



International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies

E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
IJAAS 2020; 2(1): 105-109
Received: 08-11-2019
Accepted: 11-12-2019

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Role of women on economy in third world country

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Abstract

In context of economic development of Third World countries, role of women has been subjected to several controversies. In particular to Afghanistan's economic development, women have played a significant role under the legislative reforms, promoting activities of women that directly impact state economy. This manuscript aimed to examine the effective role of women in Third World Countries, with particular reference to Afghanistan. A qualitative analysis strategy has been used in order to assess the wider literature, published to acknowledge the contributions of women in economic sustainability and development of Afghanistan and other Third World countries. Article discussed the major and common barriers and challenges, limiting economic activities of women in these countries. Further analysis of Afghanistan's Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) platform has been performed, interpreting the lessons gained from WEE incentives and objectives. Despite advancement and progress in different business sectors, restriction of women participation in development and progress of economy is contributed by gender inequalities. Conclusively, role of women in economic stability and progress of country is dependent on several factors, associated with cultural perceptions, federal legislations and policies, and level of education.

Keywords: Women, economic development, third world country

Introduction

On global scale, women comprise of labour force of up to 43 to 70 percent, particularly in agricultural labour sector (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) ^[17]. The important role of women in economic development of country has been frequently subjected to controversies in past few decades. Women, as professional entities, have played a significant part in various disciplines such as in workforce, as educators, global volunteers and caretakers. However, most equitable economic engagement of women in this sector remains elusive (Boserup *et al.*, 2013) ^[3]. In most Third World countries, the importance of productive activity of women remains unrecognised as it is not included in any statistics and largely accomplished outside the cash sector (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2013) ^[4]. In developing countries, approximately 72% women live in rural zones, occupied by domestic tasks of production, storage, processing, and preparation of foodstuff. Family budget is also facilitated by some women workers involved in selling of craft products and foodstuff (Mohmand 2012) ^[21].

In different regions of Third World states, role of women in commerce and agriculture varies substantially. According to estimates, approximately 40% agriculture labour in Latin America and 60-80% in Africa is female (Benería *et al.*, 2015) ^[2]. In Asia and Africa, the ratio of active female population increased at the rate of 2.5% and 1.9% per year respectively, from 1950 to 1975 (The World Bank 2018). Variation rates are significantly high in these regions among the ratio of female participants involved in economic sector and its development (Coleman 2010) ^[10]. Despite extensive research, lack of statistical reports and analytics are observed in literature publishing the economic role of women in Afghanistan. Contributions of women in economic development have been recognised a national development priority in Afghanistan, and integral to the sustainability and growth of country. To achieve this objective, Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program (WEE-NPP) was launched by government of Afghanistan in 2017. This forum was launched with the objective to support economic participation of women in country's development through increase in women's agencies. WEE-NPP aimed to improve the overall economy and wellbeing of families by increasing the ownership of women over economic activities and assets.

This article aims to address the role of women in economic development through assessment of wider literature and publications. The approx ratio of women working in non-organised sector is not known yet (Boserup *et al.*, 2013) ^[3]. Article will focus on importance of

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economic role of women and past legislative frameworks that facilitated the integration of women in sustaining the economy of country. Major aim of this article is to contemplate on the part played by women in economic growth of Afghanistan. A qualitative analysis of previous publications and literature has been performed in this manuscript with respect to role of women in economy. Article will also discuss the indescribable patterns of economic engagement of women in Third World Country, in particular with Afghanistan.

Findings and Discussion

Significance of Women in Economic Sector

Significance of women in development of economic sector can be found from most influential evidence from the research and survey conducted in 2001 by World Bank's 'Gender Mainstreaming Strategy' (The World Bank Group 2017). According to this research, less rapid economic growth and poverty reduction is experienced when societies discriminate roles by gender in comparison with societies that value both genders on equal scale. According to various evidences, inefficient economic outcomes are associated with social gender disparities and these disparities and largely reported to prevail in Third World countries. However, a doubled per capita income was noted after closure of gender gap in schooling in African countries as quickly as East Asia did, between 1960 and 1992 (Mohmand 2012) ^[21].

