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[Evaluating the Efficacy of NGO Project Management: Redefining the Dynamics of Sustainable Women Empowerment]

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute almost half of the world's population yet their empowerment and engagement in mainstream socio-economic and political domain need to be enhanced to achieve sustainable development of women and society as whole. Many non-government international and national organizations are struggling to achieve Sustainable Development Goal- 5 (SDG5) which is pertinent to sustainable empowerment of women, however, their strategies and interventions especially in developing countries have failed to the desired objective. Therefore, the objective of this research is examine the effectivity of NGOs project management strategies employed in developing countries particularly Pakistan and India to achieve sustainable women empowerment. To achieve the objective of the research both empirical and non-empirical data from Scopus and H-index scholarly research have been reviewed thoroughly. A conceptual framework is constructed by combining prevailing understanding of women empowerment in and NGOs perception of understanding the subject notion to highlight the gap in NGOs understanding and their intervention strategies in these countries for women empowerment. The present paper concludes that there are a profound limitations found in the NGO's understanding of women empowerment concept which limit them to devise effective strategies to intervene in developing countries and carry out sustainable women empowerment. The present study reveals that there is a need to develop long-term and effective strategies to bring out systematic change in such societies. Therefore, the paper presents some policy recommendations for sustainable empowerment of women through sustainable strategies.

Key words: Women empowerment, NGO management, Policy recommendation, Developing countries, SDG-5

Introduction

Almost half of the world's population comprises on women, statistically, according to United Nation's summary on "World Population Prospects" (2022), 49.7 % of world's population comprises on women which by 2050 would be equal to that of men. (p.18) However, they make-up two-third of the illiterate population with approximately 129 million girls are out of school worldwide (UNICEF, 2022). This gender disparity in education is even higher in developing countries such as Pakistan and India where women's lives are often complicated by practical challenges in addition to cultural, religious, and gender inequality factors. Over the last thirty years, there has been a recognition of women's critical role in sustainable development as SDG5, with a significant commitment to enhancing their position and contribution. As a result, numerous NGOs, such as

the World Bank and United Nation (UN), have pledged to incorporate gender mainstreaming strategies and have introduced and implemented women's development programs in developing nations.

However, the limited approach of these development programs, their funding and efficiency appear to undermine the organizations' dedication to promoting women's role in sustainable development. This is because, the current intervention strategies by NGOs in developing countries for sustainable women empowerment are predominantly influence by Western framework that is centered on neo-liberal capitalist models such as self-sustainability, microcredit, and financial aid programs. Therefore, the effectiveness of these strategies in contributing to sustainable development and addressing the societal and economic structures that hinder women's role in developing countries is in question. Under this backdrop, it is necessary to reconsider the fundamental principles of the approaches and research designs used in contexts that differ from the Western societal norms and pathways. Such contexts may include societies with a collective self-concept, groups motivated by the sustainable social benefits of the community as oppose to the societies focused more on self-centric development approach. (Hakim et al., 2022).

In the backdrop of the mentioned issues, this paper aims to suggest a policy framework and strategies for its due implementation in developing countries, particularly Pakistan and India, that is based on a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in promoting women's empowerment in diverse cultural and social contexts. The main objective of the current study is to examine sustainability of NGO projects in achieving empowerment of women in developing countries, such as Pakistan, and India, and highlight the limitations of the current approaches to empowerment of women by conducting a conduct a systematic literature review and comparative analysis of the existing literature on empowerment of women and present empirical data from the work of NGOs in this field. By adopting this approach, we intend to identify the gaps in the current strategies of NGOs in relation to the prevalent understandings of women's empowerment. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to contribute towards developing more effective strategies for promoting women's empowerment in developing countries, based on a comprehensive understanding of the complex social and cultural contexts involved. By doing so, we seek to promote a more nuanced understanding of women's empowerment and propose interventions that are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the communities involved, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Objective of Research

- To examine sustainability of NGO projects in achieving empowerment of women in developing countries, such as Pakistan, and India.

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Scope of the Research

Women, as a group, constitute almost half of the population of the world, yet they are struggling for their rights and recognition. In spite of various efforts executed by NGOs, such as World Bank and United Nations, in developing countries like Pakistan, and India, to advance women's position in the society, there remains insufficient financial investment and inefficiency in their intervention approaches, thus, hampering the achievement of sustainable empowerment of women. Moreover, in this pursuit, NGOs employ Western Neoliberal models and modalities, which priorities self-help, microcredit, and financial aid programs which thereby limit their ability to challenge the deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural structures that undermines women empowerment in such contexts. Therefore, there is a dire need to rethink and re-examine their approaches and research designs when applying to non-Western contexts, which includes societies with collective self-concepts that are motivated by collective development rather than self.

Under this backdrop, the scope of the study is to propose an effective policy framework and its due implementation by identifying the key problems and addressing the issues. This is proposed to be done by the of comprehensive literature review using this primary as well as secondary data collection.

