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## ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE, IMPACT ON RURAL WOMEN

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### **Abstract.**

Social change is an ever-happening social phenomenon. This, as a process of modification targets both the structures and functions of a society in order to make it compatible with human needs. Since it is an eternal truth, which cannot be stopped, it is wise to get ourselves adjusted with social change process and get advantage for the promotion and protection of the interests of humankind. And our interest is the welfare of all human being. Unplanned social change sometime cause negatively due to lack of preparedness among masses. Therefore, it has since long been noticed that social change has been posing certain challenging questions such as; what the direction of change is? What are the sources of change? And can we regulate and guide it according to our need and desires? Assessing prevailing situation, which is not friendly to any segment of population must be focused by both government and NGOs. It is equally important to develop indicators while assessing social change and studying its impact over human being and its entire social system. Improved access to basic social services combined with better living standards and preparedness for digesting new ideas and adopting new practices are few of the indicators for studying impact of social change over ever-deplorable rural women life in the province.

### **Introduction to social change**

Social change is a never-ending process of alteration of structures and functions of a society. Structure refers to institutions such as families, tribal set up, culture and economic patterns etc, and functions refer the activities that are performed by these and many other social structures. Joint family system, for instance, is a social structure. The activities being performed by joint family is distinctively different from that performed by nuclear families. Among joint family system the responsibilities get shared, thus an individual is more at ease than being member in nuclear families. A change in family from joint to nuclear is

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an alteration in structure and functions. From the perspective of social change, it can be widely classified into two categories depending on its nature and types of happening i.e. The planned and Unplanned social changes". The former receives adequate acceptance, thus does not create problems, while the later gives birth too many other issues in a society.

### **Eternity and Inevitability of Social Change Occurrence**

Human societies have never been stagnant altogether. It has been and will remain dynamic. Its occurrence is evident among contemporary societies as changes have been taking place around the globe. However, its tempo, intensity and nature vary among societies across continents depending on their socio-economic condition and geo-political importance at one given point of time. The planned strive for bringing about social changes relatively disturb life lesser than those that are not planned. Lenski Gerhard in his book *Human Societies* states, "Social change can cause social problem if not properly planned; because any new intervention will cause challenging impact over stability of society"xiii. The planned changes, for having alternate sights about the upcoming scenario, receive acceptance and social sanctioning, therefore, do not always lead to controversies, thus may not cause social problem. The unplanned change, on the contrary, faces resistance and seldom receives popularity. Notwithstanding, social change causes social problems; it also prepares ground for occurrence of new social changes. For instance, moving from agrarian society to industrial one has changed moral values of Japanese society by replacing the practicing value system of respecting people on the basis of their age to their productivity. The more productive man and woman receive more respect than how old they are. "At the beginning of this paradigm change of value system, Japanese had difficulty while dealing with one another. However, with the passage of time, this new value got settled and become part of individuality of Japanese and other modern societies"xiii. With regard to structure and functions of society Dr. Parsons' in his famous book "the systems of modern societies" describes the necessary structure and functions as values and practices that are common to all. Community as structure plays the role of integration and functions are the activities that it performs to maintain relationships among certain components and provide social control within that community. The economy as structure plays the role of adoption, while functioning is seeking resources from environment, converting them to usable forms and distribute them to the

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rest of system, and system means every individual human soul of a society” xiii. Another dimension of social is best described by the profound author Pittman, 1991 “social change as a process of identifying something in your community that is not fair, just or humane and developing a process supported by people to address the root causes of the issue in order to change the situation” xiii. This definition refers to the basics of society with more focused view over its prevailing socio-economic problems and issues that hamper smooth functions of society. Apart from complex debate of social structure and functions, there are certain basic questions associated to basic concept of social change. Like, what is the direction of change and where would it lead us? What are the sources of change? And finally, the challenging question of can we regulate and guide it in the direction of our heart’s desires? These and many other basic questions need to be answered because social change is certain and some of it may matter more than others. Social change at macro level has less impact as compare to micro level. “Harper L. Charles in his book ‘American and the World’ says that “in human society individuals strive for stability and security: society may foster the illusion of permanence: the belief in eternity persists unshaken, yet the fact remain that societies inevitably change” xiii. Keeping in view the eternity of social change and society’s responses to its occurrence, it becomes imperative to develop indicators for assessing impact of social change happening. However, separate analysis of a particular aspect of social life is necessary.