Qualitative studies have identified role of women as productive, reliable and cheap labour force, making them a preferred choice for service and economic sector such as electronic and textiles translational corporations (Lee 2014). Moreover, heavy body of evidence reporting the role of women in banking functions, indicate the significance of proficiencies of women in microfinance programs. Economic development resources aiming to alleviate poverty have recognised women as efficient distributors of goods and services (Engerman 2011) ^[11].

Legislations in Afghanistan Promoting Women in Economic Sector

According to recent reports, an increasing international support for women has been leveraged in the on-going peace negotiation and for the future of their country, Afghan women are voicing their fears as Afghanistan's gains on rights of women are at stake in peace talks. In order to accelerate progress in economic development, much remains to be done towards gender equality in Afghanistan (Demirguc-Kunt *et al.*, 2013) ^[8]. In Afghan population of 23.3 million, women constitute approximately 49% of the total population. Principal 5 of Afghan Compact (AC) strongly articulates the development of women's human capital. It has also been highlighted as a goal of gender equity in Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) ^[17].

During the London conference in 2006, international community and new Islamic Republic of Afghanistan signed the Afghanistan Compact with terms of Bonn Agreement completion in 2005 (Lee 2014). The event is also recognised significant as it marks the continuation of partnership between international community and Afghanistan to reconstruct the country, and by encouraging women's rights in services and economic sector (Vossenber 2013) ^[29]. The National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)

within context of state development in different sectors was substantially promoted in Afghanistan Compact (Duflo 2012) ^[9].

Legislative reforms implemented in Afghanistan initially lack encouragement and promotion of women in economic sector, thereby affecting a major part of the state's economy on federal scale (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2013) ^[4]. However, present reforms and legislations focus on limiting discrimination and promotion of involvement of women legislatively in employment and education. Despite wide range of supporting evidences of legislative reforms promoting women's role in economic development of the country, there has been observed low level of women's formal economic contribution in Afghanistan. Estimates of 2016 indicate only contribution of 26.8% labour force participation rate by women in Afghanistan, even though when they constitute 47% of 34.65 million population (Benería *et al.*, 2015) ^[2].

Current Constitution of Afghanistan clearly state the equal rights of men and women in economic services; under these reforms women are allowed to open bank accounts, own and register businesses since no explicit gender-legal differentiations are withstood by women (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) ^[17]. However, lack of legal incentive mechanisms and implicit cultural barriers have affected and reduced successful participation of women in economy. According to recent statistics, 29% women, among working age women, are economically active. 24% of active population is involved in manufacturing while most (70%) are employed in agricultural sector (Duflo 2012) ^[9].

For rural women of Afghanistan, access to finance is considerably limited. Despite advancements, financial inclusion is recognised as the core development challenge with accounts of only 10% population in formal financial institutions (Lee 2014). When it comes to non-commercial laws, there are actual gender-legal differences under Civil Code, Marriage Law, Labour Law, etc. These laws have significant impact on types of businesses women can undertake, mobility of women and ownership of property (Benería *et al.*, 2015) ^[2]. A low level of women-owned businesses and female entrepreneurship has been observed by studies due to lack of legal incentives for legal promotion of women to participate in business activities (Raney *et al.*, 2011) ^[22].

Barriers to Economic Role of Women in Afghanistan and Third World Countries

According to The Global Gender Gap Report of 2009, more than two-third out of 115 countries has posted gains in their economy, in overall gender gap differences; indicating the progressing economic rates by lessening of inequities (Vossenber 2013) ^[29]. The report was covered in 2009 by World Economic Forum and considerably focused on progress in Third World countries. In private sector in formal and informal, large and small enterprises, participation of females is recognised crucial economic driver for societies (Verme 2014) ^[28]. However, the barriers associated with female participation in Third World countries have affected the economic gains and interests (Bromideh 2011) ^[5].

