**National Gender Policy Framework 2022 Policy Critique (Part II)**

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03. Not addressing the root causes of the problem: In general, the objectives of the NGPF seem to be putting only a bandage over the real cracks in the existing interventions related to women in Pakistan. They do not address the root causes of fundamental problems, such as access to and availability of essential health services, decent and safe means of transport, safe working environment, financial instruments etc. Moreover, there is a stress on increasing female voters through CNIC registrations and support from the National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA). However, a considerable number of persons, particularly women, do not own CNICs and are therefore unaccounted for in NADRA’s database.

04. Insufficient data and data collection mechanisms: Consolidated gender-desegregated data is not available due to old and poorly-coordinated data collection systems. Such processes give rise to continuous human error and make it cumbersome for policymakers to effectively use data for evidence-based decision-making. Furthermore, in many cases, particularly those that deal with sensitive matters, such as Violence against Women (VAW), a majority of incidents continue to go unreported and are therefore not reflected in local or national statistics.

05. Absence of focus on the plight of marginalized segments of the female population: The differences that exist between women in urban and rural settings, private and public sectors, and formal and informal workspaces have not been taken into account. The role played by rural women in the cottage and livestock industry has not been covered in the framework. The dilemma faced by disabled women and issues faced by minorities has also not been given their due share.

Religious leaders have been engaged positively in various gender-related efforts in Bangladesh.

As per UN Young Women in Pakistan Status Report 2020, augmented labour force participation raises rural women’s participation from 34 per cent to 52 per cent (ages 15-29) are unpaid family workers. Their unpaid work is valued at around PKR 683 Billion. Approximately 65 per cent of Pakistani women earn their livelihood from the cottage industry. They face issues of lack of decision-making and power sharing, shortage of capital, Gender inequality, opportunities to present their work in the right markets, lack of education, training and innovations and obstacles in accessing the market and credit facilities. Agriculture is the largest employer of Pakistani women workers. Non-compatible tools/technologies to manage crop and livestock production activities, poor health and dietary condition, low literacy level and the burden of multiple roles are a few of the main challenges faced by women there. The policy framework remains silent about how to approach and engage them to bring them to the formal labour force.

Most importantly, despite being a policy for “gender development,” there is no mention of transgender in the formulation of key objectives and priorities, even though this community is marginalized and in desperate need of better work and quality of life.

06. Unrealistic timeline for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Critical appraisal of the KPIs of objectives as well as their proposed timeframes for implementation shows that they are not realistic or fully achievable. For example, to secure hundred need-based post-graduate scholarships in the top United Kingdom (UK) universities by eligible women in one and half year seem to be ambitious. A much more logical approach would be to start with small steps, establish a model that works, and then aim bigger. Similarly unrealistic and non-practical KPIs, like women-only transport systems, may also be reviewed in light of a similar experiment done by the Punjab government, which failed due to low rider occupancy, frequency of trips, number of routes etc. Such projects without proper study and cost-benefit analysis will not be financially viable.

07. Role of social media is absent: Most of the objectives proposed by the NGPF have highlighted the need to utilize public sector websites for the dissemination of content and spreading awareness. The critical role played by social media in educating the masses about key issues, seeking feedback, and fostering change have not been explored fully.

08. The role of religious leaders is missing: The use of community leaders, and religious leaders can play a vital role in the implementation of strategic priorities, given their social influence and moral authority particularly in the rural communities, while media can harness the opinion in the urban settings. Change in cultural and normative ethos and mindset through community or religious leaders can be a good way to improve the general conditions of women. There are good lessons to be learned from Bangladesh, where religious leaders have been engaged positively in various gender-related efforts in Bangladesh; several organizations such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Asia Foundation have successfully engaged Imams and other religious leaders through the government’s Islamic Foundation on issues ranging from Violence Against Women (VAW) to dowry.

09. Issue of ‘implementer’ vs ‘coordinator’: Following the 18th amendment to Pakistan’s constitution, the responsibility of several social sectors, such as health and education, was devolved to the provinces. It is noteworthy, however, that the framework accords the responsibility of ‘lead implementer’ to MoPD&SI for the proposed objectives, rather than the relevant stakeholders who will be responsible for carrying out the initiatives within their areas of jurisdiction. While a framework to promote national strategic coordination for gender sensitivity is certainly a welcome endeavour, its success depends on a clear understanding of the administrative context of Pakistan, as well as hierarchies and reporting lines.

(To be Continued)

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