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Socio Economic Development in Rural Egypt and Pakistan: Similarities and Best Practices for Women's Empowerment

Introduction

It is recognized among development practitioners that location is one of the key determinants of variations in welfare within a country. According to the World Bank, as of 2020, 63%¹ of the population in **Pakistan** is rural while in **Egypt** the rural population accounts for 57%² of the total population. This rural-urban divide explains a lot of the economic, political and social differences within the two countries. Furthermore, Many of these issues disproportionately affect women and this is why a focus on rural areas needs to be developed so that more opportunities emerge for them especially.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2020 compared the economic participation and opportunities between men and women by assigning each country a value between zero and one, with a value one showing that “*women spend the same share of their time in these activities as men*”³. **Pakistan** was on the extreme lower end of the list, ranking 150 out of 153 countries, with a value of 0.327. **Egypt** ranked 140 with a value of 0.438. Therefore, both countries are severely lacking in the economic opportunities available to women, although women in Pakistan face significantly greater inequalities and become largely financially reliant on their partners.

We today have multiple measures and indicators of wellbeing, based on social and economic development interventions. This paper will utilize these measures after which comparison of both countries on such fronts will be carried out. Lastly, practices that can be implemented to successfully address the low socio-economic position of women in both countries will be explored.

1. Social Conditions

A. Poverty and Its Correlates

¹ (WB, Rural population (% of total population) - Pakistan | Data, 2021)

² (WB, Rural population (% of total population) - Egypt, Arab Rep. | Data, 2021)

³ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

Education:

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) emphasizes the importance of inclusive and equitable education. It particularly emphasizes investing in the quality of education through teacher training and curriculum. On the gender parity index⁴, **Pakistan** has been ranked at the 143rd position under education attainment with a score of 0.823. In Pakistan, the rural-urban divide in literacy and skills is not only more apparent in females but is also heightened by **issues of caste and ethnicity**. Females from minority groups in rural Pakistan face the greatest inequalities in terms of access to education. According to the Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, *“literacy for rural women ages 15-64 years is 35%, compared to the national rate of 47% and 69% for their urban counterparts”*. Other factors that contribute to low literacy rates for females in rural areas include familial pressure for them to prioritize domestic work over their studies. Research has shown that during harvest season, girls’ attendance in school drops as they are expected to help share the burden of the work. They are also expected to look after younger siblings or sick family members. With the majority of their time being given to handling household work, they have little to no time for their education. In addition, schools in rural areas have very limited space and as a result, multiple age groups are taught in a single classroom. Teacher absenteeism is also very common in these areas. When comparing enrollment in private (non-governmental) schools of girls aged 5-16, the percentage in rural areas is 28% while that in urban areas is 51%. Moreover, in rural areas, only 4% of women have college degrees⁶.

While gaps in education are less prevalent in rural **Lower Egypt** (the North), in rural **Upper Egypt** (the South) they still persist. Research in 2014⁷ showed that in rural areas the difference between women and men’s median number of years of schooling was 1.6 years while in urban areas the difference was 1 year. The difference in rural Upper Egypt specifically was 2.3 years while that in rural Lower Egypt was 1.3 years. One similarity seen between Egypt and Pakistan is that due to social and cultural norms, boys’ education is generally prioritized over that of girls’. The gender gap in the likelihood of ever attending school is 16% higher for men in rural Upper Egypt while in contrast to urban parts of Egypt, where the gender gap is only 6%. Moreover, in rural Upper Egypt around 22 % of women have never attended school. This is one of the causes of 39% of the women in these rural areas being illiterate. The lack of education automatically limits their economic opportunities.

According to the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020, there are also several other challenges in accomplishing the **fourth SDG** in these regions. The curriculum taught in schools is not innovative; study of subjects such as humanities and social is given low precedence and, in some public schools, rote learning still remains⁸. Government spending on education is also lower than the world average (4% of the GDP in 2008). In the same year, **Egypt** spent 3.8% of

⁴ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

⁵ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

⁶ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

⁷ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

⁸ UN ESWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020, 2020)

the GDP on education. This is still relatively high when compared to **Pakistan** where the percentage was 2.8⁹.

