

## Governance Issues of Girls' Education in Pakistan: Key Concerns, Challenges and a Way Forward

Saubia Ramzan

Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan

Tel: 0092 3458341307 Email: saubia7@yahoo.com

### Abstract

The battle for gender justice has been a long drawn struggle. Girls hold a distinct character in every social structure. Societies have improved their socio-cultural structures and economic pursuits through girls' education around the globe. Social consciousness and acquisition of knowledge support girls to become empowered in the society. The paper reveals the problems and challenges in the governance of girls' education in Pakistan. It discusses various key issues and challenges in the good governance of female education in a developing society. The study comprises of qualitative analysis, reviews and semi-structured observations using the triangulation approach. The paper critically analyses various programs for girls' education in the perspective of legal and strategic alliances with different public, private and non-governmental sector. It explores that progression in girls' education is dependent on good governance by recognizing the socio-cultural, political and economic rights of girls in the society through eliminating the violence and sexual harassment practices. The paper further proposes a way forward for a framework of good governance of girls' education in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Girls' Education, Governance Issues, Equality and Equity, Socio-Cultural Structure, Empowerment, Autonomy, NGOs, Decentralization, Good Governance.

### 1. Introduction

Societies around the globe have improved the economic, social, political and cultural lives of the nations through education. Education plays an imperative role in raising well groomed human capital in the society through skill development and capacity building. Skilled human resource produces effectiveness and efficiency in performance thus contributing towards self-sustained society. Well-orchestrated and easily accessible education system for all guarantees the progression of a country. Equality and equity in the provision of educational facilities reasonably result in building intellectual capital among the masses if provided without socio-economic divide. Many societies face lack of awareness of the concept of multiple femininities and masculinities in the discourse on education, Pakistan has no exception. Contrary to this view, acquisition of knowledge and consciousness are conducive for girls in order to empower them in the community. Education enhances the cognitive ability by raising the sense of self-esteem among girls for achieving a desirable social setup in the country. This proves to be a strategic reserve for the progression of a society.

Desaulniers (2009) states in the article on "Educating Girls in the Developing World" that the most viable solution for gender equality and socio-economic independence in the developing world is universal education for girls. It further argues that international organizations like United Nations and World Bank deem girls' education as a primary catalyst for economic growth and stability for developing region. The author added that girls' education can yield highest returns on all investments in the developing world by bringing meaningful changes in their communities. This concept is further elucidated as follows;

"The reason is that educated girls tend to make personal benefits communal, thus extending the possibilities for further growth and returns. Expansion in women's labor force and earnings has translated into widening circles of economic and social stability. Matriarchies or leadership based on woman power are often nurturing and community oriented.

First of all, a mother's education is replicated in her children's initiatives. Children, especially girls, with an educated mother are more likely to seek similar opportunities and achievement. Each additional year of formal education attained by the mother means longer retention in school for her children.” (Desaulniers 2009)

It reflects that girls' education plays a pivotal role in social development of a community which eventually would contribute towards restructuring of societies. There has been a consensus on the issue that educational reforms are imperative while fair accessibility and participation of girls to educational opportunities has been critical in Pakistan. It is significant to mention that education sector needs to be governed and managed effectively and efficiently in order to fulfill the global knowledge economy. Improved quality of teaching and learning, autonomy in decision making and balanced contemporary approach in policy formulation are the key issues for the governance of girls' education in the country. Good governance contributes an imperative role in the institutional as well as corporate sector of the society. Blom and Cheong (2010) indicate that good governance underpins the support and mission of the institutions, creating sound, ethical and sustainable strategy acceptable to the institutions as a whole and other key stakeholders. It further states that good governance oversees the implementation of such started though well considered processes and procedures in an open, transparent and honest manner guaranteeing autonomy of the institutions. This perspective vividly portrays that female education remains neglected when it is not provided with full autonomy in strategy formulation and transparency in implementation processes. In this context, the acquisition of knowledge and values for girls has been a significant concern in Pakistan which depicts shortfalls in governance of girls' educational system that has not yet been conducive for girls in the region. It has been observed that good governance models can work when applied practically on the principles in the developing sector. Girls' education has been a serious subject regarding public and non-governmental sectors in Pakistan but desirable targets have not yet been achieved. Harmony in views exist that weakness in implementing the strategies for girls' education in Pakistan remained a crucial problem in terms of achieving the desired ends. Governance of girls' education is faced by critical problems and challenges in decision making, controlling the resources and accountability among communities. Good governance in education sector specifically for females require evolving processes, restructuring of institutions, intelligent organization of matters and collective negotiation among communities. The intelligent solution lies in the implementation of principles of governance by bridging all constituencies influencing a girl's life to ensure her right of education.

