



**ASIAN UNIVERSITY
FOR WOMEN**

**Impact of Women Organizations on
the Socio-economic Development of
Hunza**

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Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan is recognized as one of most literate regions in Pakistan. There are also a large number of women organizations and institutions working to empower women of the region, both socially and economically. Hunza lies in the region of Gilgit Baltistan and it is believed that the women in Hunza are more empowered in comparison to other parts of the Gilgit region.

Institutions play a major role in the development of society and through this paper we want to find out to what extent the increasing number of institutions has contributed to the socio-economic development of women in Hunza. Throughout this paper we will explore the perception of three groups, which include the head of women organizations, working women, and people from their communities, regarding the socio-economic changes that these organizations have brought. Our major focus is mainly in three main villages of Hunza, which include Gulmit, Karimabad and Altit.

Background

The role of women in Hunza was mostly confined in the households restricted by traditions, cultures and norms of the society. Very limited jobs were considered to be appropriate for women and in some communities only some degree of education, which is sometimes the ability to only read and write, was offered to women. Due to these reasons the society was not very liberal and was in poverty. The only source of income was the local agriculture system. Education, technology and formal jobs were not yet part of this remote region. As a few institutions started to emerge in the Hunza region the position of women in various parts was

revolutionized. As Dr. Anwaar Mohyuddin and Rozina Begum (2014) describe the history of beginning of the women organization movement as, “AKRSP (Agha Khan Rural Support Program) initiated its function in the village through social mobilization by the community leaders and immamti institutions. The intensive mobilization has resulted in the formation of women organizations in the village. The organizations were formed in 1983 and 1984 in the research locale. The aims and objectives of the organization were to reduce the poverty from grass root level, socio-economic development, and to generate income by using the local resources, and women empowerment” (p.8080-8081). The women trained by these institutions are now proving practically that they are not behind men in any field of work. As this change is taking place in Hunza it is necessary to understand the role of women in the development and progress of a society. Talking specifically about the importance of women’s involvement in the job market, which can be a solution for the eradication of poverty.

The study was conducted in two villages, Altit and Karimabad (also known as Baltit). The research was conducted in five women empowerment projects run by several organizations such as CIQAM, Altit, Kha Basi Cafe, Aga Khan Cultural Service (AKCS) Altit, KADO Gem and Jewellery Project and KADO Handicraft Project. CIQAM Altit is a women social enterprise, where more than 50 women between the ages of 19 to 40 are employed. These women are not only involved in the maintenance of Altit fort but also making furniture on orders and manufacture musical instruments for sale. Kha Basi Cafe is unique in its own nature. This cafe is a part of Baltit Serena Inn restaurants and it is solely run by women and they serve only organic food and Hunzai cultural cuisines. These women are trained by Serena Hotel Islamabad, one of the five star hotels in Pakistan. AKCS Altit is an organisation that is running the Altit Fort and collaboratively managing the CIQAM. This organization has a guesthouse, which has an all women staff. Most of the Altit Fort tourist guides are women. KADO Gem and Jewellery and KADO Handicraft Project are extensions of Karakoram Area Development Organisation (KADO). The Handicraft Project was an initiative started in 1996 in which women, disadvantaged groups and local communities were trained and employed in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the communities. This project has grown so much that some of the women have established their own small scale companies. KADO Gem and Jewellery project is employing youth of Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly women belonging to economically struggling families, and training them to make jewellery.

Literature Review

As per the Modern Economic theory stated by Hassan and Rafaz (2017) “education leads to economic prosperity” (p.84). Education here doesn’t mean only being able to read and write. It means various kinds of education, such as formal, vocational, or any training that will make a person employable. Shafiq Bano in her research article *WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTION IN ENHANCING ECONOMY* has stated the reason why women in Karimabad Hunza joined these training institutions and how they use their income, “The reason for them (women) to start working being is mainly families’ financial issues. They spent most of their earnings in the household expenditures and on the educations of their children and only a small amount of all the earnings are spent on their personal things” (p.112) Anwaar and Rozina (2014) have also found that when women start earning "The women utilize their saving mainly for educational issue of their children’s for business and enterprise; addressing health and chemical fertilizers; buying the livestock, developing land, meeting marriage requirements and meeting agricultural needs such as purchasing seed potatoes" (p.8084). The purpose of our study is to find out that how the emerging number of women entering in labor market via projects initiated by the women organizations has created a social and economic improvement starting from their families.

