

## Women's socio-economic empowerment, Sustainable Development Goal 05, and Pakistan's commitment: an assessment

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyse the condition of women's socio-economic empowerment in Pakistan and its position regarding Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which relates to “gender equality and women empowerment”. The paper highlights the socio-economic dilemmas of Pakistani women and discusses the impediments they face in the exercise of their fundamental rights. The article establishes that while Pakistan is making constant efforts to draft pro-women laws, the country continues to face critical challenges regarding its effective implementation. The question is, what are the programs, strategies, schemes, and plans that government, its institutions, civil societies, and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) can introduce and incorporate to improve women's circumstances and safeguard their interests? This paper identifies the discrimination against women as the root cause behind their socio-economic stagnation, it thus concludes that national development is not possible until gender parity and empowerment of women is implemented in its true letter and spirit as guaranteed in “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan” and other laws of land respectively.

**Keywords:** SDGs, Pakistani Women, socio-economic empowerment, socio-economic rights, gender equality, women empowerment, gender discrimination.

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## 1. Introduction

SDGs were adopted by the United Nations' Organisation (UNO) in 2015; it's a universal plan forwarded by the UN to ensure the well-being of individuals across the globe. It comprises of 17 Goals with the aim to end poverty, promote the well-being of individuals and achieve global peace and harmony, special focus has been given to end discrimination against women and to ensure their development and welfare. A target is set to achieve these SDGs by 2030. Each SDG forwards a distinct measure and collectively, all SDGs are closely inter-connected to achieve the global target of peace, equality and prosperity (The Global Goals for Sustainable Development, 2015; Fatima *et al.*, 2020).

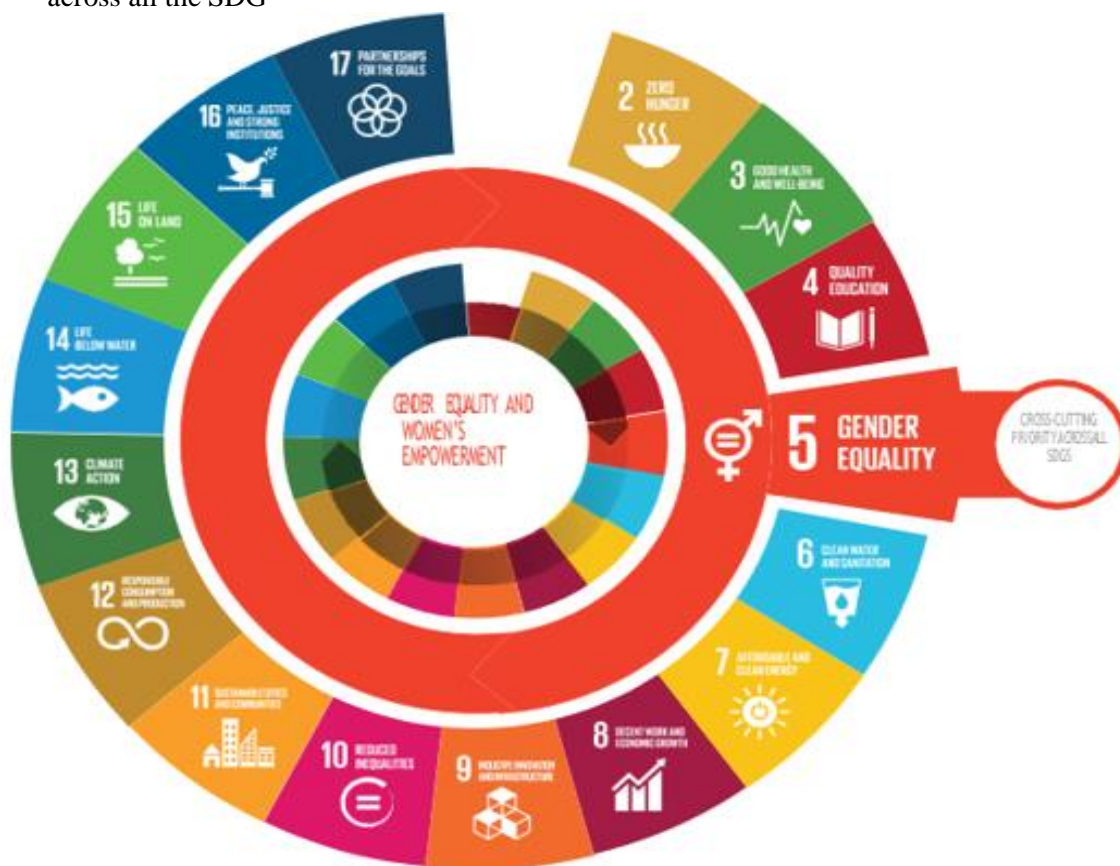
Women constitute almost half of the World's total population; hence, no global progress is possible until women are guaranteed effective opportunities for their development. SDG number 5 attempts to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". It comes with 9 targets to attain the said notion. All these targets attempt to create actions to end discrimination, forced marriage, violence and exploitation against women and girls, to ensure their full socio-economic and political development, to promote shared domestic responsibilities and access to productive health and to adopt, promote and strengthen the laws and policies related to gender parity and empowerment of women (The Global Goals for Sustainable Development, 2015).