This paper focuses on major key issues and challenges to the governance of girls' education in a muslim society like Pakistan. Following text presents some critical issues and framework of governance of girls' education in Pakistan.

Government estimates of the overall dropout rate suggest that only 30 per cent of students continue beyond the primary level (Planning Commission, 2009). The literacy rate (for population aged ten and over) has improved by barely one to two per cent per annum over the last decade, which makes it impossible to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015. Recent surveys indicate that the literacy gap, always much more pronounced in rural Pakistan, has also 'improved' but is still strongly associated with gender. The majority of those missing out on education are the most vulnerable and economically marginalized segments of society, including women. Only 35 per cent of rural women above the age of ten have completed primary education (PLSM, 2008). Pakistan still enrolls 83 girls for every 103 boys in primary schools. The primary completion rate for girls is only 58 per cent as opposed to 70 per cent for boys. Of the 6.8 million currently estimated to be out of school in Pakistan, at least 4.2 million are girls (World Bank, 2008). In some parts of Baluchistan, adult female literacy ranges from one to three per cent – one of the lowest levels across the world (PSLM, 2006-07).

It can be analyzed that attainment of education with the gender distinction exists in Pakistan along urban and rural divide. UNESCO (2009) reported that one girl for every three boys attends school in the poorest rural households. The observations have been the result of surveys conducted by United Nations Conventions to eliminate discrimination against women but the gap still exists along gender and income lines. The statistics

about girls in rural areas above the age of ten having completed the primary education is only 35% according to the survey conducted by Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurements: 2008 which is significantly low. The completion of primary education for girls depends on the quality of teachers and facilities provided at the primary schools.

Major issue confronting girls' education governance is lack of legal common framework on which goals should be defined for ultimate achievement. Girls in a muslim federation like Pakistan face many challenges in attaining educational facilities due to wrong perceptions about religion in the society. Despite increased awareness about the significance of female education in Pakistan, drastic changes have been at slow pace. The attitudes are deeply rooted in traditional form of structures of family and gender roles. Following text by Qureshi & Rarieya (2007) elucidate this idea as;

“The feudal culture and the absence of democracy (and democratic attitudes) also promote inequalities by creating powerlessness among large sections of poor people, including women. Feudalism perpetuates an unsafe environment where the disempowered in general, and girls/women in particular, are vulnerable to assault, kidnapping, physical violence and honour killing which is often socially, and until recently, legally condoned.

The above attitudes find sympathy in a rigid and restrictive and often misleading interpretation of the status of women in Islam which is also used to create barriers for women's access to family and public resources.”

The mentioned text reflects that such socio-cultural constraints restrict girls to participate in productive concerns causing great hindrance in governing the girls' educational institutions in the society. This scenario is worsened in rural areas while urban sectors somehow present better environment of education for girls but there is no such legal protection that exist on the part of government to eliminate such issues from amongst the society. (Rihani 2006) reported in AED annual report that there are greater gender disparities as well. Girls' educational attainment in Pakistan continues to lag behind the level of education attained by boys. This is seen in school enrollment figures and literacy levels which reveal that large number of girls have limited access to even basic schooling. It further states that the overall literacy rate in Pakistan is alarmingly low at just 18 percent for rural females. The most serious gender gaps in Pakistan are in the rural regions of the country. According to an article “Governance and Education” by Soomro (2011), an analysis conducted by a national NGO Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO);

“This must be juxtaposed with the fact that in many areas of Pakistan social norms and mores are already averse to girls' education. The lack of basic facilities in a large number of schools is a clear example of the low priority accorded to girls' education. The prevailing conditions contribute towards creating poverty of opportunities for girls who are discouraged at the very first stage: that of education. Perhaps with an idea already of the situation, SPO did not collect data about the availability of facilities such as computers, libraries and science labs. Ideally, all these facilities would be available in Pakistan's schools if our policymakers were serious about their commitment to providing equitable education.

