



From Vulnerability to Proficiency

Fostering Economic Empowerment Of Women in AJK Region



Women Welfare Organization (WVO)

Executive summary

Pakistani women face a multitude of challenges when striving for employment and economic independence. However, we see that such challenges have even more drastic effects when we speak of the women of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Since the region is internationally recognized as a disputed territory, therefore, the reform policies, if there are any, adopted at the Centre have minimal impact on this region, further exacerbating the plight of the women of AJK. Given the limited reach of various economic opportunities in the country, the challenges faced by women are further intensified, hence the untapped economic potential of women remains a lost opportunity for economic growth and development in the region as a whole.

In order to address the issues and challenges of the region, Women Welfare Organization Poonch (WWOP) is implementing a project titled “From Vulnerability to Proficiency: Fostering Economic Empowerment of Women in AJK Region”. This project has been funded by the European Commission (EC) under European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) country based support scheme to promote women’s social and economic empowerment. The target areas for the project are all the 10 districts of AJK, i.e., Poonch, Bagh, Sudhnuty, Muzafarabad, Hattian, Haveli, Neelum, Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimber.

The overall objective of the project is to enhance economic empowerment of the women of AJK; and to enhance the opportunity of their equal participation in the workforce of the region. Another challenge that we face when we study this region is lack of quantified and documented data. In order to deal with this issue a baseline study has been designed as the first component of the project. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) To document current status of the women of AJK, measure their literacy rate and their will to work, identify obstacles in the way of their economic growth, and collect data on their existing skill levels; and 2) to design training workshops for capacity building (another major component of the project design) of the beneficiaries identified in this project and make recommendations for future developmental initiatives.

This report is a result of that study which is based multi-staged random scientific sampling methods. The sample size of this study was 3840 women, thus $n=3840$, and both the qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the research. Two sets of questionnaires were designed for the quantitative part of the study with samples collected both from the unemployed women and employers in the target region. In addition, two sets of questionnaires were developed for the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) conducted directly with various groups of stakeholders to obtain qualitative data.

This report has been divided into seven chapters with a Reference List and Appendices. During the writing of this report, it has consistently been ensured that the findings and analyses of the study are substantiated by arguments drawn from the existing literature on women empowerment, role of women in economic development of a society, and national & international gender perspectives on socio-economic development. The referencing style used in this report is MHRA.

Chapter 1 of this report is an introduction to the issues and problems of the region, the rationale of the study, overall and specific objectives of the study, target groups that have been sampled in the surveys, the historical background of the region with perspectives on socio economic and political indicators of the society, and the desk review to build an argument from the literature.

Chapter 2 deals with the methodology of this research. In this section a detailed description has been given on the overall design of the research, how the tools were developed for the study, and how those tools were utilized in the survey for quantitative data collection, and in the FGDs and IDIs for the qualitative data. The analysis of the data collected through these tools have also been part of this chapter.

Chapter 3 outlines the results of the study. The results of the research have been grouped under three categories: Barriers, Potential opportunities, and Training Need Assessment. The barriers are further grouped under six main themes: Education, training, and skills barriers, industry and career opportunities barriers, transportation and housing problem, socio-economic barriers, structural discriminations, and system limitations. The purpose of dividing the results into main themes is to categorize various apparently related issues by isolating them from their individual contexts. This method will help us in finding the right solutions with scientific evidence collected through this survey.

Chapter 4, 5, and 6 are Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations of the research. These chapters are interrelated and analyse how the narrow specific focus of the research is linked with the wider context of the issues and related to the global perspectives on women empowerment and gender perspectives on the socio-economic development of a society. This section will also look into the limitations of the study, and the results found thereby. At the end of the study the recommendations are given to solve the problems of the women of AJK and to take advantage of the available opportunities to them.