

**The Status of Women Education in Merged District Bajaur, Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa**



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Abstract: *Women education plays vital role in the socioeconomic development of a nation. The population of women is about half of the total population of Pakistan. However, in the education sector they are far behind the male population of the country. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially Erstwhile Federally Administrated Tribal Area (FATA) has the problem regarding the gender equality with respect to the literacy rate. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has initiated the implementation of reforms which were introduced as result of the 25th constitutional amendment. This research study is an effort to investigate the factors affecting the women education in the newly merged district Bajaur of Ex-FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. For this purpose, a mixed method has been used to investigate the main reasons creating barriers to women education in the former FATA. The researcher has conducted interviews and gathered data through questionnaire from 100 male respondents in Bajaur district. The major findings of the study depict that the key factors which are affecting women education in this area are the lack of female educational institutions, lack of female teaching staff, inadequate transport system, ineffective education policies, religious conservatism and cultural barriers.*

Keywords: Women Education, Merged District. Bajaur. Erstwhile FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Introduction

Women education plays vital role in the socioeconomic development of a society. Educational institutions train an individual's behavior in a positive and progressive way. It makes society tolerant and productive. It is also observed that the girl's education can increase the income of a family and improves its standard of life. Since independence, gender inequality in education or in literacy rate is high in Pakistan. This gap of gender inequality is wider in the remote areas, which includes Bajaur district formerly an agency of the tribal built. There are several problems and barriers in the field of women education which leads to disproportionate ratio in the male and female education. According to the 1973 constitution of

Pakistan, education is a fundamental right of all citizens but in the most of the rural areas, girls are deprived from their basic and fundamental right (Nazet al. 2013).

It is not only gender inequality or gap between male and female education, but the quality of women education is also a serious issue. Several causes have been reported in different studies for the low quality of female education in the tribal areas. Lack of educational infrastructure from primary schools up to the university level, trained teachers, cultural barriers, militancy, religion conservatism and extremism are some of the main challenges in this respect (Ebrahim, 2012). Lack of government transportation system to the large distance schools creates insecurity in parents to send their daughters to

school in local private buses (Mehdi, 2007). Rampant poverty aggravate the problem further as majority of the population in the area is living in precarious conditions and cannot afford private schools, books and transportation cost.

Though FATA is part of Pakistan since independence in 1947 but till the 25th constitutional amendment, the constitution of Pakistan was not applicable to the tribal region. The region was governed under the colonial era Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) 1901 which is referred to as black law (Faqir 2017). In the post-independence, changes have been introduced in the FCR from time to time but the fundamental rights remained absent. The 25th amendment was enacted in 2018 and FATA was merged with KP. Since then, it is a transition period and different administrative departments, political representation as per the constitution and financial arrangements are being under consideration. This research is focused on girl's education in the Bajaur district in the pre and post-merger. This is a mixed research therefore primary and secondary data was collected and put to the task. Survey and interviews have been conducted in Bajour district. The collected data is critically analyzed.

District Bajaur is the smallest district by area in the newly merged districts. According to the 2017 Census of Pakistan, the total population of district Bajaur was 1,093,684 and the female ratio are 49.056% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistic (PBS) 2017; census 2017). Geographically, it borders Afghan's Kunar province with a 52 km border to the east, district Dir to the northeast side. Different tribes of Pakhtuns are settled in Bajaur which include the Utman Khel in the Southeast of Bajaur, Mamund are in the Southwest, and the Tarkani are in the north of Bajaur. Four major tribes are settled in here, which are Utman Khel, Tarkalanri, Mamund, and Salarzai along with a small population of Safis. The administrative headquarters of the agency administration is located in the town of Khaar. Out of the total population, 99.5% of the inhabitants are speaking the Pashto language. It consists of 7 tehsils: the tehsil Utman Khel is located at the southeast of district Bajaur. Women of the area have several problems in the

field of education. Lack of institutions, cultural restrictions, and other important basic infrastructure are key problems in women education. The majority of children go for Madrassa for religious education where they study only the religious teachings. The girls often get primary education but the lack of middle and secondary educational institutions leads to the discontinuity of their education. All the underlying issues are due to the lack of governance infrastructure and the old colonial FCR laws.

Literature Review

Different case studies have been conducted to analyze and discuss the issues and hurdles to the women education in the merged districts of former FATA and other developing societies. According to the study of (Sarkar, Reza, & Hossain, 2014), the women is always considered as a burden and the male are considered as a source of earning living for their families in the conservative societies. In these societies, a woman is considered as a breeding machine who will take care of their siblings and will do all the chores within the household boundaries. Such conservative people do not believe in female educations and their empowerment in the society. Salik & Zhiyong (2014) described that the gender inequality is rampant in Pakistan, but it is more evident in the form of children education, woman empowerment, woman participation in the decision making, a right of expression, etc., especially in the rural areas of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, former FATA, and Baluchistan province. That is why; these regions have huge poverty and are considered less developed areas in terms of economic, social, political and human resource development. Due to the sociocultural traditions as well as gender discrimination issues, thousands of talented and intelligent girls have no access to the higher education at the university level. The study also highlighted that one of the main reasons behind the female educational backwardness in the rural areas of Pakistan is the low education budget. Furthermore, the study of Shaukat and Pell (2015) reported that female are always discriminated on the basis of gender and the

underlying reason behind this issue is the socio-cultural climate of Pakistan. The rural families are coming under the control of a male member and they frequently adopt an aggressive attitude towards the female education.