Moreover, as the quality of public education was not up to par, many educational institutions have been privatized. However, this is further increasing the inequalities in education. In addition, rural areas in the Arabian region concentrate on jobs in the primary sector which do not encourage innovative education. Jobs in the tertiary sector are low in supply and therefore, the education does not pay off. Lastly, conflict leads to lower enrollment rates in schools because of fears of unsafe educational conditions. It also can lead to a decrease in teaching staff and educational institutions. On the gender parity index¹⁰ **Egypt** has been ranked at the 102nd position under education attainment with a score of 0.973.

According to the 2020 UNDP Human Development Report¹¹, both Pakistan and Egypt experience inequalities in education on the basis of gender. As of 2019, the mean years of schooling for males in **Pakistan** is 6.3 whereas for females it is 3.8. Looking at **Egypt**, the same gap exists, but on a smaller scale. The mean years of schooling for males is 8.1 whereas for females it is only 6.8. Looking at the percentage of the population with at least some secondary education, there was once again a much larger difference. In **Pakistan**, the percentage for males was 46% while that for females was only 28%. In **Egypt**, however, the results actually showed the opposite: 73% of men had at least some secondary education whereas for women this value was 74%. Therefore, while both countries experience setbacks in achieving **SDG 5** (Gender Equality) and **SDG 4** (Quality Education), we can see that these gaps are much more profound in Pakistan. Moreover, in contrast to Pakistan, Egypt has never experienced a caste system, which is not related to religious preferences.

Health:

The **third SDG** is good health and well-being for all ages.

The sex ratio in **Pakistan** in 2020 was 106.0 males per 100 females¹². This was largely because of nutritional anaemia which unproportionately affects women due to long lasting traditions of women eating after men and children. This results in women being at greater risk to diseases such as malaria, gastroenteritis, and tuberculosis. Frequent pregnancies can also negatively affect their health. If a woman does not have a job outside the home, another problem is that women are being limited to the household and this is sometimes a toll on their mental health.

In **Egypt**, the sex ratio is very similar (102.1 males per 100 females in 2020)¹³ due to similar reasons. The prevalence of gender inequalities in terms of access to health care is one of the major challenges in meeting the **third SDG**. The inequalities are even more prevalent in rural areas. One field in which this was observed was deliveries: in urban areas, 97% of women during delivery were attended by a qualified health professional while in rural **Egypt**, this value

⁹ (WB, Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) - Pakistan, Egypt, Arab Rep., World | Data, 2021)

¹⁰ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

¹¹ (UNDP, Human Development Report 2020, 2020)

¹² (Knoema, Pakistan - Male to female ratio of the total population, 2021)

¹³ (Knoema, Egypt - Male to female ratio of the total population, 2021)

stood at 89%¹⁴. Therefore, while a difference exists, it is encouraging to see that it is relatively small and, at least on this front, rural women experience a similar level of healthcare.

Even if health insurance is available to the remaining women, it is not benefiting them greatly. Another difficulty encountered in tackling the **third SDG** is that the expansion of health services is based on market demand and not health needs. Therefore there are many disparities in healthcare between urban and rural areas. However, in recent years, a significant improvement has taken place, and especially with regards to access to healthcare services by women in rural areas.

Moreover, rural areas are also characterized by higher fertility rates: the fertility rate in these areas was reported at 3.8 births per woman, a rate 30% than that in urban areas¹⁵. This may be because women in rural areas are generally more likely to get married at a younger age, but is also linked to the urban-rural gap in education.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020¹⁶, when looking at health and survival, **Pakistan** ranked 149 out of 153 with a value of 0.946 while **Egypt** ranked 85 with a value of 0.974. Therefore we can see that in terms of equality in healthcare, Egypt is in a substantially better position than Pakistan. This was also seen in the 2020 UNDP Human Development Report¹⁷ when reporting on the maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live birth): in **Pakistan** the number is at 145 while in **Egypt** it is at 37. Thus, there is a large difference in the quality of healthcare available to women in these areas.

