

Politics of Women's Education in Pakistan: An Analysis of Government Policies and their Implementation

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Abstract

This article studies the plight of women's education in Pakistan. Analysing the education policies given by the successive governments in different periods of time, this study finds that despite the scarce resources, the education policies had potential to produce good results but they failed to deliver due to lack of political will of the governments to implement those policies and to establish the goal of universal education especially for women. The democratic governments of post-Zia period worked positively in this direction since they required women vote which constituted half of the franchise. The government of General Pervez Musharraf promoted education sector from primary to higher level and showed strong will towards women's education. This study concludes that goal of women's education could only be achieved with robust political will of the government.

Introduction

Gender bias is an accepted phenomenon in most traditional societies and Pakistan is no exception to it. Despite signing various international protocols, such as

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CEDAW¹ the government policies in Pakistan fail to qualify to the demands of women's empowerment and thus visualise women as potential contributing partners in the society.² The situation was worse because of inadequate representation of women in the highest decision making bodies.³ As a result, national policies did not reflect any sensitivity towards the impacts and implications for women. The same was true for the policy-makers while formulating and implementing these policies which resulted in neglecting the cause of women's education.

Although Pakistani society is not gender friendly and women's education is not accepted under the social norms especially in the rural areas, but affirmative action by the government can bring gradual change starting from the education at primary level to every domain of life. This study finds that nonetheless the amount spent on education in every five year plan was negligibly small but had it been spent with sincere political will, the stated goals for women's education would have been achieved. Since education was not a priority of any government therefore education generally and women's education particularly could not get more than lip service. The evidence is that education budgets in 2002-03 were still only 1.8 per cent of GDP and even this small budget was not fully spent. It shows that politicians were least interested in translating their policy announcements into reality. The Feudal culture, orthodox value system, priority of personal and vested interests over national interests by the politicians remained major hurdles in implementation of education policies.

The article attempts to study education policies and budgetary allocations with the help of document analysis.

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- 1 UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
 - 2 Tehmina Rasheed, "Socio-Economic Dynamics in South Asia and Status of Women," *Pakistan Vision*, Vol. 5, No. 1, July 2004, 1-26.
 - 3 Only 17 per cent seats are reserved for women in Parliament of Pakistan while hardly 2 per cent women come on general seats.

Moreover, since the public policymaking, its implementation, and financial allocation are purely a domain of executive branch and legislature therefore a researcher could only use the document analysis to study them. A comparative traditional approach is used to study and compare the output of different policies. The study highlights the limitations to these policies and the lacuna in their implementations. The findings of this research support the hypothesis that the real problem lies in the implementation of these policies. The limitation of this study is that the researcher had to rely on the statistics provided by the official sources.

Importance of Education for Development

Coleman declares, "The education system of a country is the master determinant of all aspects of change."⁴ Education is the key factor in the development of human capital which is vital for building a nation. But for that purpose, it must be relevant to the demands of both society and the global market. It must be available to all the segments of society without any discrimination. The importance of education for development was recognised even by the classical economists e.g., Adams Smith,⁵ Frederick Engels, Karl Marx,⁶ Alfred Marshall⁷ etc. The political economist of the 20th century like Schultz⁸ also reconfirmed the idea that education was the key to development. The economics of education remained a vital component of the economics of development, but in Pakistan, it remained at the periphery in the national

4 James S. Coleman (ed.), *Education & Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 3.

5 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: W Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).

6 Frederick Engels, "Speeches in Elberfield", in *Karl Marks and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 4 (Mosion: Progress Publisher, 1845).

7 Alfred Marshall, *The Principles of Economics*, n. p.

8 T. P. Schultz, "Education, Investment and Return", in H.B. Chenery and Srinivasan (eds.), *Hand book of Development Economics*, Vol. 1 & 2 (Amersterdam: North Holland, 1988).

priorities. The public spending on social sectors remained awfully dismal. Education remained the most deprived area in terms of budgetary allocations. The reason for low public spending is the lack of political commitment for the social sector and non-realisation of education as a national priority area. Although governments have been planning for industrial development but they could not touch the heart of the problem that there is no industrialised society today with an adult literacy rate of less than 80 per cent.⁹