World Development Report presenting the analytics of Women in Developing Countries in 2012 highlighted certain major challenges encountered by women, restricting their economic participation and activities (Bradshaw *et al.*,

2013) [4]. Moreover, heavy workloads in their productive activities and within home also restrict their participation in businesses and enterprises. This also limits their ability to become involved in organising and undermines their health and reduces their decision making potential and other aspects of social development. Little novel technologies however, in agricultural areas have been introduced for women to aid their agricultural and domestic work (Burnell *et al.*, 2017) [6].

The situation of women in different geographic regions and Third World countries in particular, is not static. Reports frequently evidence changes in economic conditions, attitudes, and social behaviour among women population over the time (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) [17]. The economic crises and several other challenges in countries in the Third World have accelerated these changes over the time, posing profound implications on contributions of women in economic development (Bromideh 2011) [5]. With painstaking education and changes in condition neutralising the barriers, women's lack of confidence in these countries can be counteracted, promoting genuine involvement of women in pioneering development work (Raney *et al.*, 2011) [22].

Afghanistan is severely affected by lack of contributions of women in economic gains due to various influences in certain areas. The stereotypes and stigmas associated with working women pose major impacts on their economic participation (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2013) [4]. In order to contribute to production and maintain domestic economy, heavy demands are placed on women and as a consequence, increasing number of women in Afghanistan are sole maintainers of their families and majority serving as household heads (Gaddis & Klasen 2014) [12]. Yet at the same time, women in these countries lack access to support and key resources, and meet their responsibilities through adverse conditions (Jayawardena 2016) [14].

Lack of access of women to effective healthcare services in different Third World countries has also restricted their economic participation (Gaddis & Klasen 2014) [12]. Women's poor health in addition to their negative attitudes towards their health, severe causes of their health and poor access to effective and appropriate healthcare are the major barriers in several Third World countries (Staudt & Jaquette 2013) [25]. These issues are rather secondary in importance to economic development of any state and must be resolved for effective access of women to education, land, employment, and law. Health related challenges of women are often recognised as their barriers to economic contribution however, behaviours and attitudes towards these constraints towards women limit their access potential resources (Mittelman & Pasha 2016) [18].

According to an international survey report, prevailing stereotypes in Afghanistan and many other Third World countries with domestic responsibilities, insecure seasonal work, heavy workloads and their lack of animal/land rights are major barriers restricting economic development in these countries (Vossenbergh 2013) [29]. Additional constraints are presented by the mass media, 'macho' attitudes upheld through education and religious perceptions increase the likelihood of effectiveness of these barriers for long term economic decline. These barriers have major impact on women's attitudes to participate in development programmes and organisations at the decision-making level (Maksimov *et al.*, 2017) [16]. Women lack an effective voice

in community organisations, political parties and unions, which consequently leads to ignorance of their interests (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) [17].

The interrelationship web among Third World countries is also recognised a major constraint represented by early age marriages and childbirth. According to an estimate, 2.5 million marriages in India appear to be in age of 15-19 age groups, out of 4.5 million marriages within whole state (Gaddis & Klasen 2014) [12]. Maternal mortality is the most recurrent consequence of early childbearing. One in four mortalities of adult women are related to pregnancy associated consequences and childbirth, with greater toll of malaise and sickness (Lee 2014). These barriers and several other unidentified constraints restrict the access of opportunistic women in economic participation and development (Benería *et al.*, 2015) [2].

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Several studies have highlighted and reviewed the role and aim of WEE-NPP in economic development of Afghanistan by examining the legislative framework, policies and core objectives of the platform (Jayawardena 2016) [14]. Aim identified by WEE is to improve overall economy and wellbeing of Afghanistan by increasing access of greater amount of women to economic activities, assets, and by increasing their ownerships to businesses and enterprises (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2013) [4]. However, given the range of constraints mentioned above, full extent of WEE coverage in Afghanistan cannot be definitively determined. Report presented in 2017 by 'The Women and Economy' on Women's Economic Empowerment Programs in Afghanistan state the Lessons and Mapping learned from this forum (Moghissi 2016) [20].

