

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT IN NWFP: A CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC SECTOR INITIATIVE**

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### **ABSTARCT**

*The study conducted in 2004-05 and it investigated the complex nature of household livelihoods among rural women. It also assessed the overall gender and livelihood improvement in the province through D-Fund activities in the four regions established under the project. Out of total 21 interventions 11 (50%) are studied with specific reference to women. The major areas addressed through the project interventions include enterprise development and crop management skills. Interestingly, these efforts led to the attitudinal change in men of household who benefited from D-fund activities. Men acknowledge the due role of women in household overall development that is an indicator of rural women empowerment and livelihood improvement at the grass-roots level. It is very encouraging to note that 80% CBOs are still active and playing their due role in skills development of the community. A high percentage of female (56%) registered with CBOs are of the most economically active age group 20 -34 years. The CBOs members in Eastern and Northern region were more vibrant and empowered because of high literacy rate (85% in Northern region) and awareness about their role in development. Because of high literacy, sustainability of the project interventions is more in this region. About 97 (86%) respondent out of total 112 believed that because of project D-Fund initiatives household incomes have increased considerably.*

**Keywords:** *Gender mainstreaming, livelihood, attitudinal Change, Discretionary Fund, Empowerment, Horticulture, Enterprise development, Sustainability*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Keeping alignment with global notion of gender mainstreaming and livelihood improvement, the government of North West Frontier Province has shifted its concern for equity of women in all spheres of life including social and economic activities. One of such attempt was made through Discretionary Fund component in the Project for Horticulture Promotion assisted by Swiss Government. This project was executed during 1988 – 2003 in whole of NWFP. The PHP project has operated since 1987 in Malakand Division of NWFP. In 1996 it was up-scaled to Provincial level and the project decentralized its operational structure to the regions in the South, North, East and Centre of the Province. A great deal of evidence from around the world indicates that gender inequalities undermine the effectiveness of development policies in fundamental ways. In none of the regions of the world men and women, have equal rights. In a number of countries, women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their male counterparts. The male prejudice towards female is since time immemorial. (Khan and Naqvi, 2000)

Women in South Asia have the inevitable task of taking on the multiple challenges of poverty, social discrimination and violence – all within a very patriarchal South Asian context. While women have continued to negotiate issues of the private and the public, theory and practice, there has been scant attention paid to South Asian feminist practices that have tried to confront meanings and representations of post – colonial gender relations, sexuality and religion. International experience demonstrates that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of the poverty and the well-being of men, women and children is enhanced (Mahboob-ul-Haq, 2009)

Today poverty is the single most important development issue of the world. And more than three fourths of the world's population lives in developing countries, but they enjoy only 16% of the world's income, while the richest 20% have 85% of the global income (Todaro, 1997). The livelihood improvement means the transition of power from a state of unjust to one that is just. It is the provision of opportunity to the deprived poor of the society for making their decisions with reference to their household matters that include production related activities and investment in different gender specific intervention. It is also all about the state of affairs where these rural poor feel free from any sense of subordination. This means for poor women the term gender and livelihood improvement reflects increasing women's self-reliance that enables them to recognize and improve their socio-economic well being in the society.

People empower themselves by increasing their ability to control their own lives in order to create a more fulfilling existence through mutual efforts to resolve shared problems (Maser, 1997). Regardless, it is clear that women's work is critical to the survival and security of agrarian peri-urban households and thus, their economic contributions should be given importance in policy design (Kabeer, 2003). Women continue to have systematically poorer command over a range of productive resources, including land, information and financial resources. International experience demonstrate that when women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of the poverty and the well being of men, women, and children is enhanced. Gender plays an important role in determining economic growth, poverty reduction, and development effectiveness.