Women's education is considered particularly important for setting a country on the path of development. The literacy rate of Pakistani women is among the lowest in the world partly because the educational sector as a whole has been neglected by the successive governments. Girls are far more deprived of education than boys. This deprivation is more severe in the rural areas. According to the Census of 1998, the female literacy rate in Pakistan was only 32.6 per cent.¹⁰ But it is a much exaggerated figure because it counts only those who manage to sign. The rural and urban gap is also alarming in terms of the level of women's education as "the literacy rate for urban women (37.3 per cent) is more than five times higher than the rate for rural women (7.3 per cent)."¹¹ The reason might be the cultural constraints which reduce the prospects of women's education in rural areas. Very few serious efforts have been made to educate women facing strong resistance from the male dominated society. The reason for this resistance is often claimed to be an orthodox Muslim society, but a careful study reveals that this apathy is basically due to the cultural restrictions which do not allow women to come out for formal schooling, leaving

9 Mahboob-ul-Haq, *Human Development Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

10 Government of Pakistan, *Year Book 2004-2005* (Islamabad: Ministry of Women Development, 2005).

11 ESCAP, *Women in Pakistan: A Country Profile* (New York: United Nations, 1997).

behind their traditional role in the household and agriculture.¹²

Education for women has never been a priority since the politics in Pakistan has always been entangled with the struggle for power and personal benefits. This discouraging culture has been continuing for the past sixty four years. The politicians spend lavishly on their election campaigns.¹³ Usually, the political manifestos promise to revolutionize education by measures such as construction of schools in rural areas and improving the standard of education.¹⁴ However, these promises are not materialized after winning seats in elections. All the governments failed to accomplish their manifestos in terms of resource allocation for the social sector in any of the five year plans. One of the major obstacles to Pakistan's transformation into a dynamic, middle income economy remained under investment in its population to develop it as a human resource. Not even a single government has succeeded to formulate a comprehensive policy to elevate the literacy rate practically. Even within the negligible budgetary allocations for social sectors, they could have slowly achieved the goal of women's education with the political commitment to implement these policies.

Background

A policy announced by the government or any other organisation reflects its vision and the course of activities which are to be undertaken in the area for which the policy has been formulated. It is surprising to note that governments, whether military or civil, had never been enthusiastic to announce an education policy. The only

12 Women are traditionally not allowed to go alone out of homes in South Asia. It is a common tradition in all the communities of sub-continent regardless of religion.

13 Manifestos of all the political parties carrying less or more the same promises are made for the social development programs, never to materialize.

14 World Bank, *Staff Appraisal Report on Female Secondary School Assistance Report*. 15496-IN, 16 February, 1993b.

person who was genuinely interested in introducing a new education system for a newly independent country with a blend of Islamic and progressive values in education was the father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The first All Pakistan Education Conference was held in Karachi from November 30 to December 2, 1947.¹⁵ Quaid-i-Azam in his message to the Conference said that "The future of our State will and must accordingly depend upon the type of education we give to our children, and the way in which we bring them up as future citizens of Pakistan".¹⁶ But the following governments did not follow the lines given by the father of the nation. Unfortunately, the political instability resulted in the dismissal of the civilian government and Martial Law was imposed in 1958.¹⁷

The military government of General Mohammad Ayub Khan (1958-69) gave priority to economic development over education. The elected government of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1972-77) gave higher priority to the education sector as compared to the previous regimes but the result was marginal improvement.¹⁸ A remarkable change in government policy was visible for the first time in the period of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). Though he

15 Prof Laeeq A Khan, "Literacy in Pakistan", *Pakistan Observer*, <http://pakobserver.net/200909/18/Articles02.asp>, September 18, 2009.

16 "If we are to make real, speedy and substantial progress, we must bring our educational policy and programme on the lines suited to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and culture and having regard to the modern conditions and vast developments that have taken place all over the world. ...There is an immediate and urgent need for giving scientific and technical education to our people in order to build up our future economic life and to see that our people take to science, commerce, trade and particularly well-planned industries. We should not forget that we have to compete with the world which is moving very fast in this direction." Quoted on page 1 in Javed Hassan Aly, *Education in Pakistan, A White Paper (Revised) Document to Debate and Finalize the National Education Policy*, February 2007, <http://www.moe.gov.pk/nepi/WhitePaper.pdf>.

17 *Ibid.*

18 S. Arif Hussani, "Feudalism's Aversion to Education", <http://www.yesPakistan.com/feudalism/aversion>, 15/2/2010.

introduced a number of laws against women in the name of Islamisation,¹⁹ yet during his period concerted efforts were at least initiated for women's education at the primary level. The elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo (1985-1988) included primary education in its five point programme for development.²⁰

With the restoration of democracy as a result of 1988 general elections, the first women Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto took some measures towards women's empowerment and repealed the anti-women laws imposed by General Zia.²¹ To uplift women's education, the Benazir government started informal education programme. She also introduced other reforms for empowerment of women. The Women's Division was upgraded to a full-fledged ministry with a title of Ministry for Women Development; a Commission of Inquiry was set up for reviewing discriminatory laws and to improve general conditions for women;²² a separate women's bank was established to facilitate women with financial services with one hundred million rupees as initial money,²³ and announced 50 per cent matching grant for every investment in the education sector from the private sector.²⁴

Nawaz Sharif came into power and announced measures to improve women's literacy rate, female's

19 Anita Weise, (ed.) *Islamic Reassertions in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Law* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

20 Government of Pakistan, *Prime Minister's Five Point Programme: A Better Life for the Common Man* (Directorate of Film and Publications, Islamabad, n.d.), 3.