Structure of the Research

This research is divided into five main sections. Section 1, introduction, presents brief background, objective and scope of the study. Section 2, Literature Review, is further divided into two sub-sections; i. Conceptualization of empowerment, ii. NGO's role in understanding of empowerment. Section 3, Research Methodology, introduces the methodology adopted to carry out the entire research. Section 4, Discussion and Analysis, presents comparative analysis of different papers on role of NGOs administering women empowerment projects in the selected countries and discussion on limitations of NGOs strategies. In section 5, Conclusion and a Way Forward, a policy framework and its due implementation strategies are proposed.

Literature Review

This section includes the discussion on elements of women empowerment and understanding of women empowerment based on literature review of a significant number of available scholarly works relevant to the topic.

Elements of Women Empowerment

Based on findings of different scholarly research on prevailing conceptualization of empowerment of women, the following elements of empowerment are explored.

Women's Access to Resources; Healthcare, Education, and Employment

Access to resources such as education, healthcare and employment opportunities is directly proportional to emancipation of women. Increased access to education enables women to understand their rights and thereby have domino effect on their agency which enables them to not only transform their lives by getting access to potential employment opportunities but also lives of other women by their active participation in activism. (Kabeer, 2010) Sen (1990) also associates emancipation of women with her possession of more resources. Sen further argues that bargaining power of women in a firm patriarchal structure to get agency and empowerment depends on her strong 'fallback position' which according to him can be strengthened by enhancing women's financial independence. The more financial independence and access to resources women have, the stronger their fallback position will be, hence, the more they will be able to bargain patriarchy for their rights and recognition. (Sen, 1990, p.469) Schuler et al. (1996) further elaborates that the empirical evidences of microfinance programs for women suggest that financial aid can accelerate women's participation in income generating activities which further their access to more resources and improve their livelihood. Not only that some scholars promote women's attainment of their inheritance rights because landownership and access to property not only strengthen women's autonomy but also give them freedom to make their own decisions. (Cooper and Bird, 2012, and Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003)

Women Empowerment as Transformation Process

Women's subjugation exists since the time immemorial and now it is extremely ingrained in this patriarchal world that it has deep roots in almost all the fabrics of the society be it cultural, political, economic or social. The condition is even worse in developing countries especially South Asian states such as Pakistan and India. Therefore, transforming the entire structure of these countries and bringing the paradigm shift from women's subjugation to women's empowerment which may require years to transform. The concept of women empowerment as a process originated from the understanding that when women would become more self-reliant, decision-maker and resourceful, they would be able to bring a paradigm shift in socio-political structure of a patriarchal society. (Kabeer, 2010; Rowlands, 1995, Keller and Mbeve, 1991) However, some empirical studies show that transformation from women's subjugation to women's empowerment is a process of change over time (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001)

Women as an Agent of Change

Women are considered empowered when they are agent of changes instead of being on receiving end of change, which has also been acknowledged in the domain of social inclusion and participation (Rowlands, 1995 and Friedmann, 1992)

For instant, in a study conducted by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), a women from Ecuador argues that to feel empowered, it is essential for a woman to be at decision making position or at least being an active participant in decision making process. In another instance, a woman from Brazil asserts that to be considered as empowered a woman should have freedom of speech and act. Thus, it can be concluded that empowerment comes with power and agency.

Prevailing Understanding of Empowerment of Women

After a thorough review of available scholarly research, the current study presents four diverse yet prevailing understands of women empowerment.

Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming

According European institute of Gender Equality (2016), gender mainstreaming is used as a strategic tool globally to ensure gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is incorporating gender perspective to each and every domain of society be it social, cultural, political or economic. It enables a society to take measures to eliminate gender discrimination and achieve the objective to promoting gender equality. The notion of gender mainstreaming was first discuss in United Nations First Conference on Women's Status in 1975. Since then UN, World Bank and many NGOs have been committed to gender equality and mainstreaming for development. Contrastingly, it has been observed that this commitment is only a part of their policy on paper which is devoid of true implementation and actual development particularly in developing countries. A significant number of evidences are collected where World Bank's women empowerment programs in developing countries are either executed by feminist institutes mainly to fulfill men's interests or executing only microcredit programs which is a temporary solution to women's issues. Therefore, World Bank is often criticize for not fulfilling this gap between policy and implementation. (Lezreg, 2018 & Peet and Hartwick, 1999).

Empowering Women's Voices: Enabling Change and Equality

Empowering women's voices is extremely essential to shatter the existing power structure and changing the existing narrative which marginalizes women and their empowerment. Pillai, Vijayamohan et al. (2009) posit that according to Western feminist scholarship, mainstreaming women's voices is necessary for empowering them. This is grounded in the conviction that empowering women voice would contribute in promoting women's engagement and participation in society thus, leading their empowerment and elevating their livelihood. This concept encompasses promoting empowerment among marginalized women, encourage them to speak their issues and engage them in a dialogue to carry out a feasible resolution of their issues. Elaborating on this concept, Imran, Akhtar et al. (2021) emphasizes

that women's position should be shifted from 'private domain' to 'public domain' where their voice is heard and they must be given significant value in policy and decision making process. In addition, they assert that gender sensitiveness is necessary especially in the patriarchal societies such as Pakistan's where women are still responsible to private domain or domestic affairs which will play a crucial role in mainstreaming women voices even louder and more influential.