In February 2016, Pakistan incorporated SDGs into its national development plan/agenda and thus became 1<sup>st</sup> among 189 other UN member countries to adopt SDGs (PILDAT, 2019). Women make up almost half of the 207.7 million population of Pakistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Pakistan has inaugurated various laws, policies, programs and development strategies and has been a part of various international commitments to protect women's rights and ensure their development. However, Women in Pakistan continue to suffer all kinds of vulnerabilities, violence, socio-political disparities, economic stagnations, and inequalities in all spheres of life.

Thus, the discriminatory practices against a woman start at home, where mostly the family's attitude towards the birth of a female child is not welcoming and the situation seems more complex as we move ahead with the notion of women empowerment. Hence, from forced marriages to poor reproductive health-care facilities, lack of efficient and equal educational opportunities, unfair working conditions, unequal wages, unsafe working environment, inadequate representation at national forums, to domestic and sexual violence, their difficulties have no end. Consequently, the scant resources, weak application and implementation of laws, poor execution and planning strategies, and cultural and traditional practices that find no appreciation from the teachings of religion can be argued as the main reasons behind these issues.

This article aims to analyse relevant policies and measures taken for socio-economic development, highlight the discrimination women face because of their gender, address key socio-economic issues of women in Pakistan and analyse normative frameworks of Pakistan's commitments towards attaining SDG 05 specifically. The methodology used in this article is qualitative. Material is taken from books, articles, reports, and technological sources for analysis on the subject.

Figure 1: Gender equality and women's empowerment as a stand-alone Goal 5 and cross-cutting priority across all the SDG



Source: UN Women Report (2018)

## 2. Literature review

Women empowerment, their fundamental freedoms and disparities that they are facing in different spheres of life is a subject of growing research. Hence, extensive material in the form of articles, books, legislation, reports and other regional and international documents etc. is widely available. The data relevant to present study includes the report titled as “Pakistan’s Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. It’s a voluntary national review for analysing Pakistan’s performance regarding SDGs. Pakistan’s position with regard to women empowerment and challenges they are facing in various socio-economic areas have been highlighted. The data shows that Pakistan is making continuous efforts with respect to SDG 5 and has adopted several key initiatives to improve socio-economic condition of women. (Pakistan’s Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019).

The Bureau of Statistics Pakistan has published a report that includes data regarding the participation of men and women in various sectors. The report assisted in analyzing the ratio of proportion of women in distinct economic arenas like employment, agricultural and industrial sector etc. Analysis of report shows that the ratio of women’s participation in almost all the areas requires significant progress. The main issues that are hurdling women to efficiently exercise their socio-economic rights include ineffective implementation of laws, poor execution strategies, cultural barriers, unsafe working conditions etc (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

In Pakistan, women are facing socio-economic challenges in almost every walk of life. Global Gender Gap Index has ranked Pakistan at 151 among 153 countries. The situation of women's literacy, health and employment etc. is anything but satisfactory and requires radical development (Ahmed, 2019). However, on the positive side the concern of government and its effective strategies have shown some significant progress in certain key areas for instance in Pakistan "Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)" has reduced from 276 deaths to 186 per 100,000 live births. Although the number is still alarming yet the evident decrease in it gives hope and a way forward for a better future (UNFPA, 2020).