21 Ikram Rabbani, *Pakistan Affairs* (Lahore: Caravan Book, 2005), 511.

22 Government of Pakistan, *National Commission on Status of Women*, Ministry of Women Development, <http://www.ncsw.gov.pk>, 7/04/09.

23 It was established in December 1989.

24 Hassan Askari Rizvi, *The Military, State and Society* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sang-e-Meel, 2002), 209.

participation in the economic activity and population control as a part of his wider economic programme.²⁵

The Social Action Programme (SAP) 1993-94, included that 80 per cent government finances were to be contributed with 20 per cent by outside agencies for education projects. The major donors included the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and some developed countries. This programme covered all public sector primary schools. The primary school participation rate improved from 67 per cent to 71 per cent for boys and from 36 per cent to 43 per cent for girls through this programme.²⁶

After becoming the Prime Minister for the second time in 1993, Benazir Bhutto presided over the National Conference on Education and approved the recommendations of the policy. Before the recommendations of the policy could be announced, Benazir government was again dismissed and Mian Nawaz Sharif took over as Prime Minister for the second time. In 1998, Nawaz Sharif's government announced 'National Education Policy' in which a Chapter on 'Islamisation of Education' was finally included in the policy document.²⁷

It introduced SAP-II, the second phase of the SAP programme, for the years 1996-2000 once again, with 80 per cent government contribution and 20 per cent foreign assistance. SAP-II programme was expanded to cover informal education, middle schooling and vocational education. But some independent surveys revealed that net primary enrolments between 1991 and 1995 decreased

25 Ikram Rabbani, *Pakistan Affairs*, 511.

26 An assessment was made through this report that how successful was this program in achieving its goal. 'Pakistan's Social Action Program: a success or failure,' available from <http://www.yespakistan.com/people/sap.asp>, 6/18/2002.

27 Government of Pakistan, *Education Policy 1998-2010*, available from <http://www.moe.gov.pk/edupolicy.htm>.

among males and females, both in urban and rural areas.²⁸ Among other reasons, the political interference in hiring and transfer of teachers, poor supervision, corruption and a lack of emphasis on educational quality in the absence of trained and well-qualified teachers were reported to be the main hurdles in the way of the effective implementation and better results. As a result, no substantial increase in learning could be achieved.²⁹

Education Sector and Five Year Plans

The study of various Five Year Plans revealed the marginal place of the education sector in Pakistan in terms of monetary allocations. The 4th Five Year Plan (1965-70) could not be implemented because of the turmoil in East Pakistan. From 1970 to 1978, no Five Year Plan was announced by the government. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was confined to 'Rolling Plan' which was announced every year from 1970 to 1978. Therefore, it was evident that only the recommendations made in 1959-1964 Five Year Plans could be partly implemented and education policy during 1970-1977 was confined to nationalisation of private educational institutions.³⁰

The first genuine effort in the field of human resource development as a part of basic economic planning was done by the 6th Five Year Plan (1983-88). It increased the ratio of spending in the education sector to the Gross National Production (GNP) from 1.5 per cent during previous regimes to 2.02 per cent. The 6th Five Year Plan during Zia period intended to address the education problem through two-pronged policy:

- (a) Through increasing primary education facilities and
- (b) By launching adult literacy programme.

28 Government of Pakistan, *The Pakistan Integrated Household Survey*, the report is quoted in 'Pakistan's Social Action Program: A Success or Failure'.

29 'Pakistan's Social Action Program: A Success or Failure'.

30 Nasir Jalil, "Education in Pakistan", in J. Henry Korson (ed.) *Contemporary Problems of Pakistan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 71.