Questioning & Challenging Established Power Structure

Foucault's (1982) approach to power posits power as a set of actions that impact others, emphasizing its exercise rather than its mere conceptualization. (p. 777-795) However, it is asserted that power functions as a tool for ideological conditioning and shaping perceptions of masses via constructing narrative that favors established power structures, and repeat it so much so that the individuals either accept this the only way of perceiving the world due to a perceived absence of alternatives or view them as only advantageous and immutable options. (Luke, 1992, Tyson, 2014, Colwill and Townsend, 1999). Notably, patriarchal societies employ power as a mechanism of exerting control over women, consequently, denying fundamental rights to women. Such power dynamics uses either ideological tools or coercive tools to influence individuals into acting against their will, thereby augmenting the power of one gender of the society while simultaneously diminishing the power of another. (Smith, 1992, & Tyson, 2014) Alternatively, multiple perspectives on power emerge, encompassing "power over" (pertaining to dominance and resource control), "power to" (relating to enhanced decision-making and problem-solving abilities), "power within" (emphasizing self-confidence and mutual respect), and "power with" (enabling achievement and collaboration with others). In the context of women's empowerment, strategic interventions should primarily focus on nurturing "power within," thereby facilitating improved access to resources and empowering women as catalysts for transformative change. (Kabeer, 1999, Rowland, 1995, & Mayoux 2006).

However, some radical feminist call challenging the existing power structure and all forms of oppression that deny women their right to empower themselves (Sen, 1993 & Eade and Williams, 1995) This positions some feminists as the symbol of liberator and resistance against oppression. (Kabeer, 1999, Izugbara, 2004 & Lazreg, 2018) However, in developing countries, the main problem is that feminist activist from a particular socio-cultural and economic context represents and discuss issues of women from a different cultural context considering that they are oppressed and cannot represent themselves. Consequently, due to difference in socio-cultural and

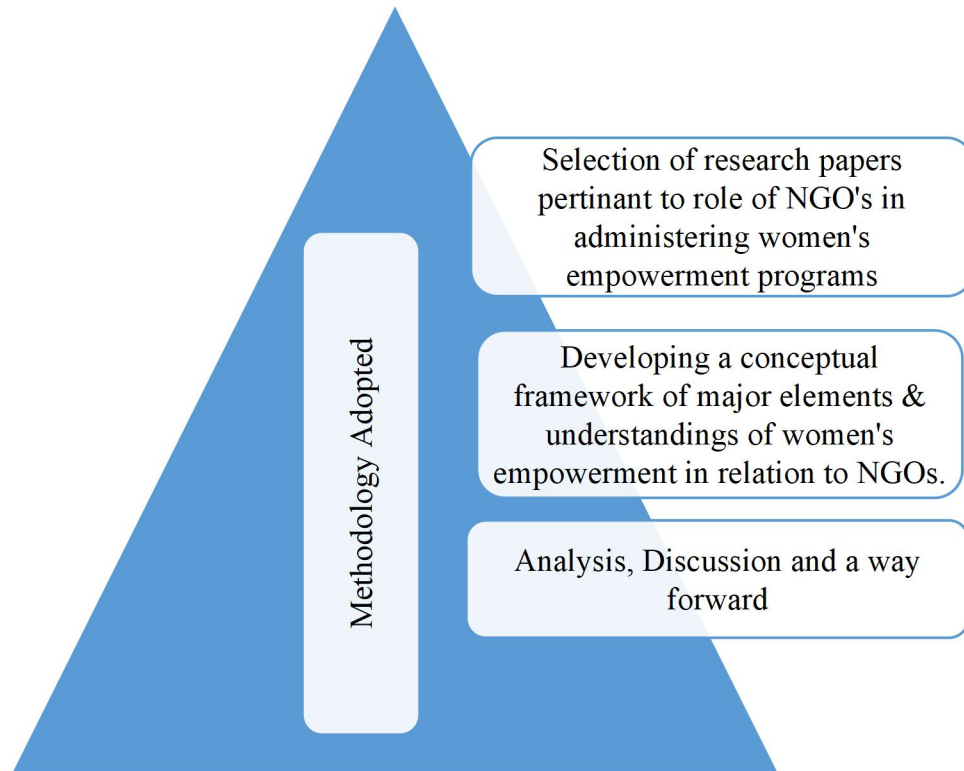
economic context, these feminist activist are unable to understand and raise the issues of women from other context thus, suggesting useless strategies that does not contribute to their empowerment and often backfire at them. (Lazreg, 2018) Therefore, there is dire need to empower women from impoverished faction of society so that they can represent themselves.