Pakistan has a series of laws, provisions and policies to safeguard the rights of women and secure their socio-economic and political interests. However, the implementation of these planned strategies remains challenging. An alarming increase has been noticed in incidents of violence against women over past few years. The surge in cases of violence against women is a question mark on the performance of government and its institutions (Dawn News, 2022; Fatima, 2021).

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and Islam has presented an ideal model to ensure women's empowerment and safeguard their rights. The Constitution of Pakistan requires the laws to be in complete conformity with the principles presented by Islam. While Pakistan has a vast list of laws guaranteeing and protecting women's rights, the country is still struggling with the effective implementation of these laws. Along with many other fiscal rights, women in Pakistan are facing dilemmas with respect to exercise of their property and inheritance rights. The government of Pakistan needs to develop a more effective mechanism to address these issues and to facilitate the women to better exercise their socio-economic rights (Rubab & Ahmed, 2018).

The briefing paper on SDG 5 is an in-depth analysis of Pakistan's performance specifically on the targeted goal i.e., women empowerment and gender equality. The global agenda of SDGs is indeed a crucial step to bring reforms across the globe. Women perform crucial part in the progress of a nation and hence no development is possible without taking their empowerment seriously. While women's empowerment is a global issue, it can be even more challenging for countries struggling harder with scant resources, political instabilities, extremism, and unrest. The briefing paper has helped in understanding the real utility of SDG 5 in Pakistan's context (PILDAT, 2019).

This study has put heavy reliance on the official websites of Punjab and KP commission on the status of women and Sindh Government website on women rights. Since 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment of 2010, resources of provinces to work on women's empowerment have been increased. Furthermore, responsibility for making laws, regulations, initiatives and strategies concerning those women's rights issues that come within the compass or scope of respective provinces has also been devolved. Hence, these portals have helped in accessing the initiatives that respective government has been adopting for the protection of freedoms and interests of women. It also aided in analysing the international commitments of Pakistan with respect to women's rights. Likewise, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) has significant contribution in improving economic situation of Pakistani women's, which has been briefly discussed in the study. Official portal of BISP was useful in analysing the program's role for women's economic well-being.