Though women participation in economic activities has occurred, yet their socio-economic plight is pathetic. This is evident from the findings of the Participatory Poverty Assessment carried out in 2006 that shows that women are among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the society of Pakistan. Women's access and control over productive resources is limited. Lack of skills, limited opportunities in the job market and social and cultural restrictions limit women's chances to compete public resources. According to the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP, 2006), the level of poverty is high in NWFP as compared to other provinces in the country and ultimately women, being the marginalized section of the society are major sufferers. Table I shows the percent incidence of poverty prevailing in the country.

**Table I** *Incidence of poverty in provinces/regions*

Provinces	Urban %	Rural %
Punjab	26.5	32.4
Sindh	19.0	29.2
NWFP	31.2	44.3
Baluchistan	28.4	24.6
AJK	14.5	15.6
Northern areas	22.6	36.5
FATA	--	44.5

**Sources:** Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers 2003

It is argued that if women are not effectively participating in the various economic development aspects, this might result in serious adverse consequences for social equity and economic efficiency and that will further disempower women. Further where men and women both have control over their respective resources the women are spending more on family's basic needs than men. This shows how important it is for a woman to have direct access to economic resources.

Reducing poverty will go a long way towards reducing harmful gender disparities. But neither gender disparities nor poverty can be eliminated without adequately addressing gender issues directly. Recognizing that poverty and gender inequalities re intertwined can help us to formulate more effective development strategies. On the contrary gender inequalities harm overall well being of the society; resulting in higher poverty, lower quality of life; slower economic growth; hindered development; and weak governance at the local level, ultimately resulting into degradation of valuable natural resources. The study further mentions that 82% of the women in NWFP participate in agro-based activities and they spend 45% of their time in agriculture based activities and are responsible for 25% of the production of major crops.

#### ***PHP Efforts for Women Development in NWFP***

The Swiss Government through its Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) consistently supported the development of Horticulture sector in NWFP over a period of more than fifteen years. The Project for horticulture

Promotion (PHP) took over the affairs of horticultural crops production in the province after the abolition of the Fruits and Vegetables Development Board (FVDB) in year 2001. As PHP was mandated to implement the horticultural activities in whole of the NWFP, so for the reason the province was ecologically divided into four main Horticultural Regions each with specific agro ecological and agro – economic characteristics. The Northern Region of NWFP comprised the districts of Chitral, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Dir Upper & Lower and parts of the provincially administered tribal areas of Malakand Agency. The Eastern regions comprised the districts of Kohistan, Batgram, Mansehra, Abbottabad and Haripur. The Central Region of NWFP comprised the districts of Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Kohat and Dargai area of provincially administered tribal areas of Malakand Agency. The Southern Region of NWFP comprised the districts of Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat and Karak.

These four regions were managed through Regional Management Groups (RMGs), comprising of skilled and experienced members from public sector, NGOs, progressive market functionaries/farmers and the employees of PHP. The RMGs acted as consultative body and evaluated/ recommended proposals under D-Fund. The project further decentralized the support through the mechanism of discretionary funds (D – Fund) activities. About 30% of the discretionary funds were specifically earmarked for women groups. For the purpose, a number of women groups were formed with the assistance of different NGOs and community based organizations (CBOs). These groups were trained in fruits & vegetables processing, preservation and exposed to marketing channels. They were also imparted training in entrepreneurial skills.

The PHP management developed a strategy to improve socio-economic state of affairs of women in NWFP through education and training in fruit and vegetable processing, preservation, entrepreneurial skills development and integration with potential markets through the D-Fund activities. The implementation strategy included the involvement of both public and private sectors. The conscious and awareness induces empowerment which ultimately resulted in the breakdown of power relations in favor of rural poor and provide better livelihood opportunities in the long run.