It was proposed to target a selective age group of younger people from 10-19 years which would cover 15 million people, 5 million males and 10 million females. A high emphasis was on women especially of the rural areas. This target was included in the five-point programme of Prime Minister Junejo with a substantial focus on primary education to raise literacy level up to 50 per cent by 1990.³¹

A Literacy and Mass Education Commission (LMEC) was established in 1981. An amount of Rs. 960 million during 1987-88 was allocated while only Rs. 50 million was allocated in 1984. It launched a vigorous campaign to promote literacy, took various steps at the governmental level, focused on media programmes for education under the President's 10 point programme for literacy. The main purpose of LMEC was to institutionalise the 'search for strategies to eradicate illiteracy and promote literacy in Pakistan.' It remained unsuccessful to establish an infrastructure from top to bottom level to involve the community and society for automation of the educational process and failed to achieve its goals.³²

This commission initiated *Nai Roshni* [Urdu: New Light] programme (1986-1990) in 1986. It planned to open 22,000 schools for the dropout students and for those who never attended school. The target group was 10-14 years. It offered free books in an informal school environment without charging any fee. However, this scheme collapsed due to various reasons including negligible community interest and provincial participation, over centralisation and control of bureaucracy and uncertainty about funding.³³ Another reason was the discontinuity of the All Prime Minister's Five-Point Programme due to dismissal of Junejo government by Gen. Zia-ul-Haq.

31 Nasir Jalil, "Education in Pakistan", 71.

32 UNESCO, *National Studies: Pakistan, Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All (APPEAL)*, and UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia & Pacific (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1991), 10.

33 *Ibid.*

More political commitment and budgetary allocations were extended to the primary education for the first time in the 6th Five Year Plan (1983-88) especially during Junejo's Five Point Programme (1986-1990).³⁴ It was not a significant amount but served as a good start. More political commitment means that the situation improved but still more was required to meet the targets.

The ratio of allocations of funds for education further deteriorated and an annual average of 2.32 per cent as ratio of GNP was given to the education sector annually during the first four years of 7th Five Year Plan (1988-1992).³⁵ The average spending on education during the period of 1987-88 was 5 per cent of the national budget which was the lowest in the region in comparison with India (8.5 per cent), Sri Lanka (7.8 per cent), Bangladesh (10.3 per cent), Nepal (10.8 per cent) and Iran (18.1 per cent).³⁶

Under the 7th Five Year Plan (1988-92), the next government started Social Action Plan (SAP) to expand and upgrade the educational facilities with the share of Rs. 21.45 billion out of a total Rs. 53.04 billion for the period of three years.³⁷ The government encouraged public-private partnership for opening new educational institutions and to release the burden on public finances.³⁸

The allocations for sub-sectors of education showed a drastic imbalance. The major stress was laid on higher education for which 18.2 per cent was allocated in the 7th Five Year Plan. According to the projections of the 7th Five Year Plan, apparently the situation was better but it constituted only 2.56 per cent of GNP for education which

34 Government of Pakistan, *Prime Minister's Five Point Programme*, 3.

35 *Pakistan Times*, Islamabad, 27 May 1990.

36 United Nations Development Program, *Human Resource Report 1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 148-49.

37 Government of Pakistan, *Social Action Program 1992-1995*, Policy Planning Section (Islamabad: Planning Commission, April 1992), 89.

38 Government of Pakistan, *Economic Survey of Pakistan, 1990-91* (Islamabad: Finance Division, 1991), 146.

was still lower than 4 per cent as prescribed by the UNESCO.³⁹ In order to overcome the shortfall of money, the government also announced incentives to the private sector declaring that all the educational institutes established between “July 1, 1991 and June 30, 1995 ‘have been granted a tax holiday.” These tax incentives were also for the individuals and companies, which donated money for education.⁴⁰ But the expectation of Rs. 50 billion partnership from the private sector proved over ambitious.

A decade long Education Policy 1992-2002 was also announced to make the education system compatible to the requirement of economic, socio-cultural and political development in an equal opportunity society.⁴¹ The 8th Five Year Plan (1993-1998) aimed to democratise the education system by providing equal access to all and to increase literacy from 35 per cent to 48 per cent.⁴² By the end of this plan, it was expected to have a model school for boys and girls in each district. It also continued to reiterate the goals of previous plans with further addition of a set new goal (a) universal education and control of early drop-outs through legislation for compulsory enrolment at primary level; (b) encouraging NGOs to launch community based educational programmes to educate people according to the socio-economic needs of local society through a motivational campaign including literacy programme in an integrated rural and urban community development programme coordinated by different departments and organisations; and (c) publications and distribution of special newspapers and reading material for uneducated people.⁴³

39 Nasir Jalil, “Education in Pakistan”, 85.

40 Government of Pakistan, *Social Action Program 1992-1995*, 47.

41 Government of Pakistan, (Draft), *Education Policy, 1992-2002* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 1992).