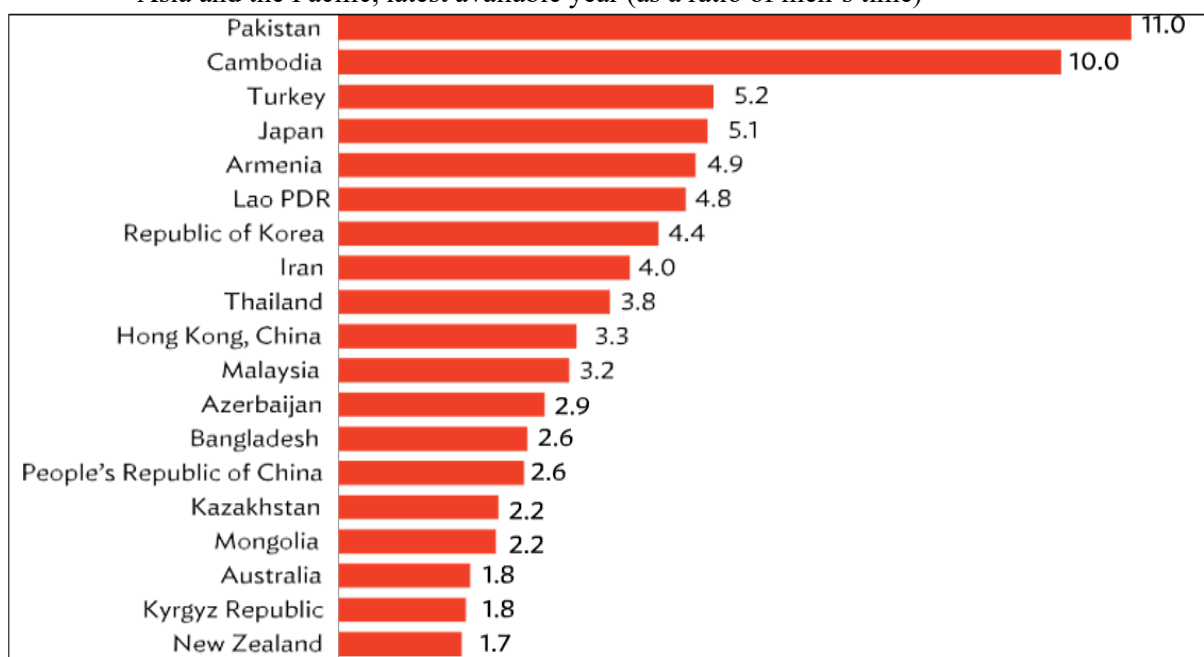
### 3. Discussion and analysis

Women empowerment is crucial for the progress of a nation, idea of state’s prosperity is not possible where women are denied rights and opportunities to empower, develop, and nourish themselves. Among all the other dilemmas that Pakistan has been facing since its independence, the gender discrepancy remained a paramount one. Since then, Pakistan has struggled hard to ensure gender parity and protection of rights and freedoms of women; with respect to this government has adopted various initiatives in form of Constitutional and other Legal provisions, development policies and international commitments.

“Article 25 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973” establishes equality before law in general. Its clause three specifically permits state to incorporate special actions for Women and Children. Article 25 thus states: “(1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law, (2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex, and (3) Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.”

Similarly, “Article 34 of Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973” also deals specifically with women’s empowerment and pledges to ensure their full and effective contribution in all domains of life. Additionally, a landmark effort in this regard was noticed in 2010 where by virtue of 18<sup>th</sup> amendment provinces were guaranteed the responsibility to legislate for women’s right (with respect to issues that come under purview of province) and to take such other initiatives as to improve their condition and ensure their empowerment in different spheres of life. For this purpose, resources of provinces were also increased (PILDAT, 2019; Bhattacharya, 2014). This in return helped in introducing pro-women laws and strategies for their full development.

Figure 2: Women’s time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, selected countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific, latest available year (as a ratio of men’s time)



Source: UN Women Report (2018)

Pakistan has also endorsed various international commitments to safeguard women's right. It has thus ratified several treaties, covenants, and international policies to ensure wellbeing of women. However, despite all these measures the condition of women in Pakistan can't be rendered satisfactory. The population of Pakistan is around 207.7m in total and about half of this are female (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Out of Pakistan's total population nearly 106 million are registered voters, of whom only 44 per cent are women (Umair, 2021). This means that in their registration record, women are at least 6pc less than their actual proportion in overall adult population (Umair, 2021). Moreover, in the 2018 general elections "the male-gap" in voter turnout stood at 9.1 percent, "with about 11m more men voting than women" (Umair, 2021). Right to vote is a democratic right that ensures the representation of an individual in policy-decision making process and has a significant impact in all areas of life and leads change. Curtailing women's voice to vote means undermining their right to make a choice that significantly impacts their socio-political and economic well-being.

A similar study uncovers that in Pakistan, almost 19% of individuals above the age of 18 years do not have Computerised National Identity Cards (CNIC), it is again alarming to notice that out of these 77% are women and 23% men (Express Tribune, 2021). CNIC is the primary legal identification document for 18 years or older Pakistanis. Besides electoral participation, CNIC is also required for a citizen to seek advantage of government financial services, including income support programs, operating and opening a bank account, applying for a passport, obtaining a SIM card, etc. It thus means that a substantial number of people of which majority are women are disadvantaged with respect to the exercise of their fundamental rights and are incapable to benefit from public policies, social protections, health, education services and development schemes and programs etc. (Express Tribune, 2021). The "Global Gender Gap index" held Pakistan at 150 position in terms of economic participation and at 93 position with respect to political gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Similarly, in "Global Gender Gap Index" Pakistan is ranked (third to last) at 151 among 153 countries (Ahmed, 2019). 2019 survey reveals female literary rate at 49% only as compared to male literacy rate that stands at 71% (The News, 2020, November 26). Another report of 2018 prepared by "Pakistan Bureau of Statistics" shows the data of women employment in different sectors, according to report the Labour Force participation rate of women is 22.8% while that of men is 81.1%, similarly the employment-to-population ratio in general stand at 48.9 with ratio of women employment at 20.9% against 77.2% men, likewise the share of women in industrial sector remains at 16.6% against 26.0% men, and women's share in services remain at 17.3% in comparison to men that is 44.4% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