Objective of the study:

- To explore local's perception about the role of women organizations in socio-economic development of Hunza.
- To document the changes women’s organizations have brought to the economic livelihood, social mobility, and traditional customs of women working in these organizations.
- To analyze the impact of socio-economic development on family relationships.
- To measure social and economic empowerment of women in Hunza.

Significance of the study:

The research will provide an unbiased feedback to the women’s organizations about the concerns and expectations of the locals. Moreover, this research will help the upcoming projects to plan according to the needs and expectations of the locals. This research report will help the community to recognize and acknowledge the contributions of women and these organizations on the socio-economic development of Hunza. Furthermore, this report will be provided to the

AUW library, which would be a primary source for further research conducted on similar/relevant topics.

Methodology

The research is a cross-sectional study and samples were collected through snowball and purposive sampling methods.

The data for this research is both qualitative and quantitative. The study includes narrative interviews as well as survey forms. Survey questionnaires comprising of structured questions were made for the beneficiary women, while two different sets of semi-structured open ended questions were developed to conduct interviews with head of the organizations and locals. A week before the visit, we contacted the organization via phone calls and email, and sent them the participant information sheet and consent form. After we got the confirmation, narrative interviews were conducted with the head of four women's organizations.

In addition to the interviews with the head of the organizations, 14 interviews were conducted with locals in each village. The target groups were men and women above the age of 18, so that we can take their consent. The participants' information sheet and consent form were shown to the locals who were literate, while for the others the documents were translated into the *Burushashki* language by the researcher. The participation information sheets were stored safely in the computer with a pass code to keep the identity of the participant anonymous.

Before getting the consent of beneficiary women working in the organizations, we took permission from the heads of the organizations. After we got the permission from the organization, we briefly shared the purpose of the research for ensuring their active participation. The quantitative data was collected from the survey forms filled by the beneficiary women. The questionnaires also included two open ended question to get a general idea of the impact of the women organizations on their communities.

We stored the information in a way that only the researchers can access to the data. After sorting the data, we quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed the information using distribution and bar graphs.

Sample Questions for the beneficiaries:

1. Approximate monthly income of your family before your joining the organization.
 - Below \$100
 - \$100-\$150
 - \$150 - \$200
 - \$200- \$250
 - Above 250
2. Approximate monthly family income after your contribution?
 - Below \$150
 - \$150 - \$200
 - \$200 - \$250
 - \$250 - \$300
 - Above \$300
3. What is the major spending of your family?
 - Education
 - Health
 - Food
 - Weddings
 - Others
4. How did this job impact you and your family's social life?
 - Positive (happy with the social life you have right now)
 - Negative (unhappy)
 - Not as such (Not a significant change)
5. After you started earning, do you find any difference in getting a chance to participate in the family decisions or Does your family asks for your suggestion or opinion while taking a decision at your home?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
6. Does this earning impact your family relationships?
 - Yes

- No
- Sometimes

7. Is women working outside their homes getting normalized for the locals and the families?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Sample Questions for the locals:

1. Age?
2. Qualification?
3. Mention your opinion about the aim/mission of these organizations?
4. Do you believe these organizations are working to empower women? Are these approaches of women empowerment locally accepted? Please explain why?
5. What changes have these organizations brought to the economic livelihood and social customs? Are these changes positive?
6. Are these organizations bringing the community together and create unity in the community?

Sample questions for the head of the organizations:

1. What is the mission of the organization?
2. What changes (economic and social) do you see in the community, that you consider as an achievement of your organization/project?

Findings

Data collected from survey forms filled by the beneficiaries (women working in the organizations).