### ***Modus Operandi***

Keeping in view the nature of study, the target groups and beneficiaries spread all over the province are investigated. The interventions completed under the D – Funds addressed different issues that include food, livestock, and agriculture sectors. Some of the interventions also include social forestry component. As per heterogeneous environment the data collected from the following sources. The secondary data sources utilized for information included:

- i. List of D-Fund projects completed in different regions with women groups availed from PHP Post Project Support Unit Tarnab
- ii. Name and present address of the PIs and Co-PIs availed from PHP Post Project Support Unit
- iii. List of direct beneficiaries obtained from PHP Post Project Support Unit
- iv. Information about the projects / interventions objectives availed from PHP Post Project Support Unit

While, primary data collected from all the four regions of the province and it is ensured to investigate 50% D-Fund projects in each region and 30% of the direct beneficiaries and 20% indirect beneficiaries of the projects. For this purpose, four sets of questionnaires schedules were developed covering all the stakeholders of D-Fund interventions.

- i. Questionnaire schedule for individual beneficiary (s) of D-Fund activities.
- ii. Questionnaire schedule for indirect beneficiaries
- iii. Questionnaire schedule for PIs and Co-PIs of the D-Fund projects
- iv. Questionnaire schedule for general masses views

The paper portrays the efforts of PHP project under headings covering the D- Fund achievements in all the four regions. A conscious effort is made to highlight the women empowerment and livelihood development made with women CBOs in the province. At the end conclusion and recommendations are placed for policy makers and analyst to materialize on.

### ***Data Interpretation and Findings***

After collecting the preliminary information about the D-Fund interventions, a random sample of 50% was drawn from the list of 21 discretionary fund sub-projects. On the basis of which, 11-interventions were studied in detail throughout the province, and a critical analysis of these interventions on the socio economic status of target women

groups is made. In this regard the list of 21 interventions predominantly highlighted that 6- projects were on the issue of fruits and vegetable preservation, while 01 was related to enterprise development and rest of the 4 were on the horticultural promotion and marketing aspects.

Out of 21 interventions, 17 were solely executed by the female Principal Investigators, while remaining 4 were carried out by male Principal Investigators. Women beneficiaries of the projects executed by women Principal Investigators were found more informed about the project objectives, tasks and results compared to those executed by the male Principal Investigators.

In overall 9.7% of the female in the women organizations were highly qualified holding professional degrees. In D.I. Khan, most of the beneficiaries were illiterate female in process which otherwise show, the low ratio of female education in the area. While referring to the women age groups performed better, it was observed that the youngest group of female found in Northern, then Central region, followed by Eastern region – the reason for large ratio of young lot in North is described as social mobilization work carried out under various donors assisted projects in the area since 1978 till to date as area development projects. Table II further clarifies the situation.

**Table II Women age group in the PHP D-Fund activities in the four regions**

Group	Eastern	Southern	Central	Northern	Total	Percentage
35 above	36	38	24	13	111	31.8%
20-34	66	26	48	57	197	56.4%
15-19	10	8	12	11	41	11.7%
TOTAL	112	72	84	81	349	100%

Source: Survey Findings 2004-05

Answering to the question of role of the acquired skills towards income generation 88% respondent were of the views that the skills and interventions have boosted the income of the household through saving by efficient utilization of agricultural products and through direct marketing of the preserved fruits and vegetables and kitchen gardening activities. The results are given in Table III.

**Table III Responses for income generation from acquired skills**

S. No.	Region	Income Increased			Total
		Yes	No	Nil Reply	
1	Eastern	97	8	7	112
2	South	54	18	--	72
3	Central	79	2	3	84
4	North	77	1	3	81
	Total	307	29	13	349
	Percentage	88%	8.2%	3.7%	

Source: Survey Findings 2004-05

Moreover it was very encouraging to note that 80% of the CBOs were active and found intact regarding the skills and training acquired under the D-fund activities detailed as in Table-IV. In eastern region all the four CBOs were still performing and the one under DEWA association (it is local name used for oil candle) has even strongly utilized the skills and a number of multiplying activities were initiated.

**Table IV Status of CBOs in post PHP era**

Regions	Active	Dormant	Total
Eastern	4	--	4
South	2	2	4
Central	1	1	2
North	1	0	1
Total	8	3	11

Source: Survey Findings 2004-05

In light of the above analysis, the key findings of this study pertaining to each of the agro-ecological zones are given below:

***Eastern Region***

Total reported area of the Eastern region, comprising Hazara Division, is about 1.66 million hectares with an area about 0.32 million hectares, under agriculture activities which comes to 19% of the total area. Population of the Eastern Region is about 6137000 individuals with a male to female percentage of 52.5% and 47.5%. D-Fund project activities in eastern region were more as compared to other regions.