Violence:

In many instances, violence against women is used to ensure that women comply with traditional gender hierarchies, especially in lower income households. In a country like **Pakistan**, many cases of domestic violence, especially rape, even go unreported due to lack of faith in legal assistance and police. Even though domestic violence is largely prevalent in the country, there are very limited mechanisms to help women cope with the issue: in addition to there being few shelters, help centers and helplines are also few in number. As reported by the Women's Division, domestic violence occurs in approximately 80% of households in the country¹⁸.

Women in **Pakistan** are generally dependent on men due to lower education and fewer skills which reduce their chances of employment. Old traditions still dictate the roles of males and females in Pakistani households: males are generally given more rights and power and are expected to be the main income earners in the family. This also means any and all decisions lie in their hands and women are generally given very little say regarding the happenings of the household. However, it is seen that those women who do work outside the house and earn an income, are given some decision-making power. This is because they are seen to be contributing financially to the household and therefore their work is recognized.

¹⁴ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

¹⁵ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

¹⁶ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

¹⁷ (UNDP, Human Development Report 2020, 2020)

¹⁸ (ADB, Country Briefing Paper Women in Pakistan, 2000)

2. Economic Opportunities

A. Employment

Labor Force Participation:

An issue regarding women's participation in the labor force in **Pakistan** is that much work is not recognised and their participation in the labor force is underestimated. The two major areas in which women in rural regions partake are subsistence production and informal paid work. According to research there are four main reasons for this: the first that women themselves do not consider their housework as the same as other economic activities, the second is that most surveys only ask about those economic activities that generate income and therefore do not include domestic work, the third is that agricultural production usually only includes crop production and leaves out homestead production and lastly the census defines economic activity as *“engaging in an economic activity for a minimum amount of time in a reference period of one week prior to the survey”¹⁹* and therefore does not take into account women's seasonal work in agriculture.

In similarity with rural areas in Pakistan, many women from rural **Egypt** do not take part in economic activities. In fact, their participation in the labor force is only at 21%. Even though this number is not that much higher in urban areas (26%), it is still an improvement. Again, as with Pakistan, women from rural areas mainly take part in jobs related to agriculture; this sector accounts for 45% of the employment of women in these areas. However, their jobs are likely to be lower in terms of both wages and skills when compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, very few women have land ownership even though there is no legal framework preventing them from owning or inheriting land. When compared to urban areas, it is seen that there is a greater percentage of women involved in the formal sector in those areas. Of those women working in the informal sector, a staggering 94% come from rural areas. Another similarity seen between the two countries is the undervaluation of domestic work, most of which is carried out by women. There is also a stark difference in the percentage of women that are involved in unpaid family work in the different locations: in rural areas it is estimated at 33% whereas in urban areas it is estimated at only 4%²⁰.

According to the 2020 UNDP Human Development Report²¹, there is a large gap in the labor force participation rate of males and females in both Pakistan and Egypt. In **Pakistan** the labor force participation rate is 82% for men and only 22% for females. Looking at **Egypt**, the same discrepancies exist : the labor force participation rate is 71% for men and 22% for females. Therefore, we can see that both countries have very limited women actively part of the labor force.

These statistics were further confirmed by the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 when comparing the economic participation and opportunities between men and women. Each country was assigned a value between zero and one, with a value one showing that *“women spend the*

¹⁹ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

²⁰ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

²¹ (UNDP, Human Development Report 2020, 2020)

*same share of their time in these activities as men*²². **Pakistan** was on the extreme lower end of the list, ranking 150 out of 153 countries, with a value of 0.327. **Egypt** ranked 140 with a value of 0.438. Therefore, both countries are severely lacking in the economic opportunities available to women, although women in Pakistan face significantly greater inequalities and become largely financially reliant on their partners.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2020 went even further and compared the wage equality for similar work. In this comparison **Pakistan** ranked 102 with a score of 0.592 whereas **Egypt** ranked 22 with a score of 0.741. Thus, there is a substantial difference in this field between the two countries with Egypt having a substantially low degree of inequality in this area.

