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Women Councilors for Women's Empowerment in Pakistan

By Iqtidar Ali Shah¹, Arshad Aziz² and M. Shakil Ahmad³

Abstract

There are considerable disparities between the status of men and women in Pakistan. In Global Gender Gap Report 2014, Pakistan is ranked at 141 among 142 countries of the world and the overall gender gap calculated is 44.78%. Pakistan occupies the last place in the regional ranking of gender gap. In order to reduce this gap, empower women and reduce poverty, the government of Pakistan has adopted various social, economic, legal and political strategies and policies. The reservation of 33% seats for women at union council (village level), tehsil council (sub-district level) and district council level under the new local government plan (devolution plan) in 2000 is one of the strategies adopted for empowerment of women. This created a critical mass of 39,964 women councilors in Pakistan. In order to assess the effectiveness and impact of women councilors for women's empowerment, a study was conducted in two selected districts of Pakistan, i.e. Abbottabad (Kyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) and Attock (Punjab Province). Primary data were collected from 54 women councilors of both the districts. The result shows that participation of women councilors in local government remained good. Hence, the economic effect was quite surprising. However, no separate funds/schemes were initiated for women. Their influence over changing policies remained weak. The women councilors in the new local government system increased awareness and coordination among women. However, they were unable to reduce violence and awaken other women regarding their rights.

Key Words: Devolution Plan, Gender Discrimination, Local Government, Pakistan, Women's Empowerment, Women's Participation

Introduction

The overall development of a country depends upon the maximum utilization of human resources including both men and women. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives equal rights to both women and men. However, in practice women are rarely equal to their male counterparts (SDPI, 2008). In Pakistan women comprise nearly half of the total population but their status is much lower than that of men in every sphere of life especially in rural area.

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Women are the weaker, marginalized, neglected and under-nourished group of society. According to Yazdani, "women in Pakistan have always been more deprived than men; more than half are plagued by poverty of opportunities to income, health and education; and even where overall poverty of opportunity has been steadily declining, the male-female gaps have actually widened" (Yazdani, 2003). The Participatory Poverty Assessment conducted in the Kyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan confirmed that gender based inequality is greater. Women have no access / control over resources. They are economically dependent. Violence against women, the dominance of men, polygamy, violation of rights and harassment of women are very common. There has been almost no change in the gender-based roles and responsibilities of men and women over the several decades (Planning and Development, 2003).

In Pakistan gender based inequality exists at large despite of various kinds of policies, strategies and programmes (discussed in section 2). In legal sphere, constitutional reforms have failed to address the stark rise and prevalence in security issues that affect women. In educational sphere, the percentage of girls enrolled in primary school remained significantly low as compared to boys, and this gap is increasing dramatically in secondary and higher educational enrolment. In health sphere, the use of reproductive health services continued to be low and maternal mortality rates remained high. In labor sphere, women education attainment is low. Social norms are also restricting women's mobility. This has resulted in a limited range of employment opportunities and low wages for women (SDPO, 2009).

Women's participation and representation in politics is one of the components for empowerment. The government of Pakistan has used this to solve women related community problems at grass root level and more importantly to empower them socially, economically and politically. Political participation of women is also used as end because it is the right of women to equally participate in politics. The local government reforms (also called devolution plan / decentralization) were carried out in 2000 in order to ensure inter alia greater political participation of women in local government. The purpose of local government reform were manifold; devolution of political power, decentralization of administrative and financial authority, effective delivery of services and transparency in decision-making process through institutionalized participation of the people at the grassroots level. A secondary feature of local government reform in Pakistan was to reserve 33% of the seats for women and also for other weaker sections of the population (NRB, 2006).

In the devolution / decentralization plan, 33% seats for women were reserved at all three tiers. Local government elections were held twice to elect councilors at 6022 Union Councils, 305 Tehsil Councils, 30 town councils and 96 District Councils. Elections at union council level were held directly while at the other levels, indirect elections were conducted. Reservation of 33% seats for women resulted in the election of approximately 40,000 women out of which approximately 36,000 women were elected as local councilors at the lowest tier of the union council. For the first time such a high number of directly elected women were participating in local government (Yazdani, 2003).

