department of Agriculture and through the Department of Forests was 7 percent, 2 percent, and 1 percent of the total outlay, respectively.

Table 1

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<th>Expenditure on Projects Funded by the Women’s Division by Implementing Line Department and NGOs 1979-1989</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Rs Million)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>(25.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>(9.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Welfare</td>
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<td>(26.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industries</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forests</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>(100)</td>
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Hence the involvement of the departments representing key economic sectors was minimal. Although women's work in these sectors is well documented (partly due to the research undertaken at the Ministry itself) no significant effort was
made to enhance their productive potential in the areas of agriculture, livestock maintenance etc. The projects funded by the Ministry continued to be compartmentalised and isolated from the mainstream development programme.

The majority of schemes sponsored could be categorised as ‘typical women’s projects’ which are commonly associated with development efforts directed at women not only in Pakistan but across a number of countries [Buvinic (1986)]. The underlying objective of these schemes is to combine the provision of social services with some income earning activity. The projects usually deliver information (on hygiene, nutrition, child health), education and some sort of skill training to a group of women. They have a strong welfare orientation and the type of training offered is usually geared to women’s domestic roles and has little earning potential.

A large number of such multipurpose centres which provided adult education courses as well as training in sewing, knitting and embroidery etc., were set up under various schemes implemented by the Provincial Departments of Social Welfare, Education etc. In the province of Sindh alone there were 520 such centres of which 415 were known as Women’s Centres and 105 as Multipurpose Women Welfare Centres. By and large the performance of these facilities has been described in a recent official evaluation report as unsatisfactory [Government of Pakistan (1990)].

However, some recent schemes initiated and funded by the Ministry of Women Development mark a departure from the earlier trend and a move towards skill diversification and a more employment oriented approach. These projects such as the Karachi Polytechnic, Ready-Made Garments Centre, Hosiery Centre, secretarial training etc. cater to the labour requirements of the area and to local demand. The training being imparted is on scientific lines using industrial machinery and upon completion women are easily absorbed in the numerous manufacturing establishments in the cities [Shaheed (1987)]. However, their impact is marginal due to the very limited coverage of these projects while the majority of income generating schemes continue to teach women traditional skills which have little relation to market demand or employment prospects.

Financing of NGO Projects for Women

Both the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plans placed a special emphasis on NGOs to supplement government effort particularly in the areas of health, population and women’s development. The Seventh Plan, further, identified areas where activities of women oriented NGOs needed to be encouraged. These included legal aid centres, cooperatives and training of a cadre of women development workers. The strategy of the Seventh Plan was to support NGO efforts
to develop community based organisations to ensure that development efforts reached the target group of poor women.

The total number of 107 NGO projects funded by the Ministry between 1979 and 1989, were mainly concentrated in the large cities and not dispersed over smaller urban centres leave alone rural areas. Financing of projects was extended to large established NGOs such as APWA and Behbood as well as to very small NGOs catering to neighbourhood localities. Welfare oriented projects predominated. In most of these cases funds were provided for capital expenditures and not for recurring liabilities and the Ministry has mainly financed physical infrastructure in the form of buildings for community centres and women's hostels and equipment for hospitals etc. Very few project involved target communities or strengthened the institutional capacity at the grass roots level which was the main priority of the Seventh Plan in the area of NGO projects.

However to a large extent these shortcomings of the NGO programme merely reflect the limited approach of women related NGOs in Pakistan. They are usually urban based, welfare oriented and very rarely community based grass roots organisations.

Research on the Condition of Women

In the area of research The MWD initiated a process of systematic empirical investigations into various aspects of women's situation in Pakistan. Although there were a few scattered studies on the subject in the earlier period, the main body of literature on women's issues in Pakistan evolved over the eighties and a considerable part of which comprised of studies undertaken by the Women's Division. The research has particularly highlighted women's contribution to the national economy through empirical studies of women in agriculture, industry and women engaged in home based income earning activities [Qadri and Jehan (1984); Hafeez (1983); Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981)]. These profiles of women in various sectors provide crucial information on types of area where they work, the terms and conditions of employment etc. on the basis of which recommendations have been made on strengthening the position of women in the labour market.

However the impact of this research on policy has been minimal. Even in the design and formulation of projects financed by the MWD there was no serious attempt to incorporate some important findings of the Ministry's own Research. Thus in the area of employment the results of a study commissioned by the MWD on home based workers clearly indicated that the major problems they face are that of marketing and credit [Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981)], however the over-
whelming majority of income generation schemes sponsored by the Ministry continue to neglect these critical constraints and to teach women the traditional skills of sewing and knitting which are known to have a very limited demand.

Safeguarding Legal Rights

Nowhere was the ineffectiveness of the MWD more visible than in its role of safeguarding legal right. While an important stated objective of the Women's Division was to formulate laws to meet the specific legal needs of women in actual fact the most discriminatory legislation against women was passed during its tenure without any resistance or officially registered dissent from the organisation. The only exception was during 1981 when the Women's Division protested against an unsuccessful attempt to annul the Family Laws Ordinance. Given its location in the bureaucratic structure the department's ability to have lobbied against legislation sponsored by the state was doubtful and unlikely.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion has underlined the large gap between stated intentions and actual implementation of programmes and policies for women. The assessment of special efforts to integrate women into development through conscious public policies, particularly the establishment of a special ministry for women, indicates that the achievements in this regard fell far short of the stated objectives. Thus whereas initially the Ministry was expected to oversee the overall government programme and policies and ensure that women's interest were represented at every level, in actual fact it confined itself to funding a large number of small scattered projects which were peripheral to the main planning process.