Revolutionizing Lives and Livelihood of Women

According to Kabeer (2010), a sustainable women empowerment can be achieved through radical socio-economic transformation of a society which can impact the lives of underprivileged and marginalized women as well. This radical transformation of lives women requires women access to intellectual as well as material resources that would enable them to transform existing patriarchal structure that undermines their empowerment. Transforming existing patriarchal structure and getting empowerment is not a linear or top-down process, rather it is a very dynamic concept. Batliwala, in her research, introduces dynamic concept of empowerment, and elaborates that it encompasses transformation of not only individual but also of community and environment which enables women to take informed decisions based on available options, their knowledge and past experience. (Batliwala, 2007).

To conclude, this section reviews scholarly researches pertaining to the topic and presents three main element of empowerment of women and four prevailing understanding of women empowerment. In analysis section, NGOs understanding of empowerment is explored through the in-depth analysis of scholarly research and in the discussion section NGOs understanding and prevailing understanding of women empowerment is compared and examined in terms of NGOs role and effectiveness in empowering women.

Research Methodology



Selection on Research Papers

- The research articles pertaining to Role of NGOs in women empowerment published between 2005 and 2022 will be selected for the current study.
- Only articles that are listed in Scopus database and are H-indexed will be selected.
- At least two articles based on each of the selected countries/contexts will be chosen.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the systematic literature review of the selected research papers, the conceptual framework has been constructed, employing three elements of women empowerment and four main prevailing understandings of women empowerment present in the selected scholarly research. Then, these elements and understandings are compared and contrasted with those of perceived by NGOs. The NGOs' understandings of empowerment of women are also extracted out from the selected research paper such as the ones written by Desai (2005), Hiremath (2021), Zafar (2016), Kakakhel et al. (2016), Narumugai and Kumar (2017), Hossain et al. (2017), Nyataya (2018), and Gupta (2021).

Analysis and Way Forward

An analysis is carried out based on the data collected from the selected research articles. Approaches employed by NGOs in administering women empowerment projects are examined to find out the gap in their approach then a policy

framework and its due implementation is suggested to have a sustainable women empowerment in the selected countries/contexts.

Analysis

The Function of NGOs and the Developed Understanding of the Notion of Women Empowerment

This sections discusses NGOs' understanding of the concept of Women Empowerment and their role in implementing their strategies to empower women particularly in Pakistani and Indian context. For this, Scopus and H-index research papers have been selected keeping in view the objective of the research.

Women Empowerment: Self-Sustainability, Granting Women a Voice (Access to Recourse Element)

To tackle the cruciality of empowerment amongst the less fortunate women in India, with the aim to transform India into a self-sustainable society; Narumugai and Kumar (2017) had conducted research in order to clarify the function of NGOs in empowering the rural women of India. The prime areas where NGOs appeared to be active, were included in the paper, such as skills development, training, legal aid, legal awareness, capacity building, and self-help. On the contrary, it is propounded that NGOs must specialize in a certain domain, in order to have the ability to customize proposals towards the empowerment of women. It was also suggested that NGOs must take the young girls under their wing for the purpose of providing them with education, keeping it limited to not only the adult women (who are otherwise considered for the preparation of an 'empowered' generation for the future). Additionally, for the obtainment of successful results, it was recommended for NGOs to have an accountable and transparent mode of internal governance, so as to inspire more people to become a part of their organization.

Women Empowerment: Gender Equality and Mainstreaming, Education, Advocacy and Consciousness Raising. (Agency and Transformation Process Element)

A research was carried out by Hiremath (2021) titled "Role of NGOs in promoting Women's Empowerment", entirely under the context of India. The research led on to find a 'remarkable' function of NGOs in the mentioned domain. It is a fact that most Indian ladies remain oblivious of their rights, courtesy of oppressive traditions and lower literacy rate. The said study had confronted the matter regarding "The Women's Welfare Society" (an Indian NGO), with the intention of bridging a relationship between the NGOs and globalization, so as to 'enhance' the empowerment for women. The aforementioned NGO is actively involved in the process of advocacy and training of abused members of society, such as women and children. According to women, globalization is meant by the awareness that women have regarding the social, political and economic empowerment w.r.t. their status, and how empowered the people of their gender

are, across the world. This perception of globalization includes the exchange of information, such as technology, individual and collective experiences, ideas and networks. For the encouragement and highlighted prominence of the role of women in the world of globalization, the NGO of “The Women’s Welfare Society” had offered complete protection for the endorsement of women’s rights.