The devolution plan was designed not only to increase the number of women representative in local government by the reservation of 33% seats but it was also expected to bring a significant social, economic change and impact on marginalized groups of society like women, peasants etc. It provided a tremendous opportunity for women to play an important role in the developmental process. Yet it also posed a number of challenges. The basic question and prime challenge emerged now is that how and to what extent this critical mass of elected women affect public policy, poverty reduction and empower women? A representative from the United

Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific pointed out in the first summit of women councilors and mayors that the numbers of women councilors alone does not necessarily guarantee that women will be able to effectively participate in decision-making at the local level (Khawar, 2003).

The objectives of this paper are:

- i. To determine to what extent the women councilors (the critical mass of elected women) have influence the institutional rules, norms and practices and consequently shape the policy agenda and decisions about the use and allocation of resources.
- ii. To assess the impact women councilors on the status of common women at household and society level.
- iii. To examine the capabilities of women councilors to reduce gender disparities and change their lives, especially for women living in poverty.
- iv. To determine various socio-economic hurdles in the way of women's counselor and to construct and examine socio-economic, political and demographic profile of women councilors (where the women are coming from: their age, education, socio-economic status, and political background).

This paper has been divided into seven sections with a review of gender gap and women's empowerment in Pakistan as the second section followed by theoretical framework in the third section. Profile of the research area and research methodology is presented in the fourth and fifth sections, respectively. Results and discussion is carried out in the section six. The paper concludes in last section.

Gender Gap and Women's empowerment in Pakistan

Women's empowerment and their full participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace (Beijing Conference, 1995). A number of studies have been carried out around the globe as well as in Pakistan to look into the matter of women's empowerment. There is no country in the world in which women have the same power as men or which has achieved the gender equality or does not have gender gap. The phenomenon of gender discrimination is manifest almost in all over the world but its nature and magnitude may vary from society to society (Taga, 2012). Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden are the highly advanced countries having gender gap of 14.06%, 15.47%, 16.26% and 18.35% respectively (World Economic Forum, 2014). "Differences in opportunities and access to the resources between men and women exist all over the world, but they are most common in poor developing nations" (Moheyuddin, 2005).

The ninth edition of the Global Gender Gap Report 2014 finds that, among the 142 countries measured, Pakistan has been ranked at 141 and occupies the last place in the regional ranking. The country score has been fluctuated over the past nine years, ending with a slight improvement compared to 2006. According to report, the overall gender gap is 44.78%. The gender gap in health, educational attainment, economic participation and political empowerment on average is 3.34%, 19.46%, 69.06% and 87.27% respectively (World Economic Forum, 2014). Similarly, Pakistan is ranked 123th out of 148 countries in the 2012 Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2013). The gap not only exists among men and women but also between women group

itself across the regions. According to Rais (2002), the educated and professional women in urban areas and from upper classes of the society enjoy much better status and rights than illiterate women in rural areas. The reasons are that the urban woman has understood and realized their position and status due to their exposure to the educational facilities and mild behavior of men. However, rural woman is still unaware of the meaning of self-respect, economic independence, prestige and role of women in the socio-economic development of the society (IDEA, 2009). Women in tribal areas of Balochistan, Kyber Pukhtoonkhuwa and remote areas of southern Punjab and interior Sindh live in more adverse social conditions than women in other parts of the country. In these areas, honor killings, domestic violence and discrimination by male members of the families are too common, they are not confined there alone (Rais, 2002).

The government of Pakistan has taken various steps in order to address the gender gap and ensure an active role of women in the socio-economic and political field through active participation in policies and programmes, a quick review of policies, strategies and programmes and achievements is detailed below.

Government Policies/Strategies/Programmes

The government of Pakistan has developed and implemented various policies, strategies and programmes. An overview is given below:

- Pakistan Women's Rights Committee was set up in 1976 to consider and formulate proposals for law reforms, with a view to improve the social, legal and economic conditions of the women of Pakistan and to provide for speedier legal remedies for obtaining relief in matters like maintenance, custody of children, etc. (NCSW, 2009)
- Women's Division was set up in January 1979 with aims to formulate and implement public policies, plans and programmes to meet the special needs of women (Kazi and Raza, 1992).
- The Women's Division was upgraded to the level of full-fledged Ministry of Women Development in 1989. The ministry is mandated to make efforts for the women's empowerment and gender equality. The role of the ministry is of an advocate, lobbyist, catalyst, and coordinator for the cause of women (Sandhu, 2012).
- Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women was established in March 1983 as an independent Women's Commission to identify major problems facing women and suggest remedies (Weiss, 1994).
- Adopted a 'National Plan of Action' (NPA) in 1998 outlining 184 actions in '12 areas of concern including women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child with an additional agenda on girls & women with disabilities (NCSW, 2009)
- Under the New Local Government System (2001) in Pakistan, women were given 33% participation share in the Local Government Elections (Anjum, 2001).
- National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)' was established in 2000, with a mandate to examine the relevance and efficacy of all policies, programs and measures to the core issue of women development and gender equality (Zia, 2010).

