

## **Role and Challenges of Ngos In Empowering Women in Rural Areas of Balochistan, Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Empowerment of women is essential and prerequisite for sustainable rural development of Balochistan. NGO's play a very pivotal role in empowering them by providing basic education, vocational training for self-employment, legal aid, protection for women and self-awareness programme. However, NGOs working in these areas face socio-cultural challenges. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role and challenges of the NGOs in empowering women in rural areas of Balochistan. The data were obtained through the interview schedule using snowball sampling method. 20 informants interviewed. The results show the NGOs are playing an important role in empowering women in different fields in a challengeable socio-cultural environment, due to the socio cultural barriers, few NGOs were active. Two NGOs were selected for study who were engaged in different projects of women empowerment. This paper is intended to be a valuable contribution in highlighting the efforts of NGOs in a dominating cultural setup.*

**Keywords:** *Non-Government Organization, Beneficiary, Balochistan, Pakistan*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Among the issues of greatest concern to the international community, the most significant is women empowerment. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has laid great stress upon the empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality (Khan, 2013). Kofi Anan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, stated quite categorically that the only means for achieving development was through the means of women empowerment (Yasmin & Kareem, 2014). Empowerment enables females to acquire material and intellectual resources which make them self-sufficient and independent (Nwanesi 2006).

Moreover, women empowerment can be realized through gainful employment, the political process and superior education. In contemporary societies, NGOs appear to dominate the field of introducing women empowerment. Productive realization of the Empowerment movement needs to proceed along several pathways simultaneously. These include familial/interpersonal, political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological (Ahamad & Hemlata, 2015). Women constitute nearly half of the world's population. Due to the fact that societies are male dominated the world women are unable to obtain rights equal to those of men (Madasu 2013).

In addition, In Pakistan as in all other developing countries, women are inherently disadvantaged and consider second class citizens. They remain victims of cultural and social discrimination. The factors that lead to this discrimination are low economic and social status of women, grinding poverty, traditional norms and values of a patriarchal society and family traditions that prevent from obtaining paying jobs (Tarar & Pulla, 2014).

Therefore, women face discrimination when trying to manage the affairs of the family, political life and society. The duties assigned to them by tradition, such as the sole responsibility of managing their households, places additional hindrance in their economic and social improvement (Rehman, Moazzam & Ansari, 2015; Arora & Meenu, 2011).

Besides, in Pakistan, as in other developing societies, women continue to encounter barriers to legal recourse, lack of access to health and education, unfriendly social-cultural attitude and near impossibility to obtain credit facilities (Yasmeen & Karim, 2014). A sympathetic political process, gainful employment, better education and NGOs help women achieve empowerment (Ahamad & Hemlata, 2015). More than 100 NGOs have been registered in Pakistan and are working towards enabling women's rights (Awan, 2012).

Furthermore, by providing basic education, legal aid, vocational training that is profitable, self-awareness programs and protection, these NGOs are playing a crucial role in women's empowerment (Ahamad & Hemlata, 2015; Awan, 2012). These NGOs, assisted by the government and making serious efforts to empower women, particularly in far-flung areas (Arora & Meenu, 2011; Rehman, Moazzam & Ansari., 2015). NGOs play a crucial role in supporting and assisting women. They perform this role by providing counseling and support, advocacy and building awareness, legal aid and, wherever possible, micro-finance. These assist women in acquiring skills, knowledge, and the ability to control their lives and become empowered (Desai 2005).

Although, a majority of the NGOs operating in urban population centres. But, they have not made a breakthrough among rural women (Awan, 2012). Likewise, NGOs operating in Baluchistan, have a good track record in their field because of the highly conservative and tradition-bound environment in which they operate (Paterson, 2008). The approach adopted by the NGOs and government of Baluchistan is to participation free approach. This approach is considered to be essential for development to take place in rural areas (Khan & Bibi, 2011).