However to a large extent the goal of integration of women into development was beyond the organisational and financial capacity of the MWD. The Ministry had neither the funds nor the power to fulfil such a mandate. The share of the Ministry of Women's Development allocation of the total development expenditure was minuscule at 0.2 percent in the Sixth Plan and marginally higher at 0.3 percent during the Seventh Plan.

The limited financial allocation was in keeping with the promotional nature of the Ministry's functions which were primarily meant to initiate projects and policies in the various other government departments. However the Ministry never had the administrative clout to address the role of a catalyst effectively. Given the lack of resources and power the MWD signified little more than a token representation of women in the development arena.
REFERENCES


Comments on
"Women, Development Planning and
Government Policies in Pakistan"

The paper, by Shahnaz Kazi and Bilquees Raza, is a good attempt towards the analysis – rather, content analysis of the Sixth and Seventh Five-Year Plans with particular emphasis on policies aimed at enhancing women’s productive role, and the institutional context of women’s development, particularly with reference to the objectives and achievements of the Ministry of Women Development.

My Comments on the paper pertain to the process of analysis and methodology used by the authors, certain omissions in the paper and corrections. It also includes some suggestions for further improvement.

The authors claim to have used content analysis technique but no mention is made of how this technique has been used. This technique has some rules just as the survey technique has some procedure e.g. what were the units of analysis – each policy measure of the plans, each chapter, each para or each page of the plans? What was the rationale or justification for the selection of the Sixth Five-Year Plan and the Seventh Five-Year Plan? What questions were needed to formulate a perspective for the analysis of various issues? What were the specific objectives of the content analysis? Perhaps answers to these questions could give a framework and rationale to the paper.

There are some other questions which demand answers not only for the purpose of seeking clarification, but for establishing some ground or rationale for the analysis. While the policy trends in the first three five years plans are mentioned in the introduction, no reference has been made to the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans. Why were not gender bases in policy measures analysed and directed towards enhancing the productive role of farmers and industrial workers?

The major issue drawn from the analysis of the institutional framework for WID, mentioned in the conclusion of the paper is “the large gap between stated intentions and actual implementation of policies and programmes for women. Rich planning and poor implementation is the national issue. It is not unique to the sector of WID and most professionals are aware of this issue. Perhaps a deeper analysis was needed to understand the nature and magnitude of gaps in planning and implementation of policies for women with particular reference to their productive role. Some questions worth raising in this regard are: What are the root causes of persisting gaps in planning and implementation of measures pertaining to WID? What are some of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the varied gaps in different sectors of development within the context of women
development? How have these gaps been varying with the changing strength of both political will and social will during different decades? It is true as the authors have indicated in the paper that in the early period of Pakistan, that is from 1955–1970, miserly budget allocations in education and health deprived both men and women of opportunities and services in these sectors. But the author's assumptions have overlooked the fact that, despite a very weak political will for developing the social sector, there was strong social will for enhancing women's welfare, development and protection of their rights. Several indicators of strong social will in this regard can be found in the literature.

It is not clear why the authors have included the nature of measures related to women welfare stated in the First Three Five-Year Plans, no reference has been made to the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans. It is true as the authors have stated that despite the fact that both the plans – the Sixth Plan and the Seventh Plan have emphasised a multisectoral approach to women's development, the integrated programme was mainly incorporated into areas of literacy, health and nutrition and education, while the sectoral plans for agriculture industry, employment do not address women's role in these areas. It is important to understand why is this so because the working group for the Sixth Plan had given in detail specific measures for enhancing women's productive role in agriculture, industry and commerce. Why were these measures proposed by the working group not included in the chapter on Women's Development of the Plan? A still more important question is: Why did the members of the working group not protest against this omission? This instance is a glaring example of both weak social and political will. Answers to these questions would have helped to understand gaps in planning and implementation of programmes and policies for women – one of the points stated in the conclusions by the author.

In discussing the gaps in planning and implementation of stated objectives and activities, it is mentioned by the authors that the Ministry had the administrative clout to address the role of a catalyst effectively. How is the presence or absence of administrative clout assessed by the authors needs some clarification? Perhaps the problem is that professions or specialists on WID, have not been empowered or enjoy the administrative authority. Ministry of Women Development in not island within the system. Being a part and parcel of the system, it continues to shares the vices and virtues of the system generally.

**INFLUENCE ON POLICY FORMULATION**

I fully agree with the authors that the influence of the Ministry of Women Development on policy making or on programmes in departments and Ministries
where the MWD is not financing or sponsoring projects had been minimal. However I do not support the contention that “in effect the Ministry has not addressed this role with any degree of seriousness.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. It would have been profitable if the authors would have included some innovative and specific recommendations for improving or mainstreaming women in development planning and Government policies. Most suggestions given in the conclusions can be found in other reports.

2. The paper on the whole gives more criticism of the policies and institutional framework pertaining to WID rather than analysis detailing the causes of the short comings.

3. Furthermore it would have been more desirable and profitable if the authors would have given specific suggestions for overcoming the shortcomings.

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