The situation of women reproductive health too is disappointing, a 2020 report shows that Maternal Mortality Rate remains as high as 186 deaths per 100,000 live births (Dawn News, 2020). Another study shows that 60-70% of women undergo some sort of abuse in Pakistan and 1 out of every 5 woman is subject to domestic violence, the ratio has alarmingly raised up to 20% in recent years. Moreover, about 5,000 women die annually because of domestic violence and thousands are left disabled (The News, 2020, November 26).

### **3.1. Laws for protection of rights and interests of women**

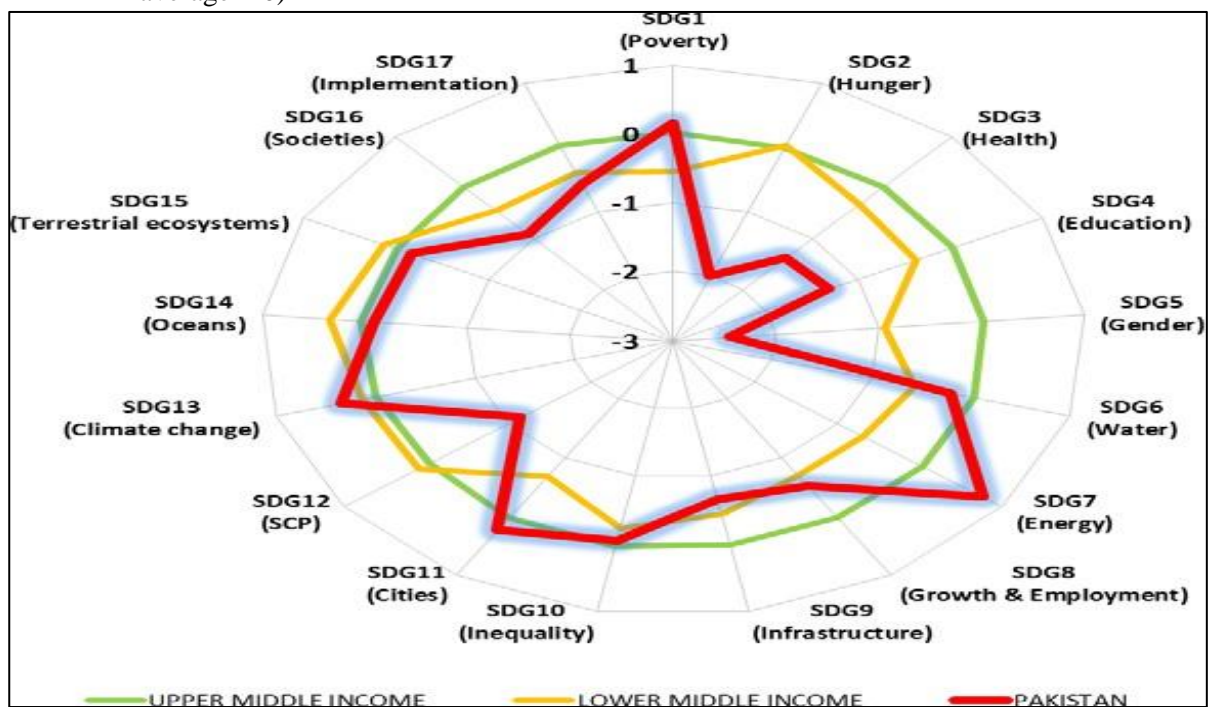
Through the passage of time, Pakistan has drafted series of laws relating to rights of women, various draft in this regard includes:

- Married Women's Property Act, 1874
- Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939
- Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961
- Muslim Personal Law Shariat Application Act, 1962
- The West Pakistan Family Courts Act of 1964
- Dowry and Bridal Gifts Restriction Act, 1976
- Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2004
- Protection of Women Act (2006)
- Protection of Women Against Harassment at Workplace Act, 2010
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010 (on sexual harassment)
- Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act, 2011 referred as Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act
- Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act, 2011" referred to as Prevention of Anti-Women Practices
- The Elections Act 2017
- Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011
- The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection), Act 2012
- The Sindh Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2015
- Lissail-e-Wal Mahroom Foundation Act, 2015
- Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2016
- Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the name or pretext of Honour) Act, 2016
- Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016
- Punjab Women Protection Authority Act, 2017
- Hindu Marriage Act, 2017
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection), Act 2012
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elimination of Custom of Ghag Act 2013
- Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act, 2014
- The Punjab Reproductive, Maternal, Neo-natal and Child Health Authority Act, 2014
- The Balochistan Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act, 2014
- The Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2014
- Punjab Partition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Act, 2015
- Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act 2019
- Women's Property Rights Act 2020
- Zainab Alert Recovery and Response Act, 2020
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Deserving Widows and Special Persons Welfare Foundation Act
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Panahgah Act, 2020
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Vagrancy Restraint Act, 2020

It is noteworthy that “The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendments) Act, 2006”, is claimed to be one of the most awaited laws in women’s rights history of Pakistan. Prior to becoming an Act this bill was presented before NGOs and civil society groups to have ensure a brainstorming discussion as to protection of women. This law brought amendments in Zina Ordinance 1979.

Moreover, in 1998 “The National Plan of Action for Women” was initiated and it is also claimed as one of the most awaited steps of the government for empowerment and progress of women. It was subsequently followed by “Pakistan National Commission on The Status of Women” (2000) and “National Policy on the Development and Empowerment of Women” 2002. Moreover, development departments and commissions were established in different provinces of Pakistan to monitor the progress of women’s empowerment and enhance their participation. With respect to this, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has made substantial efforts to initiate a commission called “The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women.” Similarly, initiatives like establishing “Ministry of Women Development (MOWD) at the Federal level and the Women Development Departments at the four provinces” are also remarkable. These departments are continuously making active efforts to protect rights of women.

Figure 3: Attainment across SDGs for Pakistan compared to different groups (standardscores, world average = 0)



Source: Cho *et al.* (2016)

### 3.2. Pakistan and the United Nations; Commitments towards the socio-economic empowerment of women

United Nations (UN) has made significant contribution toward development of Human freedoms, and safeguard to women’s rights always remained its central focus. Pakistan being a member to UN has always worked to support its cause and aims and hence the efforts of UN

toward women’s empowerment also influenced Pakistan. Hence along with national legislation ensuring women’s rights, Pakistan has always shown full pledge towards the efforts of UN for upholding women’s rights. Pakistan also became a party to the “Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women” in 1985. In 1995 Pakistan became a signatory of the “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”. In 1996, Pakistan ratified “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)”.

With respect to commitments, the obligations of Pakistan only extend to provisions that are in line with “Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan”. Moreover, Pakistan’s international responsibilities also include its reverence for UN principal documents on human rights popularly known as an international bill of Human rights that include United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN treaty body database, n.d.). In addition to this Pakistan also ensured full commitment to UN strategy for Sustainable Development where along with subjects of “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” Pakistan is committed to ensure safe and better environment for women for their full development (Asia Pacific, 2020).

Table-1: Pakistan Vision 2025: Enablers, pillars and corresponding SDGs

Pakistan Vision 2025		Sustainable Development Goals
Enablers and pillars	Goals	
Enabler I: Shared national vision		SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions
Enabler II: Political stability and continuity of policies		
Enabler III: Peace and security		
Enabler IV: Rule of Law		
Enabler V: Social Justice		
Pillar I: Putting people first - developing human and social capital	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	SDG 3: Good health and well-being SDG 4: Quality education SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation
Pillar II: Achieving sustained, indigenous, and inclusive growth	8, 9, 10, 11	SDG 1: No poverty SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals
Pillar III: Governance, institutional reform, and modernization of the public sector	12	SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions
Pillar IV: Energy, water, and food security	13, 15, 16, 14,	SDG 2: Zero hunger SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy
Pillar V: Private sector-led growth	17, 18, 19	SDG 8: Decent work and economic Growth
Pillar VI: Developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition	20, 22, 23	SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
Pillar VII: Modernizing transportation infrastructure and greater regional connectivity	24, 25	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Source: Cho *et al.* (2016)

### 3.3. Initiatives and actions by Pakistan on SDG 5: An analysis

It has been established earlier that Pakistan is struggling with the dilemma of women empowerment and challenges to safeguard rights and status of women since its independence.