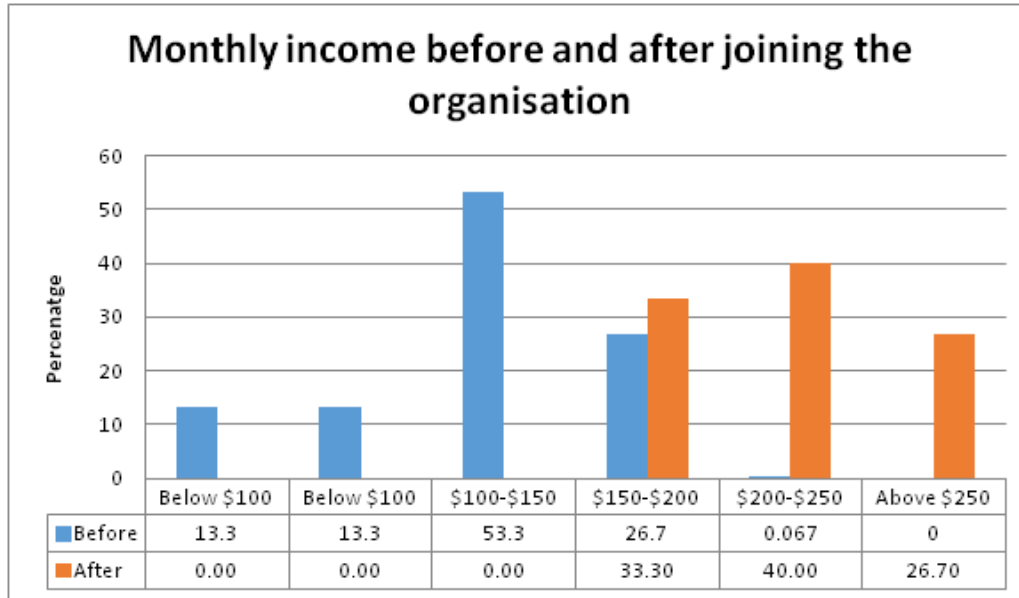


Figure 1: Monthly household income of the beneficiary women before and after joining the organization