The report also included the estimated gross national income per capita which was obtained using *“the ratio of female to male wages, female and male shares of economically active population and gross national income*²³. In **Pakistan**, the value for males was \$8412 while that for females was at \$1393. In **Egypt**, although a large difference did exist between the genders, the values were significantly higher than those in Pakistan; the value for males was \$18039 while that for females was \$4753. This makes it difficult for both countries to achieve **SDG 5** (Gender Equality) in addition to **SDG 8** (Economic Growth) as limitations on women’s participation in economic activity will mean that the country is not making full use of its economic resources.

Unemployment:

In **Pakistan**, the age at which women start work is generally younger and longer in rural areas than urban ones²⁴. Most of these women work in either their own houses or the countryside. Only 6% work in places outside the home such as offices and businesses. Those who work from home constitute 51% of those that are unpaid. Even though a majority of women in rural areas do take part in agricultural work, only 19% of them are in paid employment and as a whole, 60% of rural employed women are unpaid. Moreover, the report also showed that 7% of rural women are unemployed²⁵.

Research has shown that out of the female rural working population, divorcees and widows are more likely to take up work to help generate income for their families and dependents. However, these women are still mainly concentrated in the primary sector (agriculture and fisheries).

Only 11% of all women in rural areas are involved in manufacturing (textiles and apparel industry) and 6% are involved in community and social industries. This is in comparison to the 82% of women who are involved in primary jobs such as agriculture and forestry²⁶.

In **Egypt**, there are also several other barriers preventing the region from accomplishing **SDG 5** such as discriminatory laws and legal practices. There is no legislation present to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender. This leads to a lower percentage of women participating

²² (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

²³ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

²⁴ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

²⁵ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

²⁶ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

in the workforce. Many laws also specify exemptions for the legal age to marry, early pregnancy and forced abortions. Another reason is discriminatory social norms and behaviours which allow men to make primary decisions about the female's life and there is also widespread segregation of occupations. Moreover, domestic violence is generally socially tolerated in this region and most cases remain unreported. Moreover, there are structural barriers to women's economic participation and limited access to economic resources. Women are unable to retain control of their lives as they are economically dependent on their partners. Women also are more likely to end up in jobs that require lower skills and have lower wages. Lack of adequate public transport also makes it more difficult for them to hold jobs.

According to research, the internet is not utilized by 84% of women in rural areas²⁷. This not only limits their economic opportunities, but also restricts access to financial services. This also means that they cannot gain access to business skills and plans that may otherwise have been available to them through the internet.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, When comparing the percentage of women taking part in the professional and technical fields, the report once again showed **Pakistan** falling behind. It currently ranks 140 with a score of 0.304 while **Egypt** ranks 116 with a score of 0.624²⁸. However, looking at the exact percentage of women involved in this field of the labor force shows us how women are generally limited to the primary sector, especially agriculture and fishery, and are seldom part of the tertiary sector where more skills are needed and higher wages are offered.

Much worse discrepancies exist when comparing the percentage of women employed as legislators, senior officials and managers. Ranking 146 out of 153 countries reviewed in this field, **Pakistan** only has 5% of females working in this field with **Egypt** just one ahead at 145 with 7%²⁹ of females working in this field. Women in both countries are unable to be in high ranking managerial positions and therefore unable to earn higher income which leaves them largely dependent on their partners and/or male family members.

Women face great inequalities in both countries, which is reflected in the poor economies of both countries.

B. Entrepreneurship:

The lack of financial services available to women in rural areas makes it even more difficult for them to start their own businesses. Only 6% of businesses in **Pakistan** have majority female ownership and only 1% of women in the country are entrepreneurs³⁰. This is also largely due to gender norms in the country which have remained unchallenged for decades and limited these women's mobility.

Other barriers to entrepreneurship include the fact that many women have little to no knowledge of business skills and concepts such as break-even points. Moreover, they lack access to

²⁷ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

²⁸ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

²⁹ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

³⁰ (UN, Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report, 2018)

adequate transportation and therefore are not able to access markets. The high costs associated with public transport also means that it is difficult for rural entrepreneurs to gain access to markets and customers in urban areas. In addition, rural women do not have access to the technology and technical skills they need to expand their businesses. Therefore, those businesses that are started by women are concentrated mainly in the primary sector, which relies on traditional methods of production and very little technology. Women also have trouble gaining access to financial resources because banks require collateral and women are unable to meet such requirements as they do not have access to assets. Some women try to counter this by taking part in rotating credit and saving schemes. Due to social and cultural norms, they are also generally very restricted in their movement. The fear of harassment or dealing with men is another difficulty they have to overcome.