- Developed a "National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women" in 2002, containing a vision, defined goals, aims and objectives (Zia, 2010).
- 42 'Focal Points' established in relevant ministries / departments of the government to ensure programs planned and executed are gender perspective; especially effective in sensitive Ministries of Interior, Law & Justice, Parliamentary Affairs, Health & Education.
- Government of Pakistan makes amendments in the Constitution and promulgation of Local Government Ordinance in 2001 and at least 33 percent of seats in each tier of local government are women. In the National Assembly, more than 60 seats are held by women out of 332 seats while over 128 seats are held by women out of 728 seats in the provincial assemblies. Similarly, there are 17 women in the Senate out of 100 members (Moheyuddin, 2005).
- The federal and all provincial governments have approved Gender Reform Action Plans (GRAPs) during 2004-05 that suggests the intervention areas such as women's employment in the public sector, policies and fiscal reforms, capacity development interventions, women's political participation, institutional restructuring for more effective gender mainstreaming and support actions to create an enabling environment (Moheyuddin, 2005; Norad, 2011)
- In order to protect women and empower various legal system / laws such as the Protection and Empowerment of Women Bill (2004), the Pakistan Penal Code (Criminal Law Act 2009), Acid Violence Act (2010), the Protection against Harassment of Women in the Workplace (2010) was approved and implemented (Norad, 2011).
- The Government of Pakistan has initiated Gender Responsive Budgeting in 2007 as one of its major tools for advancing gender equality (Government of Pakistan, 2008).
- The Women in Distress and Detention Fund Act 2011 has been promulgated to provide financial and legal assistance to deserving women (PCST, 2014).
- National Commission on the status of Women was established under the National Commission on the Status of Women Act 2012. The major functions of the commission is to examine the policies and programs initiated by the Federal Government for gender equality and women's empowerment, to examine all Federal laws and rules that are against interest of women and make recommendations to the concerned quarters. (Bahawani, Rafiq, Khan & Chaudhary, 2013)

Achievement

The achievement of government in the field of social, economic and political empowerment of women is described as under:

Achievements in Social Empowerment

It covers areas such as women in education, health, law and access to justice, violence against women, women in the family & community, and the girl child care:

- To reduce gender gap at all levels, Education Sector Reforms (ESR) were approved on April 30, 2001. Primary education in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was made compulsory. Stipends for rural girls were initiated. Mixed school system was introduced. One thousand, four hundred and sixty

five (1465) girls primary/ community model schools and eight thousand and forty eight (8045) non-formal schools were established. It resulted in double enrollment in primary, nearly 30% increase in middle and almost equal increase in higher education of girls compared to boys (Hathaway, 2005)

- To contribute to improve women's health, Gender Perspective National Health and National Reproductive Health Policies, 2000 Extended Training Facilities of Lady Health Workers, Food & Nutrition Program for 5 – 12 year old girls related to enrolment program, Free Meal Facility covering 5,20,000 girls in 28 high poverty districts, and strengthened National AIDs, Malaria, TB & Hepatitis control program were started.
- With accession to the Conventions on the 'Rights of the Child' (CRC) and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and affirmative actions through a series of Legal Reforms (Amendment in Citizenship Act of 1951, 2000, Human Trafficking Ordinance 2002, Criminal Law Amendment Act 2004, Law Reforms Ordinance 2006, Protection of Women Bill 2006—tabled), together with the establishment of Judicial Courts/ Complex — a pilot project, Women (Crisis) Centers equipped with required help lines, supported by Police Reforms (establishment of Gender Crime Cell at the National Police Bureau to control and coordinate all crimes related to gender) have contributed substantially in the reduction of Violence Against Women and other Gender Crimes.