Desai (2005) conducted a research within the Indian city of Mumbai (known previously as Bombay) in order to identify the relation between women empowerment and gender mainstreaming, especially amongst the NGOs operating within the said city. The data was collected from 67 NGOs in 1994, and almost a decade later, 40 NGOs in 2003. A gender-oriented approach is adopted by these NGOs through the distribution of microfinance services, sessions of raising awareness (for the capabilities of women and their rights), legal aid, advocacy, support services, and lastly, counselling. The issues surrounding gender impartiality were addressed as a fragment of the implemented policies — for which, the NGOs of Mumbai have achieved significant milestones. However, despite this achievement, the measure of success for said proposals was based on the quantity of ‘assisted women beneficiaries’, instead of the positive changes made to the life-long existence of females. The outcomes of this study, basically indicated that the response of these NGOs was a ‘reactive’ response, having its basis etched on the rising problem of gender inequality — in spite of their commitment to gender mainstreaming. Evident by the looks of it, the Mumbai-based NGOs situated in India, have inadequate understanding for facilitating the empowerment for women, through their organizations’ works. All in all, it is ultimately proposed that NGOs must assess their involvement when it comes to a substantial understanding of the social, cultural and economic changes that occur in the functions of women — in order to customize their involvements for delivering sustainable and effective outcomes.

Gupta (2021) conducted a study with the analysis of five case studies that focused on the women in India, with inclusion of also those women who had been trained by NGOs, for becoming fruitful entrepreneurs, creating new ventures and whatnot. This study concluded that elements such as effective leadership, motivation and sharing of information on the already-existing policies granted women with self-confidence, whilst simultaneously empowering them. It is important to note that the aforementioned recommendations were made in order to make effective changes to existing policies, in such a manner that paid attention to gender equality and paved the way for involvement of sustainable empowerment. It was also suggested that women must be trained by ‘developing’ networks with business partners so as to sustain their business ventures.

Tackling the case of three NGOs which were undergoing the process of implementation of economic empowerment programs, a study in Pakistan was

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conducted by Zafar (2016). This study highlighted the prolonged function of NGOs in the empowerment of women, and added importance to the understanding of women (for their situation and determination of self). The data was collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with the n-size 60 (women participants). This data indicated the observation that the involvement of NGOs were effective to some extent, when it came to the enhancement of women’s participation. Contrary to the results of the studies conducted previously (which focused on the function of NGOs with the enhancement of women empowerment), this study profusely focused on women empowerment being a factor [for the women] of their understanding of situation and determination of self. This fact calls for allowing women to identify their weaknesses and turning them into opportunities for the good — for providing strength to their roles, and empowering themselves too.

Kakakhel et al. (2016) obtained data from n-size 100 from the city of Karak, Pakistan, in order to make an understanding for the function of NGOs in the empowerment of rural women residing in Pakistan. From the results, it was found that the said NGOs made significant contributions to the enhancement of women’s participation when it came to the act of ‘decision making’. Additionally, it was suggested that the combination of all media platforms (such as electronic media, print media, governmental platforms, etc) are able to make better contributions to the issues of women empowerment.

The below illustrated Table no. 1 summarizes the multiple understandings made for the concepts of women empowerment, as well as the strategies employed by the NGOs to empower women. Furthermore, the key results and appropriate recommendations are also mentioned.

Table 1 : Summary

Context	Sample	Understanding of Women Empowerment	Strategies of NGOs intervention	Results	Recommendation
India (Hiremat h, 2021)	The Women’s Society Welfare (NGO)	Global empowerment of women ensures local empowerment.	Facilitation of counselling centers, helplines, and institutional services	These facilities provide immediate help and employment opportunities	NGOs should be facilitated and encouraged by other NGOs, local community and government/

					needy women	state departments to empower women
Pakistan (Zafar, 2016)	Three NGOs executing economic empowerment initiative	Women's self-awareness and self-determination	Education and advocacy of women	NGOs contribution to enhancing women's self-determination to some extent		Enabling women to recognize their vulnerabilities and learn to transform them into opportunities.
Mumbai, India (Desai, 2005)	40 active NGOs in 2003 & 67 active in 1994	Gender mainstreaming facilitates women empowerment.	Commitment to implement policies of gender quality. Support via microfinancing and legal aid. Education, advocacy and counselling.	Integration of gender mainstreaming as per policy requirement.		Commitment to gender mainstreaming does not suffice women empowerment. NGOs should tailor their strategies by understanding deep-rooted socio-cultural gender norms that shape women's role in India.
India (Gupta, 2011)	5 trained women's case studies	Women Empowerment via entrepreneurship and job opportunities	Training, skill development and information sharing	Women empowerment to some extent via training,		More empowerment can be achieved via tailoring existing

			s		informatio	policies to
					n sharing	incorporate
					and	gender
					motivation	equality and
						gender
						mainstreamin
						g policies.
Pakistan	100		Enhancing	Women's	NGOs	All local and
(Kakakh	participant		involvement	involveme	contribute	government
el et al.,	s from		of women	nt in	d in a	media
2006)	Karak, KPK		entrepreneu	decision	positive	platforms
			r in country's	making	way to	work
			mainstream		involve	together
			economy		women in	with NGOs to
					decision	empower
					making	women.
India	NGOs in		Women	Legal and	NGOs are	Not only
(Narumu	India		empowerme	financial	active in	adult but also
gai &			nt via self-	aid and	implemendi	young girls
Kumar,			sustainable	awareness,	ng the	should be
2017)			society	skill	mentioned	educated and
				developme	strategies	trained
				nt and		Transparency
				capacity		and
				building		accountabilit
				via		y should be
				trainings		maintaining
						in internal
						governance
						and strategic
						approaches
						of NGOs