The reason why most NGOs choose to operate in urban population centers is that the population in the province is very scattered. The government does not possess responses to provide even the most basic facilities for the women. NGOs are the only means to bring about a change in their lives. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role and challenges of the NGOs in empowering women in rural areas of Balochistan.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Empowerment means enabling of the women. In a developing society, women are unable to exert control over resources or to have a say in taking decisions that are relevant to them. External agents are needed to create environments conducive for the women to attain power. These agents may be NGOs or an agency of the government (Mosedale, 2005).

Moreover, a woman and even a girl-child contribute significantly to their families, communities and to the nation. This contribution and the increase significantly if the woman and the girl child are imparted productive skills, access to education and health and allowing them to play an active role in relevant decision making. This enablement leads to enhancing of the country's economic development and improving their social lack (Neil, Plank & Domingo, 2015).

Even though women: constitute half of the population, they are economically, politically and socially sidelined. The nature of empowerment can take different forms depending upon the strictures and constraints that define their limitations (Ahamad & Hemlata, 2015). Further, Gender-based oppression constitutes a major fault-line running through all human experience, constraining all human and social development Karl, (1995).

True Islamic laws enjoin equality between genders. Islamic laws have not yet been established in the country even though Pakistan is supposedly and "Islamic" state. The social system prevailing in Pakistan continues to be patriarchal. Women continue to have a role that requires subordination and subservience to men (Chaudry, Nosheen & Lodhi, 2012).

Since, the patriarchal organisation of the Pakistani society as well as the social-cultural norms limit women's mobility and their ability to participate in paid jobs as well as depriving them of their share in their inherited property (Khan, 2010). For the reason, the environment and the economic resources are usually controlled by the male population. This restricts access of women to economic resources as well as education and political participation (Daraz, Khan, Khan, Hussain & Naz, 2011).

Besides, the Baluchistan population is composed of several tribes. The society in each is regulated by their own value system and deeply rooted age-old social norms. The society there is more conservative and the area in general is considered to be the most backward among the other provinces of Pakistan (Paterson, 2008). Further, the diverse political and social-economic policies are being pursued by the government agencies and NGOs at the macro and micro levels to empower women and promote gender equality (Khan, 2013). It is believed that the fruition of the women's empowerment movement will take place only if pursued along multiple dimensions. These include interpersonal, family, political, socio-cultural and psychological dimensions (Pandey & Li, 2014).

NGOS also have an impact on policy formulation. The huge influence of the international domain means that policies may be driven by an elite of Western donors (Karl, 1995). Most advocates of empowerment agree that, ultimately, empowerment is a political process that needs an organized mass movement to challenge and transform existing power structure through NGOs (Fernando, 1997). Nongovernment organization (NGO) has been working, to provide an independent assessment of the impact of better access to family planning services on family planning practice and on empowerment (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996).

However, the national governments, international agencies and NGOs have been conscious and apprehensive of the status of women. These bodies are striving to improve the level of female nutrition, health, literacy and their capacity to earn (Ahamad & Hemlata, 2015). Also, Mohyuddin, Chaudhry and Ambreen (2012) mentioned that donor countries had made substantial financial contributions to NGOs operating in Pakistan in the recent past. These contributions were intended to improve women's awareness and to enable them to take part in the productive economic activity.

On the other hand, in the recent past access to Baluch women has become a problem for NGOs. The latter is intimidated and have become targets for abductions. Most NGOs are being forced to scale down their operations by reducing the health facilities they provide and by abandoning

girls' schools. This has contributed to the impoverishment of Baluchi citizens (IRIN, 2013). An insurgency by separatists has severely eliminated NGO operations. Consequently, international groups operating in areas which are safe and accessible and not where they are needed the most (IRIN, 2013).

In addition, the result of the current study is consistent with the findings of resource mobilization theory as the resource mobilization approach stresses both the support of society and the constraint of social movements. The constituents may provide a major source of support in the form of money, facilities, and labour (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Stapleton, 2013).