Achievements in Economic Empowerment

It covers poverty, access to credit, remunerated work, rural women of informal sector, and sustainable development through:

- Launching of the National Fund for Advancement of Rural Women (Jafakash Aurat) with a seed money of Rs. 100 million, announced by the President of Pakistan with a special focus on rural women and the informal sector, operated through Khushhali Bank, First Women Bank and Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (an NGO) to provide skill, employment and income to 23,000 rural women and benefit over 74,000 households
- Dastkari School (embroidery school) (700 nos) were established by Pakistan Bail-ul-Maal (home for helping poor). It provides skill based training to poor women especially to 3,000 widows. In addition to this, 'Provision of Safety Nets', 'Food Support Scheme' is benefiting 75% women covering 1.2 million rural households. 'Guzara Allowance' and 'Zakat' are other schemes benefiting 0.4 million women.
- In 2001-02, various projects including Crop Maximization Project, Integration of Agricultural Research and Extension Activities & Introduction of Herbs as Crops and the 3 year Training Program in rearing livestock and dairy animals, were introduced to generate women income
- Ministry of Women's Development recently introduced Micro-Credit Scheme through First Women Bank, Khushhali Bank and Zarai Taraqiyati Bank (Agriculture Development Bank). It has created a new entrepreneur class among poor women at local level.
- Women's empowerment through Benazir Income Support Programme started in 2008 (Shehzad, 2011).

- Youth loan scheme started in 2014 to help the youth of Pakistan in which 50 percent of the scheme has been allocated to women encourage them to setup their own businesses and provide women to have equal rights (PCST, 2014).

Achievements in Political Empowerment:

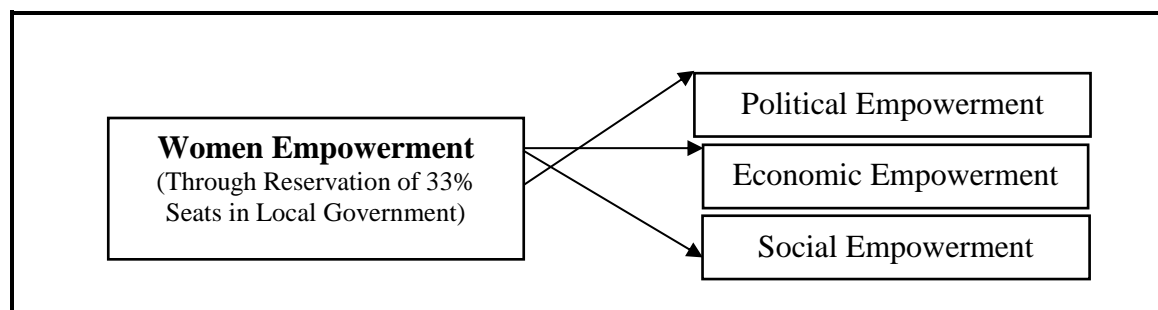
It covers placement of women in high positions of decision-making, and participation in electoral positions at Federal, Provincial, and Local levels through:

- Local Government Ordinance 2001 under the ‘Devolution Plan’, providing 33% representation of women at all tiers of local elected bodies with 39,964 women and 787 women representing in Federal and Provincial Assemblies have revolutionized political participation of women in Pakistan
- Establishment of ‘Women Political Schools’ with bulk aid from international donor agencies and ‘District Resource Centers’ to infuse political vision and awareness among neglected half of the Pakistan population.

Theoretical Framework

To assess women’s empowerment as a result of reservation of 33% seats to women in local government, the following theoretical framework (figure 1) has been adopted. The effectiveness and impact of political participation has been assessed using three variables i.e. political empowerment, economics empowerment and social empowerment.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Source: Self developed

Profile of Research Area

This study was undertaken in two districts i.e. Abbottbad and Attock of Pakistan. Brief profiles of both the districts are mentioned below:

Abbottabad Profile

District Abbottabad is located in the Kyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan and is spread over an area of 1,967 sq. miles. It is divided into two Tehsils, Abbottabad and Havelian and 51 Union Councils. The total population is 881,000 and an average annual growth rate is 1.82%. The average household size is calculated as 6.4 persons. Some 83.12% population lives in rural areas. The sex ratio in rural and urban areas of the district is 94.96 and 128.08

respectively, indicating that male proportion is much higher in urban areas compared to the rural areas. The total literacy rate is 37.26% in which 58.66 is recorded in urban and 32.51% in the rural areas. The literacy rate among male and female was 52.82% and 21.14% respectively. The total labour force participation rate is 27.92 which are higher in urban areas i.e. 33.38 % as compared to 26.63% in rural areas. There lies a major difference in the participation rates between male and female labour at 55.21% for male compared to 1.25% for female. Unemployment rate is recorded as 31.14%. Regarding access to safe drinking water, 79% of urban population avail the facility of piped water whereas the respective figure for rural population is 23.83%.