Discussion

The following tables (Table no. 2, 3 & 4) present a model for the understanding of women empowerment (based on literature review), in striking comparison to the ones adopted by the NGOs in the study. Clarified previously, the authors of studies urged the NGOs to employ further sustainable involvements by combining additional highlighted understandings of women empowerment into the developing countries' projects. This notion demands for the highlighting of prominent gaps in the involvement of NGOs, as well as for recommending the

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areas of improvement for them. Excluding the available understandings of women empowerment, the model illustrated below presents the ‘understandings of women empowerment’ (adopted by the NGOs) which contributed to their ‘unsustainable’ involvements, when it comes to this matter. Furthermore, it portrays the lost understandings that were considered as ‘limitations’ to their involvements. All in all, this model in Figure 1 urges the NGOs to identify the major limitations within their approaches for women empowerment, and combine the understandings which enhance the achievability and worth of their involvements.

Table: 2 Elements of Women Empowerment

Resource Element: Women’s Access to Resources	Process Element : Empowerment as Transformation Process	Agency Element: Women As An Agent Of Change
Women’s access to education, employment opportunity, and income-generating endeavors etc.	Establishment of policies that enable women to challenge ingrained socio-cultural norms that undermine their empowerment.	Enhancing women’s ability to take decision and be an agent of change.

Table: 3 Understanding of Women Empowerment

Gender Equality and Mainstreaming	Empowering Women's Voices	Questioning & Challenging Established Power Structure	Revolutionizing live and livelihood of Women
Gender mainstreaming and equality as a significant part of policy.	Granting women, a voice and making them active member of decision making process.	Challenging all forms of power structures that are responsible for systemic oppression of women and undermines their empowerment.	Radical transformation of lives of women particularly marginalized and under-privileged women

Table: 4 NGOs’ Understanding of Women Empowerment

Gender Equality and Mainstreaming	Self-Sustainability & Granting Women a Voice	Education, Advocacy, and Consciousness Raising
Gender mainstreaming and equality as a significant part of policy.	Legal, financial support, awareness program, and direct or indirect microfinance support.	Vocational training, education, skills development and capacity building programs

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	Empower them to take decisions.	
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LIMITATIONS	
Questioning & Challenging Established Power Structure	Revolutionizing live and livelihood of Women

The evolution of the concept of empowerment and its predominating understandings by the NGOs situated worldwide, have been addressed by this paper. In spite of being crucial partners when it comes to the addressing of issues of women empowerment, our research sheds light on limited and selective aspects of empowerment on behalf of the NGOs — as displayed in a number of countries still in a developing phase (Ja’afar-Furo 2007). This text argues that the limited understandings of empowerment hinders the working of NGOs to serve for the advancement and sustainable development of women. Tending to focus on helping women have a ‘voice’, applying gender mainstreaming, raising awareness, advocating for education, and supplying women to have financial power and security — the NGO programs have a wide range of goals. In a nutshell, the dominating approaches of NGO for women empowerment are mainly focused on making the individual agency capacities for women, even stronger. This includes the means of financial support, education, and increment in self-utilization. So that individual freedom may be extended, and women are supplied with personal strategic choices. However, NGO approaches have inadequacy when it comes to crucial social inclusion of women, as said by Bennet (2002). If this inadequacy had been adequate, then the notion of creating evergreen opportunities (for advancement of women), and giving accessibility to diverse assets, would be highlighted well. To sustain women empowerment in actuality, systemic changes are crucial and required well. Only such changed approaches are able to bring about meaningful changes which fairly modify the rules of the game at policy and social levels (North, 1995). These changes buy-in from the leadership, and require a top-down approach. The NGOs have the need to consider the strengthening and enablement of governments, as well as leadership (political); in order to involve them in a metamorphosis-like change in institution, which includes the supplying of equal access granted to opportunities and resources, as well as the eradication of institutional barriers. The articles mentioned in our sample highlight the activities of NGOs concerned with prevailing poor and marginalized women. In current times, the approaches tend to treat women, but on the other hand, it is more for the ‘unprivileged subset’ of the economy, instead of the fact of ‘being a woman’ as a categorization spanning layers of social strata. Therefore, being a financially secure woman cannot qualify for being a strong

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indicator of empowerment. The research on women entrepreneurs from Morocco by Gray and Finley-Hervey (2005) enlightened how there was substantial benefits for the women belonging to modest social backgrounds, via the means of empowerment efforts (as their ability to earn by themselves gave them more freedom from the men in their family — as compared with those business women belonging to upper classes). This is yet another evidence that the submissive nature of women originates from the patriarchal cultural norms that notifies family relations and institutions of social and political type (representing their status quo).