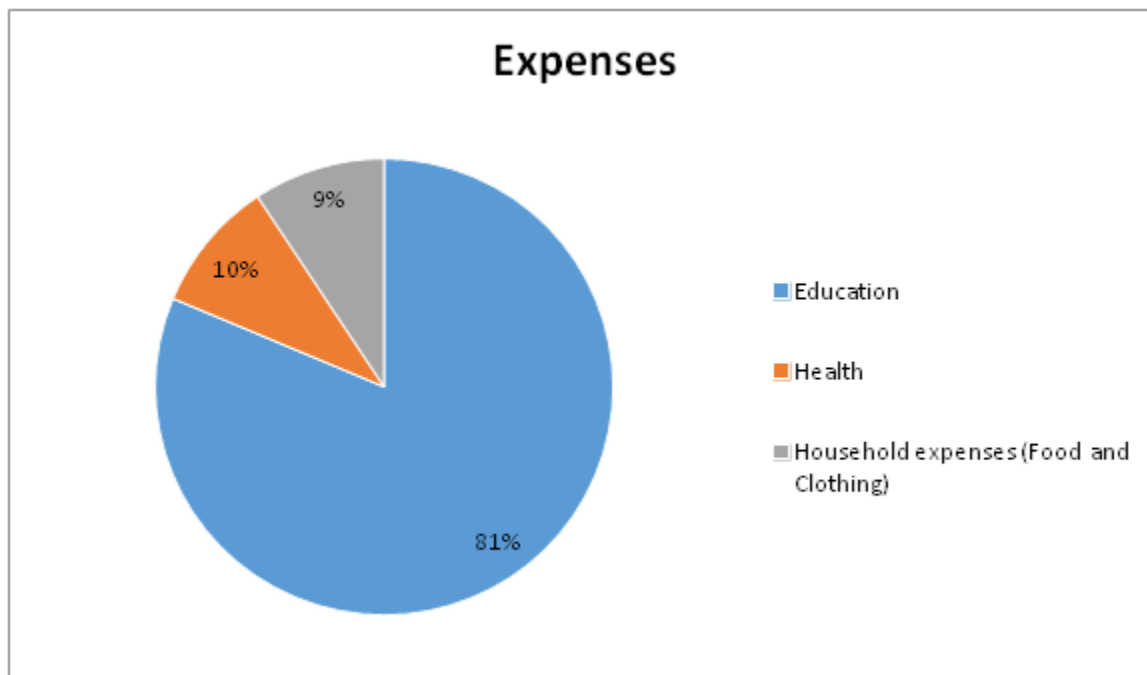


Figure 2: The major spending according to the beneficiaries

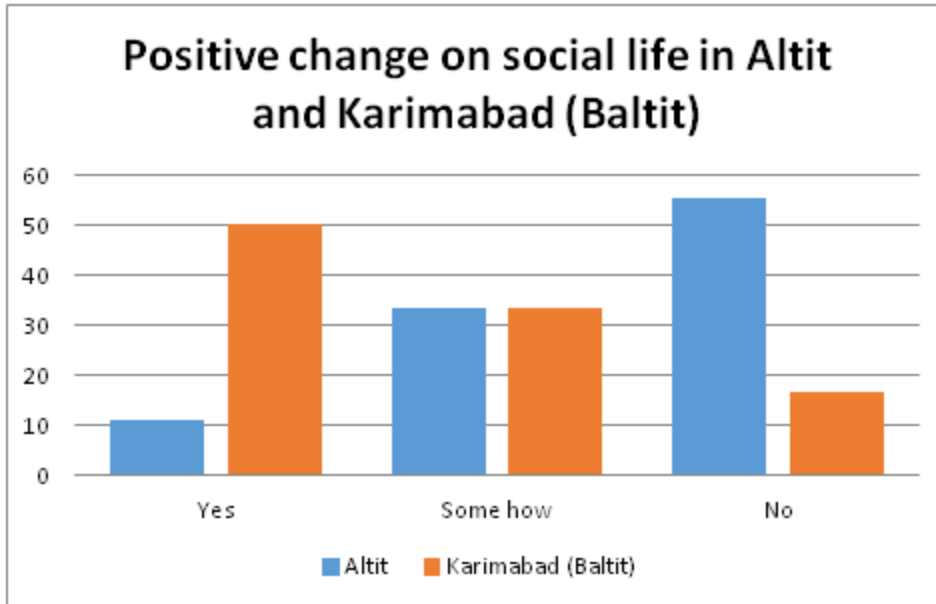


Figure 3: Positive change brought by this source of income (Beneficiary women in Altit and Karimabad)

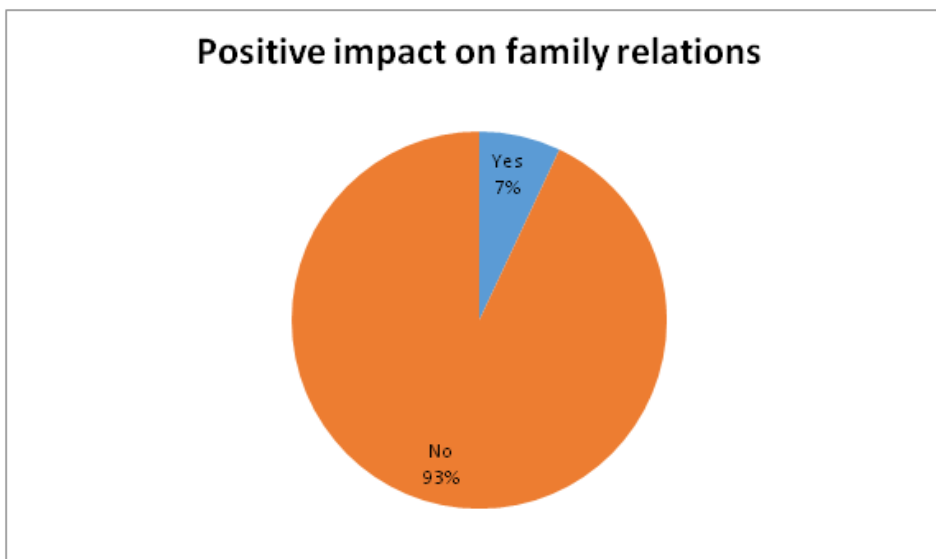


Figure 4: Positive impact of their earning seen by the beneficiary women on their family relations