It is also an undisputed fact that prosperity of nation is not possible without protecting women's rights and granting them efficient opportunities to develop. A recent report shows that there are nearly 60 million women in country that are of working age but only 20% of them are part of "paid labour" ("Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2019). According to the "International Monetary Fund (IMF)" Pakistan stands to gain USD 91.5 billion per year by tackling the issue of gender disparities (Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019).

Here it is crucial to mention that participation of women should not be limited to paid labour only, but their involvement must also be encouraged in all socio-economic and political sectors. For this, landmark initiatives and concrete efforts are paramount. Pakistan has shown deep concern about adopting SDG and accomplishing its broad aim. Pakistan is fully aware of the fact that women empowerment is vital to achieve not only SDG 5, but all 17 goals forwarded by SDGs. In this regard Pakistan is continuously struggling to eradicate all kinds of vulnerabilities and cruelties that women are facing. And it is trying hard to ensure that they get equal opportunity to exercise their social, political and economic rights, as pledged in constitution and other state laws.

As noticed above that while there exists significant gender gap with respect to women's contribution in distinct areas of life, the ratio of their involvement has gradually improved in last few years, for example the percentage of women working in managerial positions has "marginally increased from 0.3 per cent in 2012-13, to 0.5 per cent in 2018" ("Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2019). Moreover, there are 70% women serving in health workforce (Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019). Pakistan's economy greatly depends on agriculture sector, here too the share of women is relatively high with 66.1% as compared to 29.6% men (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Women today are making contributions in every realm including administration, defence, politics, judiciary, medicine, education, agriculture, industry, and other socio-economic domains; though their percentage is comparatively low, still it's a hope and way forward for their effective involvement in future. The electoral participation of women has also improved with 13% increase in registered women voters has been witnessed between 2013 and 2017 (Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019). Improvement has also been noticed in reproductive healthcare system in the sense that "Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in Pakistan has decreased from 276 deaths to 186 per 100,000 live births" (UNFPA, 2020) by prioritising women reproductive health at national level, creating awareness among masses regarding this and incorporating modern techniques in the health-care sector can rightly be credited for this. Hence, while these progresses give hope for a better future there is still long way to go.

Pakistan pledges a strong commitment to women's empowerment and with respect to this, has taken various measures and initiatives at federal and provincial levels. For instance, "establishment of tollfree women helpline in Punjab, formation of women-only police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the creation of training and rehabilitation centres in Sindh and across the country." To ensure women's development "Federal and Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women" are making concrete efforts. Laws concerning "The Maternity Benefits" have been reformed to facilitate women. Laws to prevent violence and harassment against women have also been introduced. To guarantee empowerment of women quota system has been designed to ensure significant employment of women in public sector, furthermore

on the boards of statutory bodies and public sector organizations, at least 33 per cent representation of women have been made necessary by the government (Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019).

The 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2018-2023) has significant focus on improving female labour force participation from 14.50% to 24.50%. Other development strategies introduced to ensure women development, include inauguration of economic empowerment schemes like "one woman, one bank account plan" institutionalization of the "Gender Equality & Women Empowerment Policy" (2019-2023) etc. ("Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2019). Special SDG units have also been established at the Planning Commission and provinces. All these policies ratify to support girls' education, promote socio-political and economic advancement of women, encourage their effective contribution in various spheres, create opportunities for their welfare and development, and to ensure their wellbeing and social protection etc.

### **3.4. Challenges for socio-economic empowerment of women**

Women can only enjoy their freedoms and make best of their opportunities when they are given a safe environment. In Pakistan violence against women has reached at an alarming level, violence has many forms it includes domestic, psychological, and sexual violence, economic exploitation, human trafficking etc. with increase in use of technology and online work women are more exposed to cybercrimes. In addition, women also tend to be more prey to harmful practices like honour killing. A report of 2018 asserts that in Pakistan, there are around 1,000 "honour killing" cases each year (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The issue of early marriage can diminish the right to girls' education and can lead to their economic stagnation, it can also prove dangerous for their health or even fatal for them (PILDAT, 2019).