42 Mohammad Fahad Amin, Five Year Planning in Pakistan, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/39043994/32623586-Five-Year-Planning-in-Pakistan>, 18/12/2011.

43 Nasir Jalil, “Education in Pakistan,” 85.

In 1998, the government of Nawaz Sharif announced another long term policy titled 'Educational Policy 1998-2010' to draw a comprehensive programme to achieve objectives of universal education in Pakistan to meet the challenges of 21st century.⁴⁴ A review exercise was conducted through the Inter Provincial Education Ministers Conference held in January 2005. It was accepted that such a policy needed constant revision in the wake of changing paradigms of society. It involved not only the government agencies but also the coordination with the development partners and organisation consultants.⁴⁵ But there was a need to consult the other stakeholders like community representatives both male and female for the policy revision.

The National Education Policy 2008 regarding women's education stated that:

Efforts have to be made to cut the high dropout rates and induce more out of school youths back to the school system, particularly the girls whose participation is still very low. Provision shall be expanded, particularly in the rural areas and of the schools dedicated for girls. Priority shall be given to those locations where the ratio of secondary schools is low.⁴⁶

Having a very impressive layout, this policy had all the potential to advance the prospects of addressing illiteracy both for males and females. Provided cultural aspects should be taken into account along with the continuity and political will to implement the policy till the achievement of goals.

44 This policy covered: Islamic Education, non-Formal Education, Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Teacher Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Higher Education, Information Technology and Library and Documentation Services, Private sector in Education, Innovative Programmes and Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation.

45 Government of Pakistan, Report of Ministry of Education (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 2006).

46 Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy*, <http://www.moe.gov.pk>, 4/07/2009.

Despite these efforts for promoting education, the budgetary allocation for this sector remained the lowest in the region. The Table 1 shows the distribution of national expenditures by sectors. It reveals that the social sector has never been the priority as only 15 per cent of national resources have been spent on social sector out of which an average of half was spent on education sector.⁴⁷ It was negligible since there was a need to expand social sector especially investment on education which provides basis for development in all fields.

Table 1: DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL EXPENDITURE BY SECTORS

Sectors	Percentage of Expenditures			
	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
Development Expenditures	15.5	13.5	10.5	15.8
Current Expenditures	84.5	86.5	89.5	84.2
Defence	22.1	20.2	18.0	17.9
Interest Payments	34.1	35.8	32.6	34.3
Current Subsidies	2.3	2.7	3.2	3.0
Gen. Administration	10.3	9.8	12.9	12.3
Social/Eco and Community Services	13.9	13.8	17.34	15.4
Grants	1.8	4.2	3.7	3.2
TOTAL 100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: Government of Pakistan, *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2001/02*.

The policies implemented by different governments assured ambitious achievements in terms of literacy rate and student enrolment at schools, colleges and at higher education institutions was increased manifold. But the 1972 and 1981 Population Census data shows that in 1960s and 1970s, the rate in improvement of literacy rate remained only 0.5 per cent per annum. The positive improvement occurred when during 1981 to 1998 literacy rate was raised from 26.2 per cent to 43.9 per cent showing an annual growth rate of 1.07 per cent per annum. Pakistan Social and Living Measurement (PSLM) Survey (2006-07)

47 <http://www.commonwealtheducationfund.org/downloads/Pakistan%20Financing%20of%20Education.pdf>

shows the literacy rate in rural and urban areas as well as on provincial basis. The Table 2 shows this data.

Table 2: LITERACY RATE OF MALE AND FEMALE IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS FROM 2005 TO 2007

Literacy rate	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	Male	65	Male	67
	Female	42	Female	42
	Total	55	Total	54
	Urban		Rural	
	72 per cent		45 per cent	
	Men		Women	
	67 per cent		42 per cent	

SOURCE: *Pakistan Social & Living Standard Measurement Survey 2006-07*.⁴⁸

Although education was declared national priority but budgetary allocations on this sector remained very low. In 1990s with the restoration of democracy, there was a realisation among the provincial governments that there should be more spending on social sector including water, sanitation, health and education to fulfil their election promises. Education was given 20 to 30 per cent of the development budget during this period. Punjab was at the top followed by KPK.⁴⁹

Table 3: FEDERAL ACTUAL EXPENDITURES ON EDUCATION IN MILLION RUPEES

	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
Current Expenditure	5,298	5,125	5,829	5,851	7,094
Development Expenditure	866	836	1,053	855	4,375
Total	6,164	5,961	6,882	6,706	11,469

SOURCE: Government of Pakistan, *Finance Accounts (1997-98-2001-02) and Civil Accounts (2001-02)*, Auditor General of Pakistan, Islamabad.