Twenty five female who were initially trained through D-Fund intervention in the field of fruit and vegetables processing are now working as an organized group of female under DEWA Association located at Haripur in Eastern region. It is a well organized and fully motivated forum comprising of 278 members from the local community working and planning together for the better and prosperous future. The Principal Investigator of project during interview mentioned that NGOs and other donors prefer to handover funds to these organized female groups in the area compared to male with the reason that of fund utilization, work efficiency and sincerity to task and outstanding performance by the female groups.

The data collected from the stakeholders through interviews in the Eastern region revealed that 82% of the females were literate who were involved in project activities and 68% of them were from a younger age group with age less than 35 years. With the high literacy rate and more energetic age the results and impact of the project on socio economic status of women were significant. These women have completed few mega projects of water supply funded through Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) on self help basis. After D-Fund vision these women have opened small stores in their respective mohallas, where the home preserved and packed products are displayed for sale and generate income in sufficient quantity that is helpful to their household expenditures.

Regarding political empowerment the women of Eastern Region mentioned very proudly that they have won a number of councilor seats in the local election because of the unity induced through these programs. The study findings in the Eastern region are very encouraging and inspiring for the future projects. About 97 (86%) respondent out of total 112 affirmed that because of the PHP D-Fund project initiatives their household incomes have increased manifold.

***Central Region***

Population of the Central Region (comprising of Peshawar Division) is about 6770000 individuals with a male to female percentage of 51.93% and 48.06%. Total reported area of the Central region is about 2.02 million hectares with a cropped area of 0.60 million hectares that is 29% of the total cropped area.

In the Central Region a total of 184 women were imparted skills and capacity building training under the PHP D-Fund activities in the disciplines of enterprise development, post harvest management of Horticultural crops and indoor or kitchen vegetable production. Mushroom crop has a great market and production potential in the central region and the female are also keen to grow the crop but there are some minor technical hurdles in this regard which can easily be overcome if addressed by an appropriate forum.

The beneficiaries women in the central region who got their skills improved in enterprise development were found fully utilizing the acquired skills for increasing their household income. While traveling from Nowshera towards Peshawar one can witness the D-Fund impacts in the shape of display cottages loaded with products of various fruits and vegetables prepared by these women in the Central Region. These points exhibit squashes of different fruits labeled with the producers' addresses and trade names. According to general consumers the quality of the products is best one and prices of these home made products are far below the one produced by the large industrial units and brands.

While interviewing the beneficiaries and studying the impact of PHP D-Fund activities in the central region many of the women were found engaged in the grading, packing, decorating and labeling of the fruits of plums, peaches and guava. Yet again women were of the views that they are in dire need of training in the sale promotion and marketing of the produces and products of horticultural crops. They were particularly concerned with the marketing aspects of labeling techniques, developing packaging boxes/baskets and other packets of various specifications and arranging fruits inside these packing. Few of the beneficiaries' women were also engaged in fruit and ornamental plants nursery raising and stated that they have earned a lot of income from nursery enterprise.

### ***Northern Region***

Population of the Northern Region (comprising Malakand Division) is about 6770000 individuals with a male to female percentage of 51.93% and 48.06%. Total reported area of the Central region is about 1.24 million hectares with a cropped area of 0.52 million hectares that is 42.4% of the total cropped area. In Northern Region a total of 153 women were provided with skills and capacity building training in various disciplines including fruits and vegetable preservations, enterprise development with particular reference to Horticultural crops and home based vegetable production. In Northern region, education %age amongst the beneficiary female was found, 85.2% ever highest in all the groups and was mainly responsible for the sustainability of the project interventions. Secondly, most NGOs performed in the area in collaboration with public sector departments and that contributed a lot in their better understanding in the field of Natural Resource Management.