A lot of money is earmarked in each year's budget to improve school facilities. Where does that money go and why have we seen no improvement despite the sums poured into education? Who should we apply to for information on the whereabouts of the funds? While it is true that funds for education are relatively lacking, the fact remains that we must ensure greater transparency and accountability in the utilization of whatever funds are available. Otherwise, plans for a percentage increase for the sector in the GDP allocation will be viewed with suspicion.”

Taking this into account, girls' education has never been considered as priority by the stakeholders, therefore, the amount invested in raising the standard and quality of girls' education has no accountability. Moreover, another issue for promoting girls' education in Pakistan is insufficient financing and low government spending. These are eminent realities of this society which have resulted in overall poor performance. There

is no such public ally available for gender segregated analysis of the distribution of the budget in government documents, however, annual reports of non-governmental sectors reveal that a gender gap in public expenditure on boys' and girls' education exists in Pakistan. Qureshi & Rarieya (2007). On the other hand, government lacks strategic planning at institutional levels for girls' education which is another considerable concern that causes hindrance in its authority. Intelligent strategies for affordability, equality and equity, access and quality are required for introducing girls' education at the end of governing bodies. Policies are designed but implementation is not ensured for the specified period of time. It has been observed that there is no such alignment of strategies with the state's priorities, therefore, these strategies remain useless unless practically implemented.

Evidently, training and Development processes result in premeditated progression of individuals and organizations. Dearth of appropriate professional development opportunities for faculty and institutional leadership has negative impacts on the governance process of girls' education. It further generates lack of expertise in mentoring and technical assistance to the institutions resulting in weak structure of female educational programs in Pakistan. Furthermore, there is a prevailing attitude of lack of alliances within academics and industry thus keeping the education sector segregated from the practical learning environment. Moreover, collaboration in the strategy formulation at social, political, economic and educational levels is lacking which reflects that single strategy for educational reforms cannot prove to be fruitful for such socio-cultural environment. Sexual harassment and violence practices are common evils in the society, therefore, consciousness need to be raised for such evils for promoting girls' education in the region.

Based on the above debate, a framework for resolving the governance issues is presented in the following text providing a way forward for governing bodies in Pakistan.

## **2. A Way Forward for Good Governance of Girls' Education**

Following are the propositions for proper governance of girls' education in Pakistan that can support to restructure the declining education system.

### **2.1 Legal Framework for Governance of Girls' Education**

There is a dire need of proper constitutional framework for girls' education in order to protect the legal rights of females in the community. This would encompass clear statements of objectives and responsibilities of governing bodies with autonomy and accountability. The proposed measure would enhance the sense of responsibility among boards and executives and improve the awareness of rights among individuals. Administrative and academic governing bodies may be protected against the external pressures of different groups. Moreover, the structure of girls' education would be constituted as an autonomous institution in Pakistan which would be enabled to protect its rights in the society.

### **2.2 Strategic Planning**

The issue under debate depicts that one of the major governing issue confronted to girls' education in Pakistan is lack of strategic planning. It requires intelligent planning and decision making at all level that could serve as strategic reserve for the empowerment of women in the country. There is a strong need of alignment of policies with the national priorities for accessibility, affordability, equality, parity and quality of education for girls. This issue needs to be addressed on the basis of diversity in education observing the rights of girls to be educated regardless of religion, race and ethnicity. Such strategies can prove to be a restructuring agent for the glass-ceiling that exists in Pakistan for the provision of educational opportunities to girls.

### **2.3 Autonomy of Institutions and Decentralization**

Autonomy of girls' educational institutions can ensure more responsibility and accountability in processes and procedures. Decentralization of powers and authority is characterized by effectiveness and efficiency in administrative and political pursuits. In the same context, delegation of power is more extensive form of decentralization in which power and responsibility are transferred to the constituent units under the control of central governing body. Decentralization in girls' educational programs is desirable in current scenario where

the provincial units can exercise their authority and responsibility according to the socio-cultural environment. Decentralized processes in education sector play pivotal role in broadening participation in political, economic and social activities in developing countries. This would assist to cut complex bureaucratic procedures by improved government officials' sensitivity and awareness to local conditions and needs. Decentralization process focuses geographically at the local levels by improved coordination at national, provincial and district level programs that would provide better opportunities for participation of local women in education.