Besides the reported factors, the political aspects of the country are also playing an important role in the female education attainment. The ongoing war and terror activities, regional conflicts, extremism, strict culture, and the religious ideology have further affected the female education. More specifically, the inefficient government policies, miserable economic conditions, lack of basic infrastructure and the lack of interest of the national and international agencies have negatively affected the female education in the area. Khattak (2008) concluded that the security issue is also one of the key reasons for not getting the higher ratio of the female education.

In the same fashion, a supportive study conducted by Rana (2008) described that during the Pakistan Tahreek-e-Taliban period, lists of schools were targeted and the workings of different NGOs were banned in the ex-FATA. Previously a number of NGOs were working in the education sector particularly women education, but after 9/11 some of them were targeted and their activities remained limited¹. During January to May, 2008, the Taliban attacked on at least 29 different educational institutions, where 17 female's schools were completely destroyed. Similarly, the Taliban killed at least 61 school teachers and 12 to 25 local and foreign NGOs were forced to stop their working in the ex-FATA during the period 2006-2007². Due to the mentioned reasons, the female literacy rate in the former FATA is quite low and hence, there is a lack of female teachers in the surrounding. A relevant topic investigated by (Naz et al. 2013) stated that in the Pashtun society, there is a lack of female staff in the

government organizations. Hence, the parents do not send their daughters to schools because the teaching staffs are male. The unfavorable school environment as well as the shortage of facilities in schools also reduces the girls education.

An Educational Account of District Bajaur in Pre and Post-Merger

According to UNICEF (2019), Pakistan, is ranked second in the world with the highest number of out of school children. An estimated 22.8 million children between the age of five and 16 years are out of school in Pakistan (Ullah 2020). Five million children are out of school at the primary level, and 60% of them are girls. The distant schools, lack of the teaching staff and absenteeism, the poor quality of teaching, the poor schooling environment, and the cultural bonds are the key reasons of lack of female education in the area. Weak governance and the lack of community participation in school matters are major restrictions towards the female education (Malik et al. 2015). A survey was conducted to see people response to the existing female education ratio, problems, in pre and post-merger scenarios. According to the table 1, a majority of people seemed dissatisfied with the education facilities in pre-merger era. Almost 72.4 percent people responded to the question "Before merger FATA's people were enjoying educational facilities" in "No", the 14.3 percent seemed satisfied with "to a large extent" and 9.5 percent answered with "to some extent". The 72.4 percent people's dissatisfaction shows that though people are pro women education but lack of schools, staff and other facilities on government part are the reason behind these shocking numbers. At the same time during the interviews, the respondents stressed on the government to ensure the necessary arrangements in this regard.

¹ The frontier region became a no go area not only for international NGOs but also for the government functionaries. During the years of war against

terrorism, different military operations were conducted and local people migrated to other areas.

² February 2007

Table: 01

Q11. Before merger FATA's people were enjoying educational facilities.		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	1	1.0
No	76	72.4
Don't know	3	2.9
to some extent	10	9.5
to a large extent	15	14.3
Total	105	100.0

Source: Pilot survey was conducted for NRPU project in Bajaur

In the post-merger as table 02 shows 56.2 seemed satisfied to some extent from merger and reforms. While 14.3 percent, remained satisfied to a larger extent. About 27.6 people seemed

Table: 02

Q16. After merger education sector improved in tribal areas.		
	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	1	1.0
No	29	27.6
Don't know	1	1.0
to some extent	59	56.2
to a large extent	15	14.3
Total	105	100.0

Source: Pilot survey was conducted for NRPU project in Bajau

In Pakistan, the primary school completion rate for boys in the rural area is three times higher than girls, and in the urban area, it is twice higher than girls (Sperling et al. 2014). The gender gap is huge and needs to be brought down. In 2000, the Millienum Development Goals (MDGs) set targets for the whole world in which one of the major targets was to achieve the universal primary education by 2015. Pakistan was the first among few states which integrated MDGs with the state policy and has created MDGs center at the federal level in parliament house in Islamabad and provinces.

According to the article 25 of the 1973 constitution:

“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law”.

First of all the constitutional framework exists

dissatisfied with reforms and merger. They responded with “No” to the question. These statistics shows increase in the ratio of the satisfaction of the people after merger. Further it shows an improvement in the education sector of the merged areas.

since independence and right to education has been provided. As quoted above, the 1973 constitution provides the right to free and compulsory education up to the age of sixteen but under the FCR no such right was provided. However, gender gap, cultural issues and infrastructure are main issues to achieve these targets in due course of time (UNICEF, 2012).