Objectives of WEE in Afghanistan are defined arbitrarily and are not considered straightforward concepts. According to some analysts, these objectives are perceived as reforms expanding economic opportunities for women while interpretations of other analysts consider and perceive it more broadly (Manganaro & Alozie 2011) [17]. According to latter group, these WEE objectives create an environment for women in Afghanistan to participate in economic activities. Bulk of literature on WEE highlights and support the second interpretation and consider enabling initiatives as necessary element in path towards economic development, irrespective of gender biasness; promoting poverty eradication and gender equality (Sinclair 2017) [24].

Analysis of studies and reviews envisaging positive changes due to WEE reforms suggest that these enabling efforts directly link women to economic development and opportunities in Afghanistan (Maksimov *et al.*, 2017) [16]. Nevertheless, projects by WEE are often narrowly designed to embark upon only employment earning and status, given the budget constraints in the country. Moreover, no consensus has elaborately defined the definition and definitive objectives of WEE which have been included under the WEE umbrella (Gaddis & Klasen 2014) [12]. On operational approaches in Afghanistan to WEE, several lessons have been learned, related to the enabling factors promoted and directed by WEE for economic opportunities for women (Moghissi 2016) [20].

To develop more effective initiatives under WEE, analysts and economists consider these lessons will support designers, funders, and implementers for sustainable economic development through efforts by women (Sinclair

2017)^[24]. On the basis of interpretations of economists' and analysts' views on these lessons, consistent and clear definition of WEE can limit the measurement of effectiveness of its activities. Moreover, effectiveness of WEE reforms depends on accuracy of statistics on gender which are recommended to be improved in Afghanistan for women empowerment and knowledge expansion (Staudt & Jaquette 2013)^[25]. This accuracy may also address the gaps in WEE thereby providing strategies for accurate tracking of impacts of WEE over the time.

Economists in Afghanistan consider integration of skills training programs, literacy and numeracy programs for majority of Afghan women and for their long term benefits (Burnell *et al.*, 2017)^[6]. These programs will effectively reduce the gaps in economic gains and interests hindered due to lack of knowledge and skills among women. According to estimates on WEE, development and strengthening of social bonds among women are essential for sustainability of WEE in long term (Staudt & Jaquette 2013)^[25]. Such interventions in social sphere are likely to help majority of women in making economic contributions. There are several resistances and barriers to WEE and its objectives despite its nature of being both culturally compatible and profitable (Maksimov *et al.*, 2017)^[16].

Critics analysing these resistances consider undertaking of initiatives to neutralise these resistances through productive activities that support women, and activities that are recognised consistent with cultural norms and economically profitable (Bromideh 2011)^[5]. Moreover, addition of only traditional credit is not enough, as per the perspectives of several economists and analysts, for financial inclusions to be effective. Rather, a women-centred design is proposed that addresses the challenges and barriers encountered by women (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2013)^[4]. Finally, an exit strategy is also signified by interpretations for donors in context of WEE programs in Afghanistan. For sustainability of WEE gains and due to heavy reliance on donor funding, an exit strategy integral for the donors is necessary to be developed (Jayawardena 2016)^[14].

Economic Sectors Accessible to Women

Studies conducted in Afghanistan examining the various economic opportunities presented to women, have reported various sectors that can be feasibly approached and accessed by women (Manganaro & Alozie 2011)^[17]. Most notable economic progress in past few years has been made by women in health sector. Measurements of these progresses are reflected by a lower fertility rate, a lower maternal mortality rate, wider health network and facilities available to women in reproductive healthcare and an increase in qualified female health professionals (Engerman 2011)^[11]. Economists suggest key areas for focus, in order to further advance the progress, should expand healthcare system, addressing rural women health problems, nutritional issues and incentivising work in rural areas (Vossenber 2013)^[29]. Education has been recognised another major sector approached and accessed by women in Afghanistan and several other Third World countries (Raney *et al.*, 2011)^[22]. In past decades, as estimates indicate, the expansion of Government's network is recognised remarkable while increasing the school attendance of girls, number of female teachers and academic performances and achievements of female students (Verme 2014)^[28]. In context of employment and work related statistics in Afghanistan, the

picture is less clear. As reports indicate, women are often involved in informal work or employments that take place in agricultural sector as an unremunerated contribution (Sinclair 2017)^[24].