Moreover, the resource mobilisation theory propagates the same idea that the diversity of resources they need to be assembled equally, the linkages between social movements and stakeholder groups, the contribution of external support to ensure success of the movements, and the strategy adopted by authorities to manage or include social movements for the empowerment of women. This argument is supported by (Jo, 2011; McCarthy & Zald, 1987).

Women living in Pakistan, particularly those in Baluchistan live under the burden of male domination. Consequently, the socio-cultural norms severely restrict the access of women to their basic rights. NGOs have had a significant impact on women's lives. One of the prerequisites for the progress of any nation is the degree of achievement of women's empowerment. In spite of considerable efforts of NGOs, considerable work needs to be done to remove the socio-cultural barriers.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

In-depth interviews were the source of the primary data used in this study. This method was adopted because interviews enable a greater degree of rapport to be achieved with informants than is possible if a written questionnaire is used (Daniels & Cannice, 2004). Interviews can be used if the informants are illiterate or literate. Clarifications to questions can be offered on the spot and the response rate of interviews is much higher than that obtained if written questionnaires are resorted to (Chaleunvong, 2009). It has been suggested by Dogan (2015) that an interview session should last between 40 to 60 minutes. Each interview session for this study lasted 60 minutes.

*Techniques and selection of informants*

The snowball sampling technique was used to select the interviewees. The interviewees were chosen from those NGOs who were engaged and active in women related projects in the rural areas of Baluchistan. These areas are Mastung, Noshki and Kharan. The family structure, the socio-cultural environment, and economic conditions are identical in these three districts. The sample size of 20 was initially chosen. It was later reduced to 15 because saturation was achieved well before 20 informants were interviewed. Fifteen is considered to be the smallest acceptable size of the sample in qualitative research (Mason, 2010).

Project coordinators and field assistants of the NGOs provided the information. A digital recorder recorded the views. This allowed the researcher to understand what the interviewees said rather than on writing. The interviews took place in the native language and when later transcribed to English to assess the process of data analysis. Topics such as women-related projects: discussed. Personnel of two NGOs that were considered to be successful were selected for the interviews.

In the steps were taken to ensure stability, reliability, and dependability of the data obtained. The transcripts were reviewed by skilled colleagues who were familiar with qualitative interviews. The field notes along with the transcripts were shown to the interviewees to ensure that the transcripts contained exactly what the interviewees intended to say.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section provides an in-depth explanation of how NGOs are playing their role in the empowerment of women of Balochistan, in a rigid socio-cultural setup. A qualitative approach has been used for reaching the objectives of the study. In-depth interviews were the principle means of collecting data. The research method was dictated by the objectives of the study.

### **INFORMANT'S PROFILE**

The alphabetical code "N" represents the NGO that has participated in this study while "I" represents the interviewed informants. The numeric code following the alphabetical code denotes the amount of NGOs and informants in this study.  $N_1$  denotes the first NGO while  $N_2$  denotes the second NGO.  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  are national non-governmental organizations working on different

projects of women empowerment in the rural areas of Balochistan, the head offices of these NGOs are located in Quetta (capital of Balochistan).

$I_1$  denotes the first informants while  $I_2$  refers to the second informants and the remaining informants are sequentially coded. A total of 5 informants in the project coordinator level and 15 informants in the field assistant level of two NGOs are interviewed in this study, the purpose of selecting the field assistants was that the field assistants not only are independent researchers but can also become community builders and organizers (Edwards, 2013; Turner, 2010). There are ten representatives from the  $N_1$ , and ten from  $N_2$ . The details of the informants is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Details of the informants

NGO Name	Location	Code Name		Designation
		NGO	Informants	
Aurat foundation	Quetta	$N_1$	$I_1$	Project Coordinator
		$N_1$	$I_2$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_3$	Project Coordinator
		$N_1$	$I_4$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_5$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_6$	Project Coordinator
		$N_1$	$I_7$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_8$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_9$	Field Assistant
		$N_1$	$I_{10}$	Field Assistant
Saher	Quetta	$N_2$	$I_{11}$	Project Coordinator
		$N_2$	$I_{12}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{13}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{14}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{15}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{16}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{17}$	Project Coordinator
		$N_2$	$I_{18}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{19}$	Field Assistant
		$N_2$	$I_{20}$	Field Assistant

Source: Author

(continued)

According to the objectives of the current study the analysis has been divided into two sections. Further, these sections were divided into different themes. The two sections of the main objectives were the role of NGOs in empowering women and barriers to the NGOs who aim to empower women.