### ***Southern Region***

Population of the Southern Region (comprising D.I. Khan Division) is about 2531000 individuals with a male to female percentage of 52.23% and 47.76%. Total reported area of the southern region is about 1.59 million hectares with a cropped area of 0.48 million hectares that is 31% of the total cropped area. In the southern region the women development situation is really alarming and needs a conscious effort and investment in the gender development program. The literacy rate and age data depicted a grim situation of the region since 44% of the female were without education and only 47% were more vibrant and efficient as witnessed during the data collection. These women were actively involved in capitalizing on the acquired skills and capacities developed by D-Fund sub projects of the PHP. This factor, ultimately affected the sustainability of the activities in the southern region as compared to other regions.

Regarding the interest and potential of women specific interventions in southern region the area is very fertile and accommodative for such like projects but poverty and lack of education is devastating. Resultantly post project utilities of the acquired skills were found low despite the fact that in the southern region females were very conscious about the use and after effects of the skills provided to them by the project. One of the women stated that they use to gift the home made products to their relatives and friends within the country and even to those earning their livelihood abroad. As stated by one of the female out of the 147 direct beneficiaries women in the Southern Region that due to marriages of members girls, the acquired skills and knowledge has even been disseminated out of the divisional and provincial borders in few cases.

### ***Findings in a Recapitulate***

Recapitulating the regional findings, the facts of the study can be generalized for the whole province as:

- i. Despite possessing 50% share in the population of the province, women and women related facilities are not given the due to share, in the development programs.
- ii. Women dominant role in the crop and livestock management is over sighted and ignored.
- iii. Many of the provincial or federal government development programs in the sector of agriculture do not include women component
- iv. Women role in Horticultural crop production is more than 60%, yet there is no recognition to this fact at any level
- v. Women are witnessed to have more efficiency and production than men in the crop management activities, particularly in nursery raising, picking, weeding, inter-culturing, cleaning, grading, sorting, packing and packaging
- vi. Women have greater portion of responsibilities in livestock management then men and in most of the cases except grazing all other activities are handled by women

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The present study concluded that skilled women of D-Fund interventions were more conscious about their needs and problems and they were more actively participating in their problems solving activities. Interestingly, as reported by some of the women, many of the men of the families where D-Fund women activities were carried out changed their attitude towards women role in the society and household matters and particularly horticultural crop production and marketing. Indicating empowering process of rural poor women and improved livelihood in the long term strategy. The key objective behind PHP D-fund Strategy was to enable the rural poor including women to access to material and non-material resources available with the PHP, to lead the rural poor including women to avail economic opportunities for better socio-economic position in the society. Project for Horticulture Promotion in NWFP

with its flexible approach in adopting the innovative ideas and have made a dent in the field of women's socio-economic development having main focus on the rural poor women, the main achievements of the project include:

- i. Raised consciousness and awareness among the people and in the government focusing on the most neglected areas related to women.
- ii. Became a source to build organization, strengthened the management capabilities and promoted women self-reliance; and
- iii. Created venue for employment opportunities to facilitate women's self-reliance and internal strength.
- iv. An important outcome of the study is that poor women first need opportunities for their own empowerment.

The study further suggests the following measures for public and private sector planners to honor due consideration to:

- a. Recognize women's role and contribution to the rural economy of the province and include them in future horticultural crop farming system improvement programs.
- b. Launch basic and functional programs for women so that they are able to learn and apply improved agricultural technologies.
- c. Improve the skills and efficiency of rural women through appropriate range of improved technologies in preservation, processing and marketing of various fruit, vegetables and livestock products.
- d. Introduce rain fed farming and agro-forestry practices to rural women in order to develop livestock and poultry.
- e. Enable the staff of agriculture extension department to get out with women farmers listening and learning.
- f. There is dire need to replicate the experiences of PHP D-fund in rest of the country.

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