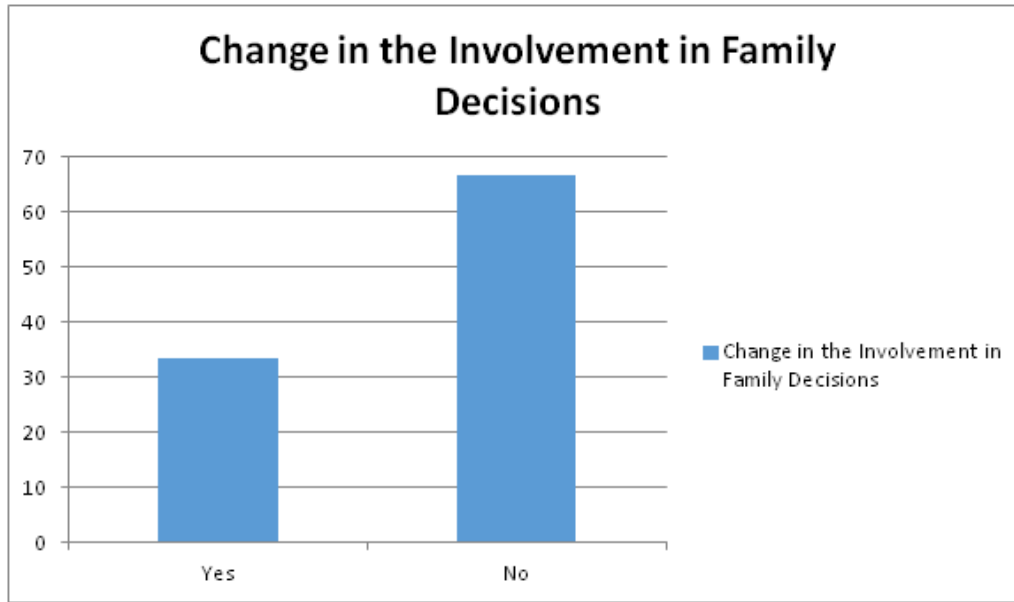


Figure 5: Response of the beneficiary women, regarding changes in their involvement in family decision

Responses from the Locals:

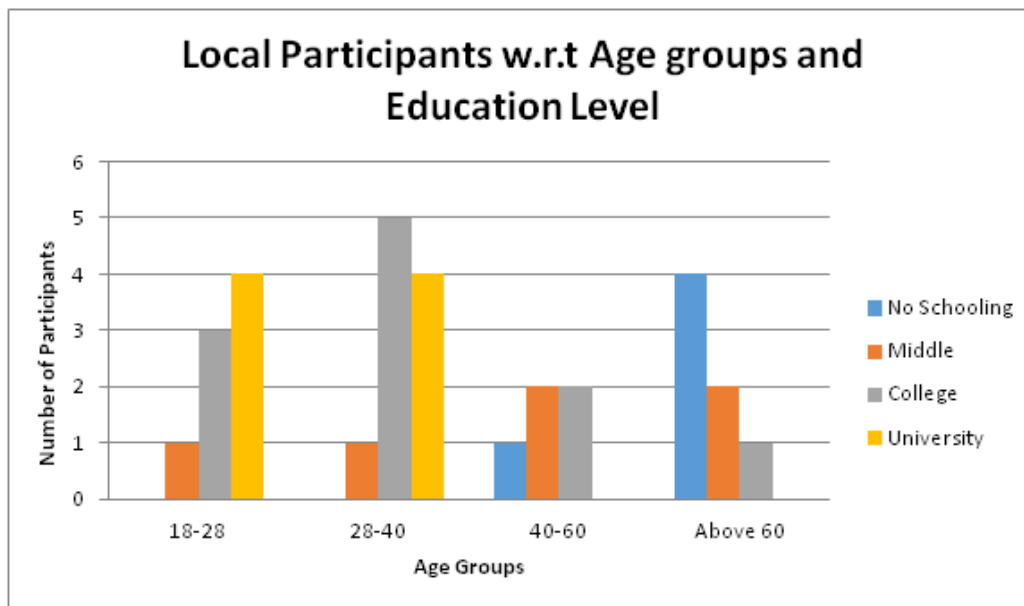


Figure 6: No of Local participants including the age groups and level of education

About the aims and objectives of the organization, out of 30 local participants 25 mentioned that these organizations are established to make women economically empower, which results improvement in the economic conditions to their families. Some of them added that these

organizations have played a great role in bringing positive social change regarding the stereotypes associated with women. Out of the rest of five participants, three mentioned that these organizations are only employing women to attract international community and to get funds by the name of women empowerment. They added that although these organizations provide salaries to women, who contribute to family finance but wages are comparatively low to the amount of work they do. Moreover, due to most of the women getting into the job sectors, they are not giving enough time to their children, which is an increasing concern for the elder people in the region. While two of the five participants mentioned that these organizations are of no use, they are just threat to the cultural and social values of the regions because these organizations are attracting non-locals to pay a visit to the region.