### **Situation of Women Life in Rural Areas**

Prior to discuss state of women status and role in rural set up of Balochistan, it is imperative to give an overall overview of women status in the whole country. The entire rural set up of the country is not conducive for women with regard to their social grooming and equal participation. Rural women are confronted with almost similar issues in all parts of the country. The official site of Government of Balochistan states “Everyday reality in Balochistan leads to the conclusion that development needs to be directed towards the uplift of women. Women's equal participation is also fully supported by Islamic teachings and in Pakistan's legislation. Islamic teachings exemplify justice and equality for women, while in the Constitution of Pakistan the full participation of women next to men is endorsed” xiii. In addition, there is the economic

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angle: If women's contribution to the economy is recognized and if women are enabled to utilize their potential in all spheres of life, it would mean an enormous capacity increase for the economic development of Balochistan. "Women social status and economic role vary within the different groups according to the various practicing customs, mode of livelihood and levels of economic well being. However, one salient fact which stands out as a common feature is their relative lack of power vis-à-vis men" xiii. The status of women in rural areas of Balochistan is characterized with powerlessness, vulnerability and dependability. She rarely receives equal treatment in any area among any tribal set up in rural areas of the province. Presently, women despite having a pathetic social status is also prone to certain brutal issues associated to out-fashioned traditions. Forced early marriages, for instance, is one prominent major risk for their survival and dignity that is practiced in many parts of the country. She is not dealt like human, but commodity, to resolve complex disputes and bloody conflicts among tribes in almost all provinces of the country by their male counterparts. She is sold, to earn economic interests, by her own kiths and kin. Her male counterpart and other male family members kill her for no reason. This inhuman act gets justified among rural masses for one obvious reason i.e. protection of vested interested of dominated male population which is protected both by laws and social orders.

### **Ongoing Responses to Women Situation in the Province**

A conceptual framework of realization for improvement of women situation is evident among actors of civil society and educated urbanized masses in the country for almost past three decades. However, intensity of the issue has not been addressed moderately due to its delicacy and sensitivity. The consciousnesses to bring about positive change in present deteriorating situation of women life have led to both concrete and abstract efforts aiming to address its root causes. Many national level NGOs, under the purview of international donors, were formed with the mandate to advocate women issues and influence decision-making mechanism for creating awareness, changing legal framework and practices with major emphasis over male dominance. "A survey of NGOs in Pakistan carried out by United Nation Development Program UNDP in 1991 provides a broad overview of NGOs responses to women's concerns nationally that revealed some interesting points of comparison

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with the work of NGOs in Balochistan. While 30% of NGOs nationally were reported to be engaged in women's welfare activities, only 11% had female principle officers. A comparatively smaller proportion of NGOs in Balochistan declared women empowerment as a complete and partial mandate of their existence"xiii. Aurat Foundation, for example, is one of those NGOs working across provinces on the noble cause of women empowerment. Gender has been mainstreamed as an immediate and necessary aspect in all efforts of NGO community in Pakistan. The continued advocacy campaigns of NGOs supported by the hue and cry of civil sector have induced policy and decision making mechanism at national level. This Credit goes to the present government of General Pervez Musharaf for allocating 33% reserved seats for women at Local Government Level and 20% representation at two other tiers of provincial and national assemblies and senate. This would definitely cause positive changes into women situation in the country.

## **Methods of Assessing Social Change Impact**

How is the world today different from that of your childhood? As you think back over your biography, you probably, remember events as small personal experiences. A comparison of events and prevalence of objects around you, make you, believe that things have changed. But, to recognize the pace and intensity of social change, we need more than a sense of history as it happens to us. We do need a conceptual framework in which to organize our experiences. We do need theories to explain why changes have occurred. We also need to develop indicators for assessing change, know its nature and types. In this regard, we also, need to explore the intellectual wisdom individuals who are already making efforts to bring about change. To make our assessment more focused, it is necessary to select a specific field of life or area of concern. In this study, the indicators are focused to socio-economic role and status of rural women of Balochistan. Based on the findings of the focus group discussions conducted to gauge understanding of activists / representatives from both public and civil sectors. The following seven sectors were found out as indicators for studying the impact of social change on rural women over time.