Attock Profile

Attock is one of the districts of the Punjab Province of Pakistan. The estimated population of the district was 1.58 million (2008). The total area of the district is 6857 Sq Km. Population density is 186/km. Geographically, the district is mainly hills, plateaus and dissected plains. It has 06 tehsils, 458 villages and 72 union councils. Most of the population of the district is engaged in agriculture. Clans and tribes play an important role in electoral politics. Some of the key clans residing in the district are Awan, Milar, Shaikh and Khattar.

Research Methodology

Data were collected through questionnaire from the female councilors of Abbottabad and Attock districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces, Pakistan using stratified random sampling techniques. Total number of women seats in the two districts are 578 (Abbottabad 239 and Attock 339) as per detail given in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Details of Female Councilor in Union, Tehsil and District Council, Abbottabad

District Abbottabad	Union Council (51)	Tehsil Council (2)	District Council (1)	Total
Tehsil Abbottabad	204	17	18	239
Tehsil Havelian				

Table 2: Detail of Female Councilor in Union, Tehsil and District Council Attock

District Attock	Union Council (72)	Tehsil Council (6)	District Council (1)	Total
Tehsil Attock	288	25	26	339
Tehsil Hazro				
Tehsil Hassanabdal				
Tehsil Fatehjang				
Tehsil Pendigheb				
Tehsil Jand				

Out of total 578 women councilors, data from 54 councilors were collected (21 Abbottabad and 33 Attock) as per detail provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Detail of Respondents

Districts	Union Council	Tehsil Council	District Council	Total
Abbottabad	10	5	6	21
Attock	26	7	0	33
Total	36	12	6	54

Results and Discussion

Profile of Female Counselor

Data from 54 female responded were collected. Their profile is given in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Profile of Female Councilor Respondents

S. No	Indicators	No & % of Respondents	
		No	%
1	Age Group		
	18-30	9	16.7
	31-40	34	63.0
	41-50	9	16.7
	51-60	2	3.7
2	Marital Status		
	Married	39	72.2
	Un Married	7	13.0
	Widow	5	9.3
	Divorced	3	5.6
3	Family Background		
	Government Servant	16	29.6
	Business	15	27.8
	Politician	15	27.8
	Social Worker	7	13.0
	other job	1	1.9
4	Education Background		
	Illiterate	1	1.9
	Literate	53	98.1
	i. School Education	12	22.2
	ii. Higher School / College Education	19	35.2
	iii. University Education	23	42.6
5	Previous Occupation		

	House Wife	39	72.2
	Working Class	15	27.8
6	Previous Experience as a:		
	Councilor	11	20.4
	Political Worker	21	38.9
	Social Worker	18	33.3
	No Experience	4	7.4
7	Training as Councilor		
	Training not received	7	13.0
	Training received	47	87.0
	i. Reasonable Extent	37	68.5
	ii. Some Extent	8	14.8
	iii. Full Extent	2	3.7
8.	Knowledge of Councilor's Responsibilities		
	Yes	50	92.6
	No	4	7.4

Source: Field Data

Data were collected from 54 female councilors of Abbottabad and Attock districts. Majority of the women councilors (63%) were from middle age and married (72%). Majority of the women councilors (29%) belong to family where their fathers/husbands were working as government servants. Majority of them (98.1%) were educated. Out of educated female councilors, majority of them (42.6%) were university graduates. Most of them (72.2%) were house wives. Similarly, most of the councilors (38.9%) have previous experience as political workers. Majority of them (87%) had gotten training to work as councilors and most of them (92.6%) were familiar with the roles and responsibilities of female councilors.

Political Empowerment of Women councilors

Data from 54 women councilors were collected to assess the impact of their political representation on their political empowerment and other women at grass root level as well. Results have been shown in the following Table 5.