However, **in Egypt**, 82% of the business owners are located in rural areas and only 18%³¹ are located in urban areas. However, those that are located in rural areas are seen to only earn subsistence level income. This may be because women here have a more difficult time securing loans as they are unable to offer collateral or do not have sufficient credit history. Fewer than 7% of women in Egypt have a formal bank account, which limits their access to sources of finance such as bank loans and credit lines³². Therefore, women entrepreneurs in rural areas have to rely on informal means to secure finance for their businesses. Those women who are able to start their businesses then face the challenge of developing and expanding them due to several reasons: lack of education, lack of training and skills, lack of time due to domestic work, and a general lack of mobility. Moreover, as with Pakistan there is a lack of access to internet services, especially in rural areas. According to the report Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, a survey has shown that while 78% of women entrepreneurs in Cairo use smartphones, in rural Egypt the number is only at 2.5%³³. The same is the case with other technological devices and services: laptops, desktops, the internet and mobile internet subscriptions are all consistently in higher use in urban areas than rural. This puts women in rural areas at a disadvantage as they are unable to access information about investment opportunities.

3. Political Representation

Even though many new policies directly impact women, they have little to no say in whether or not these policies are implemented. This furthers gender inequality in **Pakistan**. Even if women's participation in the political sphere is increasing, there is not an increased representation of them in political parties. Those who do make it to political parties are given inferior positions and cultural norms once again limit them to decision making roles in only those policies related to family. Real change can only occur if women are given a real chance to be a part of the political sphere.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020³⁴, when looking at the percentage of seats held by women in Parliament, the value in **Egypt** is estimated at 15% while that in **Pakistan** is 20%. While Pakistan does have a higher percentage, both countries largely under-represent women in the political sphere. This means that even those policies and legislations that largely affect

³¹ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

³² (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

³³ (UN, Profile of Women in Rural Egypt, 2018)

³⁴ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

women, such as those on marriage and pregnancy, are decided on mostly by men. More recently, with support from Egypt's President, and since 2014, there have been improvements such that the share of women in Parliament is 25%. In Egypt, however, the NCW is actively working to solve the issue of under-representation of women in politics and legislation.

When measuring political empowerment, the Global Gender Gap Index 2020³⁵ showed perhaps the greatest extent of inequalities. It was also the first measurement in which **Pakistan** ranked ahead of **Egypt**, coming at 93 out of 153 with a value of 0.159. Egypt ranked at 103 with a value of 0.133. However, these low values are especially alarming as they show the extent to which women in both countries have little to no say in the legal system.

4. Solutions

Rural Development Best Practices in Pakistan:

1. Improving the Quality and Pricing of Education through Provision of School Card Reports

One strategy that proved to improve the level of education is the introduction of report cards with child and school test scores. The study was first introduced to counter private school's (non-governmental) increasing profit levels as a result of parents' lack of information on the performance of public and private schools. This strategy showed enhanced student performance in addition to reduced fees. In addition to reporting each child's individual scores, the reports also included how each child performed in comparison to their peers. These report cards helped to reduce private schools' fees as without proper information, parents relied on the fact that higher prices equaled a better quality of education. The introduction of report cards changed their perception in that they now used test scores as an indication of better or worse quality. A decrease in school fees was also a factor that contributed to increased enrollment rates. Test scores showed an increase as this new method fostered better engagement between parents and schools, pressuring schools to bring about improvements.