### **1. Education and Literacy.**

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Accessibility is a major concern while understanding education and literacy status of women. Despite knowing the significance of education one can not continue getting education if there is no school, teacher and educational materials such as books and physical environment etc. An associated issue with access to education is linked with consent of male family members that matters for the most parts. It is commonly observant in various parts of rural areas of Balochistan that girl child's enrollment is not encouraged by elder male population. According to reports of Strengthening Participatory Organization SPO's workshop report "majority of young boys and girls in remote areas of Balochistan do not have access to education simply because their villages do not qualify for having a school. The criteria for opening new school limit accessibility to primary education"xiii. Discrimination on the basis of gender with regard to accessibility to education is prevalent almost in all rural areas of the province. Quality education, however, is a later stage concern. Education is an input that helps improve other aspects of life.

## **2. Basic health Facilities.**

Like education, basic health is also linked with accessibility. Availability of medical facilities will improve situation of health related issues among women. Presently, ignorance combined with conventional mindset that dominates women life due to male counterparts do limit access of women to basic health facilities in one way or the other and increases risks of being healthy. Complicated delivery cases during childbirth, for instance, are dealt with at home without consulting qualified medical practitioners. Alarming high rates of morbidity and child mortality are two indicators of lack of access to basic health facilities in the country. The high rate of infant mortality is conventionally substituted by high growth rate in rural areas of country including Balochistan. Thousands of women die due to unplanned pregnancies and lack of access to basic health advice, health education and health facilities such as family planning methods and reproductive health concept etc. The number of deaths of women of childbearing age (during pregnancy, later or within six weeks after childbirth) in the past 5 years, was 88 for Balochistan, with 74 from rural and 14 from urban areas"xiii

## **3. Economic Status.**

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Since women are rarely bread-earning members of their families, she is generally dependant over male for her necessary and unavoidable expenses of daily life. Her dependency is not confining to her personal needs only; she is not consulted in all other affairs of housekeeping and childbearing. Even, if she does laborious work outside her home and earns some monitory benefits, she does not have control over her income. Consequently, she lives a deplorable life and faces the ugly and cruel face of poverty among her poor family as compare to her male counterpart. Economic dependency has threatened her life in all sphere of life. She is treated as commodity even in matters that entirely belongs to her life. She rarely has access to follow a professional career that she wants and is able to adopt. “The amount of Walvar that her parents receive from the family of groom actually is the price of a young girl who is going to get married”<sup>xiii</sup>. It means that young daughters are sold through taking advantage of tradition such as of Walvar etc in Pashtoon society, which in no case is justified as practicing values system being practiced anywhere in the country.

#### **4. Decision Making.**

Women for being economically dependent are seldom consulted during entire process of decision-making mechanism at family and community level in semi tribal social set up of Balochistan. Male family members decide matters entirely related to women life. Getting married, for instance, is generally dealt without getting consent of young girl. All she is expected to do is to obey elders and follow their biased decisions. This immaterial aspect cultural as group expectation is one of the major characteristics of our culture that has high credibility among the male population. He is the man who decides every single matter of familial and communal life, which puts negative impact over women life and its various functional aspects. In Nasirabad and few other districts of province” karokari / siakari” honor killing is a life threatening risk to women’s life, which is practised by male as a result of their imbalanced and unjust decision making mechanism. No matter how corrupt her male family member may be, she has to bear all consequences. Discrimination on gender ground is more intense and complicated in rural areas mainly due to prevalence of tribal set up, mass poverty, lack of education and access to basic services. Though discrimination affects both genders, the female gender is most discriminated, as she is dependent both economically and socially. ”This cruel and inhuman act of discrimination

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reaches its climax when an innocent woman gets killed by her male family members i.e. husband; father, brother, son or even local informal leaders like Sardar etc. This is, indeed, the most brutal form of discrimination. Regrettably, in most cases, as reports say, the female is not guilty of crime or anti social evil, rather is used by male family/ community members in order to justify his criminal act and protect vested interests”xiii.