For sustained empowerment of women, social inclusion and systemic transformation are more than just necessary. However, women require NGOs for deep engagement with economic, social, political and structural processes in order to be able to support socially inclusive development alternatives. It is important to note that NGOs are profusely repressed through the needs of donors aligned with demands of accountability. It is so, at most times, the donors originate from the North part of the world (such as welfare countries in Scandinavia, Europe, etc) via the means of philanthropists, other NGOs, as well as non-traditional donors (Banks and Hulme, 2012). Such processes appear as disadvantageous to NGOs wanting to wholly connect with the wider network (consisting of stakeholders in political, cultural and governmental domains), so as to further strengthen their bases in communities (Sabatini, 2002). On the contrary, more attention has been paid to organizational professionalism (which is often barely politicized of NGOs, standardized, and performance-oriented), which leads to decent change in positions on their behalf (Hayes et al., 2018). Therefore, for helping shape the wider visions of empowerment, under the umbrella of this context, the NGOs have the need to establish meaningful connections with context-specific and local cultural institutions, women's associations, and decision makers. It is worthy to note that considering empowering women with the use of granting further access to different shapes and forms of resources as 'key' — is anything but a sufficient impact on the well ingrained practices and structures at the center of the issue of gender inequalities. Arc en Ciel (AeC) is a foundation in Lebanon, which is a good enough example for the promotion of everlasting change. This foundation is supporting marginalized communities actively in different fields. They also engage these communities in sustainable development, applying a process consisting of three steps only. The first step involves the development of hands-on projects with respective stakeholders, in order to find appropriately workable solutions. The AeC has become an organization frequently used as a means of reference for any topic — as it has become the main organization in the country regarding specific issues, for donors to work with. Lastly, the AeC is involved in public debate and civil society communication, so as

to push and press for laws that are bound to bring about a better change to the prevailing situations (Salamoun and Bastian, 2017).

It is true that cultural norms are the aspect which significantly shapes the understanding when it comes to the matter of empowerment. A number of NGOs originate from the developed and welfare nations situated in the world's Northern side. The programs of these NGOs tend to highlight a woman's personal, economic and financial capacities, as their most relevant regulators. The Western understanding of empowerment (consisting of self-orientation, financial independence, and self-reliance) for women originates from individualist cultural understandings and norms. Here, empowerment is the immediate consequence of economic development and advancement — as is already evident in the Northern side of the world (Wood et al., 2021). The rising practices and understandings of NGOs demand the asking of underlying assumptions of empowerment. They also require the adaptation of them (to the context in which they are 'active'). As a matter of fact, the majority of development programs (which focus on the empowerment of women) are in the 'developmental' context in the South side of the world — where almost all communities and societies have a 'collective' ideology, rather than 'individualistic'. These explicit differences among the collectivist-individualist sequence (Kagitcibasi, 1996) connect to such rudiments as priorities for business: the scope of appropriate product/service (commodities) offering, the time-horizon length, the decision-making format, and the area where such offerings are able to be made. For empowerment, the NGO practices have the need to incorporate more collectivist and contextualized notions — so that the original concepts of empowerment from different perspectives are well understood. The individual self is never alone, and always related (comprising the empowerment of tribes and families of such individuals). The notion of 'power' is well embedded in collective values, reflecting in the acts of sharing, collaboration and mutuality (Wood et al., 2021). The composition of empowerment may not be the same in all contexts, however, they do share elements of common ground as compared to contexts of Western world and its mind frames (which are more inclined towards the individualistic self-model). Therefore, empowerment not only utilizes different elements, but it also treats such points of differences with high regard (as compared to what the Western perspective may have done), which is why both the processes appear different and seek different results, defining success.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This sections includes conclusion and necessary policy recommendations based on the analysis and in depth-discussion on scholarly works and available empirical data.

Policy Recommendations

Need to Conduct Ethnographic Research by NGOs to Contextualize their Understanding to Women Empowerment

NGOs are mostly following Western approaches and struggle to implement them in developing countries which have deep-rooted patriarchal norms and issues that are at stark contrast to West. These NGOs are influenced by an individualist cultural approach which are almost invalid in developing countries such as Pakistan and India. Mostly NGOs are either heavily influenced by or funded by Western states, therefore, they follow that approaches that fulfill donor's requirement. Moreover, international development aid organizations and NGOs mostly follow a top-down approach to welfare of women which subsequently neglect to establish a strong networks with the local institutions and civil society activists who work to strengthen women empowerment organically. Hence, instead to strengthening women's agency, they keep them on receiving end and passive beneficiaries which limits them to voice their own concerns and issues. Mostly, NGOs' women empowerment tools and strategies are based on national aggregate data, which is unable to explore context specification with regards to gender identity on societal and communal level. NGOs should realize the fact that the concept of empowerment is context-specific and the performance indicator of empowerment varies from context to context. (Wood et al., 2021) Therefore, there is a dire need to conduct an ethnographic research in developing countries by NGOs and their donor international development agencies to get first hand localize knowledge about perpetual gender norms in those countries and their impact on women empowerment so as to contextualize their understanding of women empowerment. NGOs should launch programs where they interact with local women and interrogate about their issues, and necessities instead of offering assistance from western approach. (Alserhan et al. 2015 & Boulanouar and Wood, 2018) This will help them to properly target their policy intervention and device strategies that would be conducive and effective for sustainable women empowerment in these countries. (Barca et al, 2012)