2. Utilizing a Public-Private Partnership to Expanding Educational Opportunities

The concept of publicly funded private schools was introduced with two main aims: to increase enrollment rates and reduce gender disparities. While the latter was not achieved, the policy proved to effectively increase enrollment rates. To test their hypothesis, researchers along with interested entrepreneurs selected 200 private schools to subsidize. The program, Promoting Low-Cost Private Schooling (PPRS), increased enrollment in primary schools by a staggering 30 percentage points³⁶. This system can prove beneficial to students as, compared to government schools, private schools are open more days a week, have a larger teaching staff and better infrastructure. While a further financial incentive was provided to increase enrollment of female students, the enrollment rates of males and females were, to a large degree, similar. In addition, students enrolled in a PPRS school showed an increase in test scores in math and

³⁵ (WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2020, 2019)

³⁶ (J-PAL, Delivering Education to the Underserved through a Public-Private Partnership Program in Pakistan, 2017)

language. This program has proved so effective that it has been implemented in more than 1000 schools and has gone through extensive expansion. The funding is through Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), a quasi-governmental agency.

3. The Effects of Performance Pay Among Private School Teachers

While the first two practices looked at increasing enrollment rates and students' performances, this practice was aimed at improving the performance of teachers. To determine the effects of objective versus subjective performance incentive pay on both student performance and teacher behavior, researchers partnered with a large private school network in Pakistan. To test the objective performance group, supervisors will rate teachers on a scale of 0-100 based on their efforts in improving student performance. Teachers will also be ranked against one another. To test the subjective performance group, teachers will be given a raise based on their students' average performance on a standardized exam. Teachers will also be ranked against each other based on the performance of their respective students. For the flat raise group, teachers will be given a 5%³⁷ raise at the end of the school year. This group will act as a control for the subjective and objective performance groups. The results of this study will allow researchers to discover the most effective incentive scheme to find and retain good teachers. As a result, both public and private schools will be able to better the quality of education.

4. Increasing Public Transportation in order to raise Employment Opportunities for Women

Currently, lack of efficient public transport limits employment opportunities in Pakistan, in particular for women. In order to accelerate employment levels, a partnership between researchers and the Lahore Transport Company (LTC) is working towards the introduction of small vehicles known as wagons. These proposed wagons serve to mainly benefit the poor who, throughout the years, have been at a disadvantage due to limited access to transportation to main cities. For women this is an even greater problem as they are generally prevented from using other modes of transport such as motorcycles and bicycles. Equipped with these facts, the government has decided to introduce women's-only compartments on buses. The aim of the LTC partnership is to tackle the problem of transport costs and to develop 80³⁸ additional routes for the most under-served areas. These changes will hopefully allow those living in areas outside of major cities to expand their job search at a low cost and subsequently improve employment levels in the country.

5. Phone-Based Job Assistance to Aid Women's Economic Recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately affects women, both in terms of employment levels and infection rates. As Pakistan recovers from the pandemic, women face even further challenges trying to find jobs. To combat this issue, researchers provided a mobile platform to assist women with job search and employment. A program, Job Talash, was used to connect

³⁷ (J-PAL, The Effects of Performance Pay Among Private School Teachers in Pakistan)

³⁸ (J-PAL, Increasing Public Transportation For Higher Employment And Women's Empowerment In Pakistan)

those looking for jobs in two groups. The first group obtained a list of vacancies via text along with a message to call Job Talash to submit their applications. The second group obtained a list of vacancies via phone call and were given the option of submitting their application during the call. Researchers will compare both groups, along with a control group, to assess the impact of phone-based job-search assistance. As women in Pakistan are further disadvantaged by lack of information and domestic responsibilities, the study could show promising results.

6. Training Programs for Marriage Registrars to Improve Women's Rights in Punjab

While women's rights may exist on paper in Pakistan, their implementation is affected by public officials' behaviors and practices. This means that many women, especially those who lack a quality education, are unaware of their property, marriage and divorce rights. To counter this, the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) together with researchers have started training programs for marriage registrars; such programs have become mandatory for registrars if they want to retain their licenses. Four key areas of women's rights will be highlighted in these training sessions: child marriage and the legal age of consent, right to divorce and polygamy and consent of the first wife. After these programs have been conducted, researchers will survey the registrars to assess what change, if any, was brought about regarding knowledge of the law, marriage rights and community norms. Researchers will also assess if the training programmes brought any change in the way in which registrars handle marriage contracts.