It is an undeniable fact that education plays a fundamental role in the improvement of human capital. Women education is not only limited to developing the personality of a person, but also plays an important role in the social-economic and cultural development of the society. However, due to the negligible financial resource allocation and lack of priorities, education ratio remained low in district Bajaur as compared to the other regions of the country. According to the Naqvi et al (2012) till 2001 annual financial spending's on education in FATA was Rs. 1.5 billion. An increase was seen from the 2001 to 2004-5 and the spending reached to the 2.7 billion rupees. The writer

further argues that according to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) another 1.08 billion was required. According to the District Statistics of 2017 census available on the education department of the Bajaur district's website, the total education ratio is 20% in the district with the ratio of 7.8% and 29.95% female and male respectively. These statistics shows a huge gender bias and gap in the male and female education (Education Department 2022). According to the website, the Elementary and Secondary Education Department Bajaur is the biggest of all departments in the district. The department has 3354 employes and more than 152000 students are learning in 653 government institutions having more than 2240 teachers (Education Department 2022). As the MDGs specified and confirmed by the data, women education in the erstwhile FATA and specifically Bajaur district needs special attention of the both the province and federal government. As previously the looked after of the tribal regions were under the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), but it's track record is not much commendable. Since the start of the war against terrorism, the role of army has been increased in the region but women education remained to be the casualty of this entire process.

Problems of Girls Education: A Locals Account

Education in erstwhile FATA has various problems. In order to get a clear picture, this section deals and discusses various problems in the education sector in the erstwhile FATA, particularly girls education. These problems were identified by locals and people serving on different posts in the administration during interviews conducted in different parts of Bajaur district. During our discussion, we will refer to different respondents as respondent 1, respondent 2, respondent 3 etc.

In the pre-merger era, political parties were not allowed but as far as policy making and their implementation are concerned, they were highly politicized. Government projects were used as political bribery and self-interest was kept above the people's interests. Responding to a question regarding education in the pre-merger era,

respondent 1 who was serving on an administrative position replied that "Every place has a different story. Previously, projects if we talk about education, so, previously it was like a political bribery, because projects were allocated to *Maliks* or to the people who were considered powerful. These projects were not provided on need base. Secondly, proper planning was lacking with respect to the need of the people". He continued "...it was a kind of political bribery in order to make 'some' people happy". When he was asked about the post-merger era situation, he said that it is far better than the previous (pre-merger) era's administration. Answering to another question regarding education in post-merger he said "...the weight of sides (*Maliks* of influential people or faction or communities) was observed previously and currently are awarded on need base as people's representatives sitting in the assembly." Similarly, in the post-merger administration is keeping proper check and balance over projects and administration. Respondent 1 said about the current status of education that "previously political agent or assistant political agents were not interested to visit schools etc." He elaborated "I myself in this month have visited 14 schools. I checked their attendance and performance; quality of education and we maintain checks ad balance. That previous chaos has ended."

A local tribal *Malik* refer to as respondent 2, appreciated the merger of FATA and argued that in the post-merger "change in certain areas could be seen but difficulties in other areas have also been increased. Like education as we were talking earlier, the change is not that much as they are propagating. I am running a girl's school since 2007. We time and again told the administration to provide us building but till now they did nothing. Let me tell you this. Here nothing could be done without money. Jobs are for sale, first money and then your work. I can provide proofs. They sell jobs on the bases of grades." He further said that "...others have launched such schools after mine and they (government or administration) have provided every facility to them. The education officer has done nothing in our case. In our region this is the

only girl's school, but they have done nothing for us. I have talked to the ADC, DC and others but no results. From Banda to Amankot we do not have any girl's school." As argued earlier that distance is a major issue for girls to continue their education. As their parents due the traditional society feel insecure and it is hard for the students to go on foot to distant schools if existed.

Another respondent who is referred to as respondent 3 who is also a government functionary when he was asked about the huge gender gap in education and low literacy rate he said that "as you know the area has been badly affected by the militancy and as a result of the military operations so many educational institutions; like school, colleges etc have been damaged. However, the rehabilitation process is going on and we hope that soon these issues would be sorted out". This is also notable that previously, before the war against terror, education sector was in shabby conditions.

When a local respondent was asked about change in the education sector in the post-merger he said that "till now we have not seen any change. It's been a year and half so different departments have not been established here yet. It is happening but will take time because this is a slow process". Generally the respondent was optimistic about the reforms and merger.

Conclusion

It could be concluded from the discussion that education in general and girl's education in particular is facing different problems in district Bajaur. It includes lack of schools at convenient distances, infrastructure, and transport issues and last but not the least the cultural values. Further, previously, projects in the education sector were used as instrument in the tribal areas and not on need base. Respondents in the Bajaur district appreciated the merger of FATA and hoped that change is coming, however, social changes are slow and it will take time.

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