## ROLE OF NGOS IN EMPOWERING WOMEN

In this study most of the informants identified two major roles of NGOs that were social empowerment (capacity development program) and economic empowerment (economic upliftment programs).

Any organised group of learning activities that is put in place in order to help local policy-related, socio-political and organisational change in order to achieve a specific development goal are considered development programs (Otoo, Agapitova & Behrens, 2015). Economic upliftment programs are stratagems employed to provide opportunities for all sectors of the population, especially, the poor, the young, particularly women who are most often marginalised (Kabeer, 2012). In this study, the target population was selected through snowball sampling, which include those NGOs who are actively working in the rural areas of Balochistan on women empowerment projects.

The results of the analysis in section 1 presented two major themes: capacity development awareness programs and economic uplift skill development projects. The participants across the interviews believed above mentioned are the major roles played by NGOs in rural areas of Balochistan aim to empower women. Table 2, presents the summary of the role of NGOs in empowering women of rural *Balochistan*.

**Table 2**

*Summarised findings of the role of NGOs in empowering women of rural Balochistan*

Roles of NGOs in empowering women	Mentioned by
<b>Social empowerment</b>	
-Capacity development	I1, I4, I7, I8, I10, I13, I17, I19,
-Awareness programs (Training and workshops)	I1, I3, I6, I9, I11, I15, I18, I20,
<b>Economic empowerment</b>	
-Economic uplift skill development projects	I3, I5, I8, I9, I11, I12, I16,

Source: Authors

## *Role and Challenges of Ngos*

The above table shows that majority of the informants are of the view that NGOs are engaged in social empowerment through capacity building programs and training and awareness programs and Economic empowerment through skill development projects.

### **SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

Social empowerment programs by NGOs were generally about political awareness, educational and legal rights. I11 was giving his opinion that

*“After joining NGO, the members’ level of awareness in political, educational and legal fields had increased. They were well informed about their rights, the way of decision making, and some knowledge about the political participation, and positive consequences of being empowered on the lives of their future generations. The members felt that they were able to decide independently about their life decision keeping the view of Islamic laws. Our NGO is committed to promoting a greater awareness to women. Our tasks range from raising awareness, conducting training and initiating outreach programs as well as advocacy programs. We firmly believe the decision-making power. Political participation and better health of women are instrumental to achieving social, political and economic equality” [I11]*

In Balochistan, many NGOs are involved in different aspects of economic, political and social awareness programs. These women-related projects are essential prerequisites for the development of the province. Nikkhah and Redzuan (2010) maintained that multiple agencies must be involved in order to achieve sustainable development goals. They pursue different strategies around the world and have the mission of empowering women. Different NGOs are playing a very important role for the well-being of the women through different projects and awareness programs and by providing livelihoods with dignity for resource-poor women living in rural areas of Balochistan. I20 was of the view that

*“ Our organization is working on a project that is providing a shelter home and a lawyer for the victims of domestic violence. They educate women about their rights and provide vocational training for self-employment. They help women to obtain national identity cards so that they can participate in politics. They also assist the government in the policy formulation process. They are mainly concerned with the uplift of the social status of women in the society” [I20].*

These findings are consistent with those of Ahamad and Hemlata (2015). Ahmed documented that adequate educational facility, strong legislation, political will and sufficient job opportunities must be provided for females If Women Empowerment is to be achieved. The research findings of Khan (2013) also carry the same idea that NGOs also engage in policy advocacy to influence public policies concerning the poor people. In line with this approach, NGOs have developed various strategies to influence the process of public policy making and to control the implementation of development programs or projects.

### ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

In Balochistan, NGOs are working for the economic upliftment of women aiming to empower women economically. According to I17

*“...Our NGO firmly believes in empowering women, in this regard, Social, political, economic and legal support is given to the deprived women and girls of Balochistan, and many projects on skill development and Micro Credit services are much better for the deprived women, to launch their micro enterprises/business at community level that will indeed increase their pocket power, but we always recommended that microcredit must have a minimum level of interest. The impact of microcredit is not much applicable particularly in these communities. vicinity, besides the payback is also very low” [I17]*

Now women have started earning money, becoming independent and self-motivated. They can take their own decisions in some matters and give their suggestions in family concerns. NGOs are also assisting the government and other donor agencies by highlighting, through their annual surveys, the areas that are the least developed and where women live in pitiable conditions. They are engaged in mobilizing the resources (tangible and intangible) with the help of tribal chiefs and local communities.

Moreover, the NGOs are working in the target area of the study, aiming to empower women as a social movement, by mobilizing their resources with the help of the local community and government collaboration. However, the findings of Ahamad and Hemlata (2015) also declare that NGOs are helpful in improving the capacity building and social mobilization of women. Far-reaching changes are seen in the lifestyle and living standards of women after they join NGOs. I16 was of the opinion that

## *Role and Challenges of Ngos*

*“After joining NGO, the women were able to spend money to meet family requirements. They were also getting better co-operation and support from family for participating in NGO activities as under their socio-cultural limits; they were able to earn inside four walls of their home. Skills of sewing, cutting, livestock caretaking where the need of the rural women through which they can live independent and better lives. The skill development (kitchen gardening) project was much more progressive and successful than family planning (as the family planning program was against their cultural norms)”. [116]*

The result of the current study is consistent with the findings of resource mobilization theory as the resource mobilization approach stresses both the support of society and the constraint of social movements. A significant component of the support, in the form of money, facilities, and labour must be arranged by the constituents (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Stapleton, 2013).

Movement leaders at the national level mobilise the local groups. These, in turn, mobilise others with inside or outside the movement (Stapleton, 2013). Suharko (2007) mentioned that NGOs elucidate and Marshall the demand for resources and services from the government as well as the market. This enables people to achieve their development goals. In the perspective of service delivery, NGOs strive to assist people in order to access services that the state provides.

Moreover, the Resource mobilization theory maintains that resources are not uniformly distributed to different sectors of society. Some sectors managed to obtain greater access to resources than other sectors. Movements must overcome the obstacle uniform distribution of resources in the society. NGOs achieve this by understanding the methodology which successful movements adopt in order to achieve this (Runciman, 2012). It is also clear from the above facts that although NGOs are facing many challenges in these rural areas, even then they are engaged in many activities for gender mainstreaming.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGES TO NGOS AIMING TO EMPOWER WOMEN.**

The findings of this section were also categorised into two themes. These themes were taken from the interviews of the informants after transcribing; these were; Male dominance, Security issues. Table 3, presents the socio-cultural challenges identified by informants.

**Table 3**

*Summarized Findings of the role of NGOs in empowering women of rural Balochistan.*

Socio-Cultural Challenges for NGOs	Mentioned by
<b>Male Dominance</b>	
-Women were not accessible directly	I3, I5, I8, I8, I11, I16, I19, I20,
<b>Security Issues.</b>	
-Weak law and order situation	I1, I4, I12, I9, I14, I15, I18

The above table shows that the majority of the informants is of the view that male dominance is one of the major barriers that NGO staff faced, and some pointed out the security issues are being hurdled on the way to empower women.