48 In this decade, the four indicators; Literacy Rate, Enrolment Rate, Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment Rate (NER) have improved at a moderate pace.

49 Financing of Education in Pakistan, preparing document for the ministerial meeting for South Asia EFA Forum (21-23 May 2003), Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO Islamabad, May 2003. 34-35.

Despite these apparently impressive figures, the actual expenditures on education varied from 1.66 to 1.83 per cent of GDP which is much less than 4 per cent—the standard percentage set by the UNESCO—though it was around 7 per cent of the budget, as shown in the table 4.

Table 4: FEDERAL ACTUAL EXPENDITURES ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP

	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
Total Expenditure (in million)	49,083	49,407	54,002	57,053	66,022
Percentage of GDP	1.83	1.68	1.71	1.66	1.80

SOURCE: Ministry of Education.⁵⁰

The Table 4 shows that the expenditures on education were reduced during the initial period of General Musharraf and it remained less than 2 per cent of GDP. The apparent boom during his period was due to two reasons: government's will to implement education policy and concentration on higher education.

Higher Education

The largest expanding sector was higher education. The primary level had grown to 12 times between the period of 1945-1988 as compared to secondary education to 16 times; the college level to 30 times; the professional level to 18 times and the university level showing an unprecedented growth to 98 times. But despite such a large growth rate, the facilities of higher education were only extended to 46 per cent of the relevant age group of students (18-23 years).⁵¹

Eventually the higher education sector was growing extraordinarily as the government had provided 100 per

50 Quoted in The Education Budget in Pakistan, HRCF 2004, by Commonwealth Education Fund, 9.

51 World Bank, *Higher Education and Scientific Research for Development in Pakistan*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1991).

cent more funds for research and education in universities. There was a long awaited demand of a women's university which was for the first time supported by General Zia-ul-Haq. Later, Fatima Jinnah Women University was established as a separate women's university in Rawalpindi. Lahore College for women was given the status of a university. International Islamic University, Islamabad, also established its separate wing for women's education in almost all disciplines which presently comprises of 6000 female students.⁵² A women university has also been established in Balochistan.⁵³

The statistics on different sectors of education reveal that the enrolment of male and female are almost parallel to each other in urban areas at the primary, middle, high school level and higher secondary school level. It is because of level of awareness and comparatively high level of education in cities and towns. The different figures are seen in rural areas where still female enrolment is lagging behind that of male i.e. around 40 per cent female to 60 per cent male, which shows the strong cultural influence in rural areas. Apart, a strange phenomenon is seen at degree level that women are way ahead of men. They have around double the enrolment in degree colleges as compared to males.⁵⁴

There are a number of factors responsible for women's greater enrolment rate in higher education. One of the major factors is that the women proved to be more serious students as compared to men, producing better results in academics. The Vice Chancellor of the Punjab University openly accepted that the results of the secondary, higher secondary, graduation and the university level show high

52 Statement of Dr. Hussain Siddiqi, President International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan, on 26-03-09.

53 Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Quetta was established in 2004. www.sbkwu.edu.pk/

54 This analysis is based on the data available on the official site of government of Pakistan. (NEMIS, 2005-6: 5). Academy of National Educational Planning and Management, Islamabad.

performance of the female students as compared to male students.⁵⁵ The other factor is over-emphasis on higher education in Pakistan as compared to the primary, secondary and higher secondary sub-sectors. The reason is that higher education gives short term results as compared to the other sub-sectors. More monetary allocations facilitate more institutions of higher education.⁵⁶ Despite this growth of the higher education sector, the facilities of university education are available to only 0.4 per cent people in Pakistan.

Challenges

The rigid and obstinate traditions and attitudinal problem is the major hurdle in the way of women's education in Pakistan especially in the rural areas. People consciously or unconsciously are reluctant to send their daughters to schools. They believe that giving the right of education to a girl may divert her attention from her home responsibilities.⁵⁷ Moreover, such people do not consider education as a basic human right; rather they consider it a luxury, extravagance and a mere wastage of money. Some parents perceive the 'costs' of educating girls to be high without any return. Since males are supposed to earn for their dependents, therefore, it is believed that there is no need for women's education as they do not have to earn for their families. Traditionally, a large section of society still considers it highly immoral for a girl to go for a job. Although female institutions have brought effective changes and now many seem prepared to accept the jobs of their females in such institutions. But many families, under cultural threat, avoid working outside. The dependence on the earning of daughters is a disgrace to

55 Address to the audience of a Conference, held by Pakistan Study Centre, University of the Punjab, Lahore, on 19/02/07.