Moreover, with many other challenges that discrimination against women can lead to, their economic stagnation remains a significant one. For the protection of economic interest of women, Pakistan has drafted laws to protect employment and property rights of women, and to facilitate the exercise of their right to Inheritance and Dower (*Mahr*). However here too, the prejudicial cultural practices violate the laws of country. Woman thus are restricted to demand Dower if not paid already, and practices to unlawfully deprive women from their right to inheritance are common (Rubab & Ahmed, 2018). Furthermore, excessive burden of household chores is also greatly affecting them, this unbearable burden can adversely impact their health and social wellbeing.

Besides discrimination, poverty, lack of transport facilities, safety and educational infrastructure also act as barriers for girls' education in Pakistan. Lack of adequate education can increase economic stigmas of women and reduces their chance to get decent employment. In service sector too along with insufficient employment opportunities, the issues of unequal wages, unsafe work environment, low maternity benefits, unfair working conditions and workplace harassment increase miseries of women. Furthermore, violence against women also remains one of the main reasons behind their plight, Pakistan is ranked as the sixth most dangerous country in the world for women, and seventh in sexual violence, including domestic violence (Siddiqui, 2020). A 2020 report claims that in Pakistan around eleven rape cases are reported each day (The News, 2020, November 26). This alarming situation of violence questions the performance of law enforcing agencies and implies that the laws drafted for

women's protection and safeguard seem effective on papers only. Until challenges like political disability, scant resources, prejudicial cultural norms, and lack of effective implementation of laws and executive policies, are not overcome the target of gender parity, women empowerment and prosperity of nation can't be achieved.

#### **4. Conclusion and recommendations**

SDG 5 deals with "gender equality and empowerment of women" it is of crucial importance to ensure prosperity of nation and is closely linked with all other 17 goals set under SDGs. Women empowerment has an overriding significance for development of country and for this protecting women's rights is vital. Since its independence Pakistan has struggled hard to eliminate issue of gender disparity, for this Pakistan has incorporated excellent laws in form of constitutional provisions and other national and international legal instruments, however fragile execution strategies, limited resources, lack of education and awareness among masses and orthodox cultural practices remain challenging in this regard. Notwithstanding all the challenges Pakistan government pledges its firm commitment to accomplish the aim of SDG 5. Pakistan's efforts in women empowerment include, gender responsive initiatives like Victim Support Services for women and children (Shahid, 2020) "creation of training and rehabilitation centres in Sindh and across the country, and policies like Bolo Helpline, and establishment of women-only police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" that is also an integral part of police reforms aimed to help women.

Similarly, Gender responsive budget schemes like Benazir Income Support Program has indeed developed long term effect in fiscal development of women. Likewise, Punjab Women Development Policy (implementation framework 2020-2024) is actively working along with other national Women Development Departments (WDD) to empower and benefit women. Relative increase has been witnessed in the "number of young women, (between the ages of 15-24 years of age), in higher education and entering professional categories in the workforce" (Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019), moreover, Pakistan has also planned country's first all-women market to boost women's economic participation and empowerment (Jamal, 2021) which also gives hope for better future. It is critical to realise that the notion of gender equality and women's empowerment requires long-term planning and constant and active efforts.

The role of religious scholars in creating awareness among individuals on role and women's status in Islam can prove fruitful in educating public on Islamic concept of gender equality and women empowerment, likewise role of religious scholars must also be encouraged in suggesting such further initiatives as to facilitate the exercise of rights of individuals in accordance with principles of religion. And while the government have primary responsibility in this regard, other stakeholders, civil society groups, media, academia, non-government organisations (NGOs) and public in general must also play its role in reaching the desired target. For this developing significant strategies like educating public, spreading awareness among them through media, holding discussions with them at grassroot as well as at national level, ensuring the efficient application of existing laws and executive plans or strategies, introducing new laws and policies where required, developing human resources, enhancing fiscal support to women through finance programmes at micro and macro level, making effective use of reports related to subject in consideration and developing better reporting and monitoring system for this can be brainstormed.

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