Table 5: Political Empowerment of Women councilors

S. No	Activities	Number and % of Respondents	
		No	%
1	Women councilors' Participation in Discussion during Meeting		
	Yes	42	77.8
	No	12	22.2
2	Reasons for Non Participating		
	No response	28	51.9
	Male councilor dominated	7	13.0
	Hesitation during meeting	18	33.3
	Culture constraints	1	1.9

3	Male Councilor Attitude Toward Female		
	Positive	41	75.9
	Negative	13	24.1
4	Importance given to Women councilors in Decisions		
	Yes	35	64.8
	No	19	35.2
5	Women councilors' influence to Change Policy		
	Yes	11	20.4
	No	43	79.6
6	Cooperation of the Nazim (Elected Administrator)		
	Normal	23	42.2
	Good	18	33.3
	Very good	10	18.5
	Non Cooperative	3	5.6
7	Cooperation of the Local Departments		
	Normal	28	51.9
	Good	23	42.6
	Non Cooperative	3	5.6
8	Hurdles Faced by Women councilors		
	Cultural hurdles	12	22.2
	Political hurdles	33	61.1
	Mobility constraints	8	14.8
	Other	1	1.9

Majority of the women councilors (77.8%) indicate that women councilors participated in discussion during meeting. Majority of them (51.9%) did not respond to the question that why women councilors are not participating in meeting. However, 33.3% identified that main reasons of their non-participation is hesitation and lack of courage to talk. Male councilors' attitude toward women councilors was good as majority of them responded (75.9%). Similarly, most of them, i.e. 42.2% and 51.9% responded respectively that Nazims and other local departments have a normal cooperation with them. However, women councilors still have not gained any influence to change the decisions as 79.6% responded. They also identified problems which women councilors are facing which include cultural constraints (22.2%), political constraints (61.1%), and mobility constraints (14.8%).

Economic Empowerment of Women councilors

Data from 54 women councilors were collected to assess the impact of their political representation in local government on their economic empowerment and other women at grass root level as well. Results have been shown in the following Table 6.

Table 6: Economic Empowerment of Women councilors

S. No	Activities	Number and % of Respondents	
		No	%
1	Availability of Schemes Related to Women		
	Yes	10	18.5
	No	44	81.5
2	Special Development Funds Allocated Women		
	Yes	6	11.1
	No	48	88.9
3	Any Economic Impact of Local Government System on Women		
	Yes	43	79.6
	No	10	18.5
4.	Nature of Impact on Women		
	Increased women income	7	13.0
	Increased basic facilities to women	18	33.3
	Increased awareness among women	10	18.5
	Provided justice to women	8	14.8
5	How Women can be Economically Empowered		
	Micro financing	23	42.6
	Technical training	18	33.3
	Special fund to women councilors	13	24.1

Majority of women councilors (81.5%) responded that there were no special schemes for women in the development programme. Similarly, majority of women councilors (88.9%) informed that no special funds were allocated for women development. However, majority of them (79.6%) also indicated that the local government system have had good impact on women besides these deficiencies. The impacts identified are: increased women income (13%), increased basic facilities (33.3% responded), increased awareness (18.5%) and provided justice (14.8%). The women councilors also identified some areas which will help women's empowerment in the area of micro finance (42.6% responded), technical training (33.3% responded), and special funds to women councilors for women development (24.1%).

Social Development of Women councilors

Data from 54 women councilors were collected to assess the impact of their political representation in local government on their social empowerment and other women at grass root level as well. Results have been shown in the following Table 7.

Table 7: Social Development of Women councilors

S. No	Activities	Number and % of Respondents	
		Yes	No
1	Any Social Change to Women in Present Local Government System		
	Increased awareness among women	37	68.5

	Provided social justice	6	11.1
	Increased education	7	13.0
	No social change	4	7.4
2	Special Responsibility Given to Women councilors		
	Yes	9	16.7
	No	45	83.3
3	Types of Responsibility Provided to Women councilors		
	Head of training school	4	7.4
	Head of women related activities	5	9.3
4	Women Access to Basic Facilities		
	Yes	34	63.0
	No	20	37.0
5	Coordination Among Women councilors		
	Yes	50	92.2
	No	4	7.4
6	Any System Developed by Women councilors to Reduce Violence		
	Yes	8	14.8
	No	46	85.2
7	Training Arranged by Women councilors to Aware other Women of their Rights		
	Yes	16	29.6
	No	38	70.4

Majority of women councilors (68.5%) responded that the new local government system increased awareness among women. Majority of the women councilors (83.3%) informed that no special responsibilities were given to women. In few areas they were given responsibility to look after women training center. Most of the women (63.0%) informed that they have got easy access to basic facilities. The coordination among women was recorded excellent as indicated by majority of women (92.2%). However, no system was developed by women councilors to reduce violence against women in their areas as confirmed by 85.2% of women councilors. Similarly, no training or awareness programmes for other women have been arranged by women councilors in their respective areas as indicated by 70.4% of women councilors.