#### **2.4 Alliance of Public, Private and Non-Governmental Sector**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) globally play an eminent role in advocacy and provision of girls' education as compared to public sector. Therefore, alliances could be developed from amongst public, private and NGO sector in order to ensure optimum utilization of resources and professional skills. Long term partnership would enable the government to restructure the girls' education setup within the country to resolve insufficient financing issue. Such partnerships will strategically support the education sector in terms of provision of better physical infrastructure, trained faculty and pragmatic approach of teaching and learning for girls. One of the expected outcomes of such alliances is the increased participation of women in education and its management. In this perspective, positive impact of this partnership eventually results in building schools for girls, involvement of local women in operating institutions and autonomy to community based organizations (CBOs) to mobilize women for work. Moreover, the study about the developmental works in girls' education in the past decade reflect that village education committees, social action programs and community education foundations have proved to present more potential of work in such alliances.

#### **2.5 Coalition of Ministries for Recognition of Girls' Rights**

All such efforts remain raw until coalition of two important ministries of education and women development is formed. Alliances of these ministries can promote coordinated planning and evaluation of innovative policies and programs for girls' education. Girls' education at all levels is highly associated with the recognition of their socio-cultural and economic rights that can give them a required status in the society. Acceptance of women's social and economic rights and protection from sexual harassment and violence is the major stride in recognition of their educational rights. Therefore, coalition of social, political and financial strategies for girls is the overwhelming practice toward their overall development instead of a single educational strategy.

#### **2.6 Training and Development of Leadership and Faculty**

Training and development is a consistent process for organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Lack of strategic planning and critical thinking are the result of weak professional development of academics and administrative bodies. Training and development processes with innovative approach need to be launched for educational leadership and faculty in order to provide advocacy for girls' education in the region. Proper professional development would result in intelligent decision making, problem-solving and cognitive skills among administrators thus equipping them with better understanding of the issue.

#### **2.7 Girls' Education Information System - GEIS**

Girls' Education Information System – GEIS would assist the decision makers for data validation, reporting and problem solving with complete informational technology assistance. This information system would serve as a strong tool for teaching and learning environment. The GEIS would provide a platform for global networking that can integrate various other international networks in order to extend assistance for strategy formulation, academic partnership and resource sharing. Simultaneously, technical assistance needs to be provided to the girls' education sector for its operation and optimum utilization.

#### **2.8 Monitoring and Evaluation Process**

There is still a dire need of consistent process of monitoring and evaluation of such projects which will guarantee its performance and effectiveness leading towards a way forward for setting the needs of future programs. This would ultimately indicate the gap between the current and expected performance which will form the foundations of need analysis resulting in establishment of objectives for fresh and innovative



programs. Therefore, this process proves to be a strong pillar in chalking out the objectives for future programs thus enhancing the performance of current projects.

Concisely, the review of policies and practices during the past years depict that there has been a consistent acknowledgement of the need of strengthening the girls' education programs with the intention to achieve gender parity. Various programs have resulted in increased participation of girls to educational institutions but government has not been successful in achieving the millennium development goals by recent years. Problems like dropout rates, low enrollment rate and increased gender gap are still confronted by the governing bodies. The statement of increased participation does not match with the targets, however, reform interventions mainly depend on improved allocation of budget in girls' education with the involvement of donor agencies to upgrade its status. Close vigilance on accountability, corruption, political interference and underutilization of funds is the need of time.

Additionally, a greater challenge in governance of girls' education is to improve the status of education at primary as well as higher education level while Pakistan education policy and programming have mainly focused primary education of girls in the provinces with community participation. Universal primary, secondary and higher education of girls should be the desirable goals of government. This cannot be done until such programs are coordinated among education ministry and the ministry of women development. The semi-structured observations of this study reveal that protection of woman's social and economic rights from violence and sexual harassment would only ensure her rights of education in Pakistan. Moreover, educational improvements depend on several interactive factors like promoting gender-parity and equality in education at all levels to contribute the socio-cultural and economic contexts. Intelligent good governance is required to recognize the socio-cultural and economic rights of girls thus by promoting the rights of girls' education in the society.

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