Calculating the local acceptance towards the approaches of women empowerment adapted by these organizations, out of 20 participants from village Altit, 12 answered that they are fine with the approaches and ways adopted by these organization, as they are empowering women economically as well as socially. While some of the 12 participants mentioned that introducing the skills of carpentry and masonry to women is really a positive step towards a constructive society. While the remaining 8 participant mentioned teaching women skills specifically carpentry and masonry is not sustainable. They mentioned that prices of the furniture made by CIQAM Project costs much more than local's affordability and due to these women carpenters, men carpenters are charging a lot for their labor too. They also added that this source of income for women carpenters is not sustainable, especially for the unmarried ones who might get married outside to another village or district and might not continue this job. In Karimabad, all the 10 participants agreed that the project running in their village are sustainable and are focusing to empower women economically and socially as most of the jobs are culturally associated to women, such as knitting, cutting and sewing.

About the social and economic changes these organizations have brought, out of the 30 local participants 26 admitted that these organizations have economically contributed to improve the quality of life in the households. These organizations are contributing to lessen the economic disparity in the community, because they are employing women who belong to economically struggling families. The one of the local women mentioned that women of this time are getting more opportunity of mobility, more food in comparison to the past years. The respondents above the age of 60 mentioned that now women have more involvement in household decisions and

young husbands are more kind towards their wives in comparison to their times because of the financial contribution.

The remaining four participants, who are all from village Altit, mentioned that these organizations are introducing local women to non-local men, which is considered culturally inappropriate. Ms. A, age 84, mentioned that these organizations are giving opportunities to the local women to earn, this economic empowerment allows these women to spend their extra income on following the fashion trends, which is their right but according to the locals it is culturally inappropriate dressing. Mr. X, age 75, mentioned that the flow of money is negatively impacting the younger generations, both boys and girls, as they are forgetting the cultural norms and values practiced earlier in the region.

Analysis

The discrimination against women in some societies is often due to their illiteracy and inability to financially contribute towards the family. At the same time, if there is no discrimination against women in the provision of education then the society can progress economically and socially and women will be more aware of their rights. As Anwaar and Rozina (2014) state about the impact of these organizations in Hunza region in their research as, "The women can now take the decision of her family affairs and voice her demands; she has equal rights as the male has in the family . . . And the most interesting that she can contribute economically parallel to her counterpart either directly or indirectly. She has the access to the market now she can independently display her products in different cities of Pakistan. She has become independent for her basic amenities of life" (p.8084). Our data also shows where 93% of the respondents agreed that after joining the organization, they are being able to contribute monetarily towards their family and that resulted as a positive impact on family relationships while the rest of 7% said that there was no positive change seen on their family relationship (figure 4). After they started making financial contribution to the family, 33% of the women working in these five organizations said they are now more involved in the decision making, while the remaining 67% of the women said that there was no change in their involvement in family decisions (figure 5). Marie Evertsson et al. answers how the higher level of income and education are concerned with gender equality in case of women and according to her there is a practical impact of women education level and women labor force participation and she claims that women with higher level of education get more good jobs with handsome amount of money than those women with lower