56 The budget spending remained around 4 per cent of GNP but full utilization of funds with monitoring by the responsible administration produced better results.

57 Field survey conducted in many villages of provinces of Punjab, NWFP and Sindh.

the family. Many times women's education is declared as un-Islamic by *mullah* [Urdu: Un-educated Muslim clerics], while Islam in its original teachings considers education essential for both men and women. It does not impose any restriction on women's education and their intellectual development.⁵⁸ In fact cultural values dominate the religious principles in Pakistan.

Women's extensive role in the agricultural pursuits is another hurdle. As 65.9 per cent of the Pakistani population lives in the rural areas, most of them own a small piece of land and are facing poverty.⁵⁹ Traditionally, these people had been satisfied with what they had. Social mobility was an important tool to provoke them for the economic benefits but traditional lethargy hardly allows upward mobility.

Feudal system is another hurdle in the way of women's education. It discourages opening schools particularly girl's schools and colleges in their respective constituencies. Since politics has been a game of the feudal and elites who have been ruling the country for the last sixty one years, both civil and military governments could not seriously undertake the challenge of women's education. It was due to the fact that the ignorant and illiterate masses, unaware of their basic rights, would blindly vote for the feudal lords. The business class has also joined politics which seems following traditional trends. Therefore, most of them are more concerned with money-making activities rather than working for education.

The most important hurdle in women's education is the lack of facilities in rural areas. Most of the villages are still deprived of roads and schools. Teachers are not available where the schools have been established.

58 Men and Women have the right to seek education in Islam. 15/10/2011. <http://www.answering-christianity.com/education.htm>.

59 "Asia's Women in Agriculture, Environment and Rural Production: Pakistan," <http://www.fao.org/sd/wpdirect/WPre0111.htm>, 14/04/09)

Corruption is another curse in the society and government departments that hinders proper use of funds and implementation of policy

Women's Education in Musharraf Era

In terms of the women's political empowerment and their presence in the institutions of decision making, the government of General Parvez Musharraf (1999-2008) played a tremendous role. The allocation of 33 per cent seats in the local government and 17 per cent in the provincial and national assemblies proved to be a vital step. The Local Government Ordinance 2000⁶⁰ which ensured women's participation at the local government level was daringly implemented with the political will of the state. Their effective presence in the elected decision making bodies brought discussion and debate on many key issues including violence within households, women's illiteracy issues and harassment at the working place which resulted in a new chapter of social change and confidence in women. Anusha Rehman, MNA, says that it was due to the efforts of women in the assemblies that laws such as the Protection of Women Act 2006 were passed, which reversed some of the clauses of the Hadood Ordinances of 1979⁶¹ which were considered anti-women. On the other hand, it is perceived that Musharraf did this to project his government as liberal and western as he was facing severe criticism that Pakistan was a hub of religious fanaticism. Whatever may be the reason, his tenure proved blessing as far as women's empowerment was concerned.

A large number of women have been inducted or encouraged to join the fields of law, medicine, business, police, military, air force and other male-dominated areas. In the field of mass media also women were provided a better environment of working in terms of choice of appearance, speech, dress, arts, entertainment, etc.

60 Government of Pakistan, *Local Government Ordinance* (Islamabad: 2000).

61 Interview with Anusha Rehman, Member National Assembly on 19 November 2008.

Some significant steps were taken by General Musharraf for women's empowerment as a whole and for women's education in particular. Since Pakistan is the signatory of a number of international conventions and declarations such as Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) etc., where the government has agreed to take 'proactive political, policy and legal measures for women's empowerment, advancement, mainstreaming and removal of gender based inequalities.'⁶²

In order to take practical steps to fulfil the commitments under these conventions, Musharraf government established a commission on the status of women in 2000. Previously, it was established in 1983 but for a limited period. It consisted of one chairperson and twenty members with the task of examining the policy, reviewing the laws, monitoring the actions, research and developing links with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and to facilitate women with friendly laws and policies along with their effective implementation.⁶³ Apart from this, the first ever National Policy for the Development of Women was formulated through a consultative process and was announced in March 2002 by General Musharraf.

The study of statistics during 2001-2004 shows that the enrolment of the girls remained impressive.

Table 5: GIRLS' ENROLMENT AT DIFFERENT LEVELS DURING 2001-2004

Education level	Enrolment	Average per cent
Primary level	27,933,880	40.98
Middle level	6,355,122	40.89
High school level	2,661,384	41.6

SOURCE: *Economic Survey of Pakistan (2003-04)*.

62 Government of Pakistan, *Year Book 2004-2005* (Islamabad: Ministry of Women Development).

63 'National Commission on Status of Women.'