For having no voice in decision-making, women suffer for the most part while implementing decisions of male counterparts. The legal protective shields, such as law, do not protect her interest as women. Forced marriages such as the tradition of (wani) and exchange marriages are also prevalent in the province as an immediate outcome of biased decision making mechanism.

## **5. Conventional Thoughts.**

Prevalence of mindsets among dwellers of the rural masses, which do not match with parameters of modern human values, is practiced in certain parts of the province. For example, serious illness cases and psychological diseases are treated unscientifically. Male child receive over attention and love at family and community level as compare to girl child. Superstitious kinds of thoughts and practices are preferred on new concepts of dealing with matters of life. Outdated custom of polygamy is considered as an alternative avenue for giving birth to male baby is still practiced mostly among those having better economic status. Conventional though have stronger place than scientific solutions in all fields of life. Conventional thoughts govern matters of rural life instead of modern scientific human responses.

## **6. Cultural Aspect.**

Cultural belief subdues all matters of human life. However, in most parts of the world this universal truth that culture as a process of gaining and losing new components prevail very little. Men feel strong to keep him attached with old practices embodied in his culture in which women have little freedom of mobility outside home and have to observe purdah strictly. She is not treated equally while taking intake to sustain life. For instance, it is not considered mannered if a lady takes her meal with her male family members,

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rather she should take her meal after her man family members have taken. Another weak aspect of prevailing cultural practice is that individual's life is entirely controlled by the family or head of clan, where individual has no right to say and express his or her opinions. Thus, women for the most part do not know about her rights as human or women.

### **Conclusion.**

Study of social change is a complex and challenging task. It is complex because impact of any change can best be studied while baseline information/ benchmarks are available. However, the issue is best tackled through developing indicators as standardized state of affairs widely sanctioned by civil society organizations and masses. Any change as an impact can be gauged, which might help in devising new effective strategies and projects that can best response issues and concerns of women associated to their role and status. Women situation is not satisfactory, which requires changes both into social structures and their functioning. Consequently, efforts being made both by public and civic sectors need to be modified in order to make it responsive to the needs of the prevailing situation.

### **Suggestions and recommendations.**

Broadly, there is a wide gap between analysis of present situation of women and the efforts being made to improve it. More clarity is needed to best focus the issue and build consensus towards delegating roles around relevant specific themes followed by pragmatic efforts. The following recommendation for various stakeholders is also made.

Civil society organizations should play leading role by taking up the issue of women's deteriorating situation in its totality, advocate and lobby around it to build pressure for influencing decision making mechanism. This is the prime responsibility and due role of civil society organization of the province. The present trend of short-term interventions may be substituted with long-term programs.

Besides NGOs and other people organizations, media should give special attention towards women and organizations that are working to improve vulnerability of rural women in the province. Political parties must also come forward for taking up the issues of women

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and making this the mandate part of election manifesto and party's constitution.

Religious educational institutions, leaders and parties should create enough space in their present approaches. The attitude of labeling cultural hindrance as religious limitations requires to be given up, which will help in spreading the essence of tolerance and co-existence among dominating males.

The prevailing deteriorating situation of rural women can be improved provided that Government becomes responsive to the need of women. Improvement of accessibility to basic services particularly education and health facilities must be dealt on priority basis. Rather womenfolk must be given extra attention and facilities so that they can come forward and continue their educational career.

The existing laws particularly the newly approved "women protection law" should be effectively enforced in order to minimize incidences of violation such as honor killing, unmatched forced exchange marriage and Wulvar etc.

Families should bring about radical changes in its prevailing discriminatory child grown up mechanism. This biased mechanism lays down the foundation for not leaving girl child to gain confidence needed to face the challenges of entire life. She may be treated equally in the process of getting education.

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