Problems and Achievements of Women councilors and Deficiencies in the New System of Local Government

In order to assess the real impact of women councilors, some specific questions regarding their achievements and problems as women councilors were asked. It was found that although they have got a chance to represent women at local, tehsil and district level, but no specific work or achievement for women has been done in the area. However, the system created awareness among women and men. The women came out for first time to participate in politics at local level. The system broke the hesitation of women to participate in politics. Most of the problems identified by women councilors were culture related. The deficiencies in the new local government system identified by women councilors include: non availability of special funds for women, no decision power, no real empowerment, and no role in policy making.

Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men are the decision makers and women are subordinate. To reduce the dominance of men or in other words to reduce gender gap, the reservation of 33% seats for women were introduced in new local government of Pakistan. Resultantly, 36,000 women were elected as local councilors at the lowest tier of the union council. It is pertinent to find out that to what extent these women councilors affect institutional policies and common women's lives on one hand and to assess their capability to reduce gender gap, empower women and the hurdles they are facing as women councilors on the other hand.

It is argued that the reservation of 33% seats in local government will increase women participation in politics which will bring difference to policies and institutions. Their participation will also influence the institutional rules / policy and contribute in decisions about the use and allocation of resources at local government level. However, the study found unequal gender role in decision making (Table 5). Women councilors are still unable to influence the institutional policies and rules despite of the fact that politically they are empowered to some extent by the reservation of 33% seats in local councils. Although women councilors' existence is realized by men councilors and governments agencies but still they are facing various political, cultural and mobility constraints. Changes in the status of women in the form of participation in discussion, confidence development, positive attitude of men, cooperation of male counselors and government agencies are very positive steps to reduce gender gap and empowered women.

The impact of women counselor on other common women in term of economic impact, social change, awareness about their rights, increasing interaction/coordination, reducing violence, access to basic facilities is of significant importance in reducing gender disparities. The women counselors increased interaction/coordination and unity among women which is important for reduction of violence. Their access to basic facilities has been increased. Women felt a social change and increased awareness about their women (Tables 6 and 7).

The induction of 36,000 women councilors at lower lever was expected to reduce gender disparities, violence and will change common women lives to some extent. However, no such changes/impact was noted in community. The reason was that the women councilors were unable to develop a system for common women awareness to reduce gender disparities (Table 7).

The women councilors' profile of the two districts where research was carried out is very satisfactory because most of them were educated, from middle age, married and house wives. Similarly, most of the counselors have previous experience as political workers and having some kind of training to work as counselors. They were familiar with the roles and responsibilities of female councilors (Table 4). They were facing some hurdles as female such as cultural, political and mobility constraints. (Table 5)

Conclusion

The results concluded that the overall women councilors' participation in local government has been increased and remained satisfactory. They participated politically in decisions making. However, their influence over changing policies was less. The economic impact was effective. However, no separate funds/schemes were allocated to women councilors. The new local government system increased awareness, interaction and coordination among women. However, the women councilors were unable to reduce violence and to create awareness among other women regarding their rights.

Just increasing the number of women councilors, providing them administrative types of training and awareness is not enough. There is need for considerable work to be undertaken by

the government and women councilors themselves to propose new policies for women development and use the local government as an institution to economically and socially empower women at grass root level. The female councilor need to identify the issues of common concerns and to collectively put pressure on the local bodies to address these issues. They also need to learn how to generate pressure on the male councilor to involve them in decisions making process and provide them funds for women related schemes. Majority of the women councilors in the area were educated and had previous experience of local government as women councilors. Attitude of male councilor and government department remained normal. No serious social, culture, and political constraints were reported. However, no example is available where women councilors have developed a platform by themselves against the women violence, demand for women rights and education. No platform was created where they politically and socially supported women at grass root level. The dependency of women councilors on male councilor and government for funds only would never empower them economically and politically.

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