It shows that there was a visible increase in the enrolment of girls in recent years which was a good sign for the brighter future of women.

In the last few years, a visible change regarding the political commitments for women's education has been noticed. The budget allocation for women was increased by the provinces. Under the Devolution Plan provinces were empowered to deal with various issues at provincial and local level. Education was one of them. An educational scheme, *Parha Likha Punjab* [Urdu: Educated Punjab) was initiated by Chaudhry Parvez Illahi⁶⁴ which offered attractive incentives for the enrolment of the female students. It ensured not only free books but also provided scholarship for eighty per cent attendance by girl students on a monthly basis. Some critics blamed that Musharraf did all this to please the West but it is a reality that the concept of enlightened moderation given by Parvez Musharraf stimulated the liberalisation of the society. The political will of the government ensured the implementation of the education policy.

Present Scenario and Future Prospects

The then newly elected government of the PPP under Yousaf Raza Gillani had also taken an initiative regarding women's education. His government set priorities regarding doubling the allocation of funds for education in the fiscal year 2009-2010 besides promoting women's education in the country⁶⁵ but practically they reduced the grant of the public universities, previously priority areas of Musharraf's regime. After one year in office, the government could not announce any official policy for education. As a policy statement President Asif Ali Zardari⁶⁶ announced that his government would utilise the full potential of Pakistan in all fields, especially education. He assured that he would raise the education budget in the coming

64 Pervez Illahi was the Chief Minister of Pakistan's province, Punjab, from 2002 to 2007.

65 Editorial, *The News*, 8 March 2008.

66 He is the President of Pakistan and Co-chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian, since 2008.

5 years to 7 per cent of the GDP. He also promised to raise the allocations for higher education to 20 per cent and that for university education to three times higher than earlier.⁶⁷ Practically education as a subject has now transferred to the provinces under the Eighteenth Amendment. Now there is a need to show more commitment towards the cause of education by the provincial governments.

Conclusion

The political instability, the non-representative political culture and the feudal system were some of the factors responsible for giving less priority to the education sector. On paper good plans were chalked out to keep the nation engaged that the government was committed to the cause of education. In reality, the lack of political commitment to implement those plans could not produce the expected results in improving the literacy rate in Pakistan which is still one of the lowest in the region. It remained dismal for women despite all promises. The measures taken by the government of Gen. Musharraf to empower women proved quite helpful in generating a better literacy rate among women. It depicts that a political commitment at the highest level to achieve a certain goal can make a difference and all the planning and efforts would be fruitless without the will to implement those plans.

The status of women in Pakistani society is a matter of endless debate and deepening concern. Some people strongly believe that the presence of more women in the workplace as heads of institutions is merely symbolic. Still the cultural norms have nominally changed where women are perceived as a commodity across the society with little freedom and strapping traditions pressing them ever downwards.⁶⁸ But the empirical evidence gives an optimistic view that now the scenario is changing. On the basis of the emerging trends in society like a change in the value system, the flagging grip of the feudal culture, the awareness of women's education through media and the desire for a competitive growth in society, it can be predicted that prospects of women's education are bright. The

67 "All Out Efforts to be made to uplift Education: Zardari," <http://www.sananews.com.pk/english/2009/10/17/all-out-efforts...>, 15/2/10

68 Editorial, *The News* (Islamabad), 14 November 2008.

marvellous performance of women in different fields of life, the decreasing rate of dropouts of girls from the schools, high budgetary allocations for education, affirmative action of the government through reservation of seats for women in professional colleges and universities, role of the Higher Education Commission for advancement of opportunities for higher education, the struggle of women organisations for their rights; all these transformations show that change is occurring and women are competing in terms of quantity and quality.

Prospects of democracy and need for women's votes, as they encompass more than 50 percent of the population, compelled political parties to place women's issues on their agenda in which education is an important one. But again policies would not be enough without a strong political commitment to change the plight of women on a sustainable footing through education. A fundamental change in social attitudes towards women is also required particularly in the rural areas. A comprehensive women's policy along with a serious effort from the top level can materialise a change to the bottom level in order to achieve the goal of not only women's development but also human resource development to bring about sustainable development in Pakistan.

The ideological problem has affected the situation pervasively. People of our society lack the nationalistic enthusiasm. They do not come to schools for national duty; rather to kill the time and to earn money. Unfortunately, the nationalistic approach is dwindling day by day under the pressure of religious fanaticism and regional movements. Unluckily, the federal governments had not been treating them properly which has complicated the issue. A very serious and sincere endeavour is required to address this situation so that a secure future can be assured.