In several other areas which are under-represented in Afghanistan, such as public servants and private sector, women's economic contributions are poorly acknowledged (Burnell *et al.*, 2017)^[6]. Scarcity of women has been reported in social sector jobs as qualified female professionals and a critical need has emerged for delivery of social services to women in Afghanistan (Staudt & Jaquette 2013)^[25]. Nonetheless, in sector of microfinance, repayment rates are typically strong as women readily participated in this sector, making it an area of success (Gaddis & Klasen 2014)^[12].

For improvement and increase in the number of opportunities for women in employment, analysts supporting WEE objectives direct program designers and policymakers to strengthen incentives and quota for women to enhance their participation in social service delivery roles public sector; neutralise key barriers to employment of women and support agricultural value chains (Maksimov *et al.*, 2017)^[16]. Third most strategy is recognised effective as contributions of women in agriculture are strongest and most valued. Employment related barriers for women, hindering economic development in Afghanistan, are also recommended to be taken down by strengthening and optimising the education system, through non-chauvinistic and non-prejudicial interventions (Mittelman & Pasha 2016)^[18].

Amongst aforementioned areas, the area of justice remains the area of greatest need in context of women in economic development in Afghanistan and other Third World countries. Legal rights and voice of women still require attention in majority of Third World countries (Benería *et al.*, 2015)^[2]. According to studies reporting justice related issues of women, measurement of changes in access to women to justice is critical however, due to widespread violence, this access is limited (Coleman 2010; Holmén *et al.*, 2011)^[10, 13]. Due to social stigma, crime against women are under-reported and most often, reported crimes are generally handled through application of customary laws and dispute resolution mechanism.

In the legal system, women are severely under-represented as professionals, which restrict the access of female victims to justice (Boserup *et al.*, 2013)^[3]. Certain short term solutions have been identified by policymakers to expand women access to justice. These include legal protection for women involved in legal processes, thorough education on these perspectives and presence of reliable and accessible judiciary (Manganaro & Alozie 2011)^[17]. Contributions of women in this sector can be therefore acknowledged after promotion of accessibility facilities of women to legal justice, on the basis of their legal rights. Lack of thorough education, non-reliable and bias judiciary are identified as common barriers, restricting participation of women in economic development through legislation sector.

Conclusion

Significance of economic role of women in Third World countries, Afghanistan in particular, can be attributed to the varied estimates of economic gains and interests in response to legislative updates, promoting women in economic development. Despite prediction of long term progress of

state economy on international scale, certain potential barriers in Afghanistan have restricted the economic activity of women. Common potential barriers in Afghanistan and other Third World Countries include inaccessibility of women to justice, lack of education system for women, gender inequalities, poor healthcare access, and limiting economic activity of women to agricultural sector. In response to global financial crisis, economists have uttered urgent need of participation of women in development and progress, through contributions in public and private sector. WEE has contributed in major incentives in order to increase the ownership by women, their economic activity and assets in Afghanistan; the cumulative effect of which has not been measured yet due to discrepancies in statistics and analytics.

In order to enhance the economic activity of women in Afghanistan, policymakers have identified certain sectors in public and private domains, directly associated with economic gains of state. These include healthcare sector, education, work and employment, and legislative and judiciary. Economic policies, aiming to promote role of women in Afghanistan and many other Third World Countries, are under consideration that may reduce the chances of economic liabilities and increase economic assets through women's contribution.

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