### MALE DOMINANCY

Balochistan is one of the most underdeveloped regions in Pakistan and has traditionally had a heavily male-dominated patriarchal society. Women have rarely had a role in public life. This social set up also hinders the NGOs who are working on women's development projects in rural areas of Balochistan, where women do not have decision-making power. According to I5

*“... Our main focus is skilled development so that the women can utilize their skills, and support themselves economically, as economic empowerment is essential where they can polish their decision-making power as well....Here people rarely accept any changes, male dominance is not only biggest hurdle for women, but its biggest challenge even for us when we launch any project [women related] we have to seek permission from Sardar or Nawab [tribal head]or their male members of the family, they will confirm first that nothing is going on against their values, then we start our work in the area, women are not allowed to talk or contact without permission of their family head”. [I5]*

Almost all the field assistant of the NGOs opined that the male dominance is the major barrier they face during their fieldwork. All the group members invariably experienced resistance from male members of the family to access women for their programs. Women were not having freedom of mobility, due to which they were not able to manage to attend the sessions of awareness

programs by NGOs. NGOs directly fail to work on women related projects due to socio-cultural resistance, for avoiding the objections of the male members of the family, NGOs continue their sessions for empowering women under other health projects. This study reveals that men dominate Baluchi society and are more influential than women. NGOs cannot expect to achieve women empowerment without garnering the support of men (Repila, 2013).

Moreover, it is revealed that the socio-cultural constraints never allowed women to live an independent life in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan under patriarchal system or male dominance. The majority of the women is not enjoying the benefits of NGOs due to lack of mobility, freedom of exercise concerning their view, The results of the study also revealed that NGOs successful projects are dependent on the local bodies.

## **SECURITY ISSUES**

NGOs, work in areas that are accessible, not where needs are greatest, due to the nomadic population of Balochistan, it is not possible for NGO to follow their way as it's quite risky. I9 said that

*“Our biggest problem is a security issue, in fact, in many sensitive areas, NGOs stopped their ongoing projects as due to several attacks, ransom cases... Here [rural area] one of the biggest problem is that the nature of population is totally scattered, we face a lot of problems in reaching those mountainous areas and accessing the female, secondly nomadic life is very common in this region as this region (Balochistan) is sharing its border with Afghanistan, so we face many challenges in monitoring our projects”. [I9]*

Balochistan is the largest province in Pakistan. The population density is low. As compared to other parts of Pakistan the population is scattered. Hundreds of NGOs are registered but most carry out their work in urban areas due to socio-cultural barriers and security issues. In Balochistan, the rural areas are backward and in a pitiable condition. Where most work is needed, it is simply not safe to work. Security concerns did not stop NGO workers who travelled to the affected rural areas, but they do hinder humanitarian work. “Security issues do hold back, and staff struggles to offer the level of support needed.

Moreover, In Balochistan, multiple NGOs have scaled down their operations, abandoning schools and health facilities, which impoverished Baloch citizens were in dire need of basic facilities. Access to Balochistan by NGO

workers has become a problem as they become targets of abductions and intimidation (UNPO, 2013). Humanitarian NGOs, Pakistan (Balochistan) remains a difficult place to deliver aid, because of the security challenges. Security concerns have affected us and restricted access to communities (IRIN, 2013). Security is the biggest issue that they are facing in these areas, even NGOs fail to provide the statistics for research on women related issues due to the security issues. The findings of the study are in line with the study of (Perveen, 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that NGOs are trying to play a very important role for the well-being of the women of Baluchistan. They operate through different projects and awareness programs and by helping resource-poor women living in rural areas of Balochistan earn their livelihoods with dignity. This study primarily investigates the role and the challenges of NGOs working in rural areas of Balochistan aiming to empower women. Using a qualitative approach, Interview through snow ball chain referral sampling was the source of collecting data. In this research, the reality has been observed the NGOs mainly focus on economic and social empowerment.

Moreover, they operate on the premise that if a woman is economically empowered it will help her to raise her social status and quality of life and make better decisions. However, it has been also revealed in the study that the poor law and order situation in Balochistan has adversely impacted the organizational responsibilities capabilities of NGOs. Due to this, only some NGOs continue working for development. The remaining is not in good shape due to security issues and cultural barriers. The NGOs which are working for women empowerment in Baluchistan encounter resistance and criticism against them by male members of the community on the ground that these NGOs are distracting women from their social values and norms.

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