level of education and she says that it is education that instills the egalitarian ideology and reduces discrimination (2009). If we educate the women then not only poverty will be reduced but also the gender discrimination too. Also the educated women will get higher income and this positive monetary aspect of high income will help to change the thinking of people with traditional mindsets and values towards women education so that they can improve their financial conditions especially in poverty stricken societies. It will then encourage women and their family members to think beyond the limited traditional and cultural society values where women are supposed to stay at home only. It will also lead to high involvement of women in job sector on merit causing to reduce the disparities and discrimination to an extent and thus contributing to the economic progress. As Anwaar and Rozina (2014) have already found that, "The women utilize their saving mainly for educational issue of their children's for business and enterprise; addressing health and chemical fertilizers; buying the livestock, developing land, meeting marriage requirements and meeting agricultural needs such as purchasing seed potatoes" (p.8084). Our data affirms this and shows that 81.3% of the women participants spend their salaries solely on education either their own, their children or their siblings according to their marital status (figure 2). The second major expenses are food and health. These were the findings that our research has affirmed with the results of previous scholars. In contrast, the negative comments which people had regarding the women organizations and their impacts were not highlighted in the previous researches done in this area. For example, 3 respondents mentioned that the reason of employing women belonging to economically struggling family in these organizations is only to attract international community and get funds. It is not benefiting the women; rather it is helping the organization to get more funds. It is also exploiting and deteriorating the cultural norms and values of the region. Some of the local respondents mentioned that these skills like carpentry and working in restaurants like Kha Basi Cafe are not sustainable because most of the women working are unmarried and when they will get married they might move to some other regions/ village or town and they won't be able to use this skill there. Because the CIQAM project is only operating in Altit region and thus, women who get married out of the region have higher chances of being unemployed. There are carpentry shops in other regions as well but not like the one in Altit where only women work. This way the locals and the community members think that it is not sustainable and beneficial. Also they mentioned that because the items in CIQAM are made by women carpenters the prices of these products are very high then the same items produced by men carpenters. Due to the high prices and poverty

the locals cannot afford these items and CIQAM is only running to fascinate the tourists and get international funding. About *Kha Basi* cafe in Altit region, locals say that this restaurant with high prices is an attraction only for the foreign and non-local rich tourist, who can afford, while the food is no different than other restaurants in region, because most of the restaurants around also use organic food. One important point which needs to be pointed out is that the two projects of KADO which includes stone work and knitting are not much criticized because these jobs are usually done from home and these occupations are culturally associated with women. It shows that although AKRSP and local government started the movement of women empowerment with the help of these projects after 1983 but still after so many years less progress has been made in social perspective. Economically we can see the positive impacts very clearly but the social change is still in progress (figure 1 & figure 2).

Recommendations

While analyzing the data collected through interviews and survey forms, we have compared and interpreted the findings of the previously conducted studies, which has led us to propose some recommendations for the future projects. These recommendations will further help to improve the economic situation by reducing poverty and hopefully bring positive social changes, which will help to achieve positive socio-economic development in the region. Our recommendations for the future projects are:

1. Women vocational training institutes like KADO handicraft projects should be initiated in other regions of Gilgit like Ghizer, Nagar, Diamer and Astore. Educated women from these districts are allowed to work outside but uneducated women do not have any option other than opening a small ladies shop for the neighborhood women. Teaching a skill which allows women to work from home in their free time will help these women who are in need of financial assistance.
2. Projects like CIQAM which trains women carpentry is not sustainable because most of the trainees and workers will be then limited to Altit region only. If the workers want to get higher education, or move to another city or get married to neighborhood villages it will be hard for them to practice their skills anywhere else than CIQAM Altit because of unavailability of only women worker factories.
3. The young women who could not complete their education because of financial crisis at home and joined these organizations for earning should be provided scholarships and

grants through international funding donors or local government programs so that the deserving women who have the will to complete their studies will continue their higher studies.

Limitations

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The first is the time constraint. As it took more than two weeks for getting permission from the organizations for conducting the research for which we had to restructure our timeline accordingly. The second potential limitation was: some interviewees' answers were influenced by the people around them during the interview, which shows that some of the respondents were not able to clearly state their point of view. Limited budget was another limitation of the research, due to which only newly emerged and regionally well-known women's organizations were taken as the target organizations for our research.

Conclusion

The projects initiated by government, international NGOs and AKRSP networks have helped and made women capable to contribute towards their families. The financial contributions by women have been used on giving quality education to their children and siblings, for health and food purposes. This shows that if women who do not have an educational background and skills from deprived backgrounds are taught skills which will help them learn, earn and support their families will be beneficial not only for that specific household but also for the whole society. We look forward for more projects like this in other regions of Gilgit Baltistan so that women in all these areas will prove their capabilities and the gender stereotypes which limit the women to their homes.

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