NGOs Collaboration with Mainstream Media of Developing Countries

Media plays a pivotal role in constructing or deconstructing gender ideologies particularly entertainment media. Pakistan and India both are famous for their drama industry which is popular among common masses of both the countries. Most of the dramas produced in both the country are either glamourize gender based violence practices or promote the prevailing gender ideology particularly the role of women in the society which undermines their worth as a potential member of the society. This is because of the fact that media

represents and fulfills vested interest of people in power who benefit from women's subdued position. However, the archetypal gender role of both men and women are so outdated that they not only curtail women empowerment but also have extremely disastrous effects of male members of the society thus, leaving a catastrophic effects of socio-economic growth of the society as a whole. Therefore, in order to challenge the deep-rooted archetypal gender norms and bring systematic transformation in the existing mindset of people, NGOs should work with mainstream media of the developing countries to make a policy which favors the production of dramas or movies that deconstruct and reconstruct women's gender roles and present them as potential member of the society.

NGOs' collaboration with Local Agencies to Uplift Women's Position

NGOs should engage local agencies systematically that would empower local communities and societies to take the responsibility to uplifting women overall status in the society which would ultimately lead toward more sustainable development of women. According to Sen (1993), women's position in the society depends on their "perceived contribution response". Here, perceived contribution response is the perceived notion of the society about women's contribution as a member of society which in Pakistan and India is very low. For instance, housewife's contribution in this capitalist world is considered as negligible however, housewife enable male member of the household to work effectively by taking responsibility of the entire household chores. There is a need to change this perception and reconstruct a mindset that can value women and their contribution in the society. This is only possible if local communities take the ownership of elevating women's position. Therefore, NGOs should work in collaboration with local government and agencies to engage them in programs and activities that can transform society's perception toward women and their empowerment.

NGOs Cooperation Government to Revamp Education Curricula

Education institutes plays a significant role in socialization of young members of the society and inculcate in them certain ideologies. Therefore, besides vocation training and capacity building programs, NGOs should work with concerned authorities to revamp the education curricula and incorporate the subjects that teaches gender issues and empowerment of all the genders.

Government's Consistent and Constructive Intervention

Government should work in collaboration with NGOs and support them in establishing a constructive connection between socio-economic and political domains so as to work collectively for women empowerment. Government should also work actively to dismantle radical activists who for their vested interest do not let the deep rooted issues of the women especially from

underprivileged class and hence create a rift in the society. This resultantly erupts rage and hatred in the society towards women empowerment. Therefore, it is extremely essential that NGOs with support of government should work to bring social, economic and political rubric of the society on one page for the empowerment to happen.

Conclusion

The objective of the research is to examine sustainability of NGO projects in achieving empowerment of women in developing countries, such as Pakistan, and India. To achieve the objective of the research both empirical and non-empirical data from Scopus and H-index scholarly research have been reviewed thoroughly. A conceptual framework is constructed by combining prevailing understanding of women empowerment and NGOs perception of understanding the subject notion to highlight the gap in NGOs understanding and their intervention strategies in these countries for women empowerment. The present paper concludes that there are a profound limitations found in the NGO's understanding of women empowerment concept which limit them to devise effective strategies to intervene in developing countries and carry out sustainable women empowerment. NGOs work for gender mainstreaming and self-sustainability through education, training and capacity building projects which are effective to some extent. However, they are unable to identify two major limitations in their scholarship and understanding of women empowerment i.e. radical transformation of live and livelihood of women especially from marginalized and impoverished faction of the society and challenging existing power structure of the society which hinders women empowerment in these societies. The present study reveals that there is a need to develop long-term and effective strategies to bring out systematic change in such societies. Therefore, the above mentioned policy recommendations are offered for sustainable empowerment of women through sustainable strategies.

This paper can be perceived as an extension of the analysis which is provided by empirical studies done beforehand in this particular field such as the ones written by Desai (2005), Hiremath (2021), Zafar (2016), Kakakhel et al. (2016), Narumugai and Kumar (2017), Hossain et al. (2017), Nyataya (2018), and Gupta (2021). Their research provides recommendations for the better workings of NGOs in the domain of empowerment for women. This paper has extended their discussion through the analysis of root causes for the proposed areas and undertaken approaches for research in the future. To conclude it, this paper portrays a deep analysis of the work of NGOs when it comes to the matter of women empowerment, and presents a combination of quite a few opinions and perspectives in this very field.

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