Rural Development Best Practices in Egypt:

1. Improving the Egyptian Education System

There is an increasing need to reach remote areas, such as rural Upper Egypt, where access to education is limited. A similar research study conducted in Pakistan showed that this can be achieved by creating local schools thereby reducing the travel time. School enrollment rates and test scores were both seen to improve. Another suggestion included moving away from rote memorization, which is currently the primary way of learning, and instead encouraging creativity, critical thinking and free expression of ideas and opinions to promote continuity in learning. Such methods can also be altered to each student's strengths and weaknesses to achieve the most effective learning outcomes. Moreover, research also showed the importance of developing non-cognitive skills in children. Programmes can be implemented in primary schools that aim at developing patience and discipline in the youth. Research in Istanbul has shown that this can build skills in several different areas: patience, self-control, willingness to engage in challenging tasks and can also have positive effects on their health.

2. Impact of Loans and Grants on Microenterprise Growth

Researchers partnered with three micro-finance institutions in order to determine what impact the provision of loans, cash grants, or in-kind grants may have on the business decisions and outcomes of micro-entrepreneurs'. This research was conducted in Qena, a rural area in Upper Egypt. Participants from all three institutions were also given business training courses over two days. The results of the evaluation showed that personal characteristics, rather than the type of finance, had a greater impact on how effectively that capital was used. While it was seen that loans, cash grants, and in-kind grants all led to an increase in business ownership for men and

women, the increase was more significant in the case of women (10.2% as opposed to 3.4% in the case of men³⁹). Moreover, during this period the profits of these women also increased with in-kind grants bringing an increase of 133 EGP per month. The results of this survey show that policy makers should grant these forms of capital assistance to “high-potential” entrepreneurs as this will bring the most change in the income and employment of those targeted.

3. Impact of Exporting on Profits and Productivity

Research was carried out to determine the effect of exports on the profits and productivity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Aid to Artisans (ATA) helped connect local rug producers with foreign buyers. Through their help, Hamis Carpets, a rug intermediary in Fowa, were able to design carpets for sale to high-income countries. The results of the intervention showed that those rug-producers who were able to export their products showed an increase in profits by 26%⁴⁰ due to increased knowledge of efficiency and product-quality. Moreover, the price these firms received per rug increased by 43%. Moreover, it was seen that exporting firms were able to improve the quality of their rugs through improved technology and efficiency; when rated by a “*master artisan*” on a scale of 1-5, exporting firms received a score 0.79 points higher than comparison firms. There were also long-term beneficial results: firms were able to learn about production practices through exporting and bring about improvements in their firms.

4. Job Training and Matching to Increase Youth Employment

To counter the high rates of youth unemployment in the country, researchers partnered with Active Labor Market Programs (ALMPs) to provide vocational and soft-skill training, counseling and job search assistance to help the youth actively become a part of the labor force. Participants were divided into two treatment groups; the first group received job matching and skills training and the second group received job matching, skills training and individual counseling. The results of the intervention were measured in terms of employment, working hours, monthly income, and overall wealth. Employment was seen to increase by 34% for both groups. When looking at working hours, it was seen that the second group showed a greater increase (3.6 hours). Monthly incomes also increased for both the first and second group by 35% and 36%⁴¹ respectively. It was noted, however, that the wealth of both groups did not change during the course of the intervention. Moreover, it was also seen that for non-labor market outcomes were not very significant. However, it was established that such interventions can be of particular benefit for women and the youth.

5. Improving Female Labor Force Participation

Many women in the Middle East face significant economic challenges as compared to their male counterparts as social norms limit them both occupationally and mobility-wise. Moreover, there is also misinformation around wages as many women often underestimate wages that will be offered to them. This may discourage some women from participating in the labor force. There is also generally large scale discrimination against women; a study around Egypt's labor force showed that around half of the employers revealed that they are more inclined to hire men than women. Tackling such hurdles is even more difficult for those women who are in rural areas.

³⁹ (J-PAL, Impact Of Loans And Grants On Microenterprise Growth In Egypt)

⁴⁰ (J-PAL, The Impact Of Exporting: Evidence From A Randomized Experiment In Egypt)

⁴¹ (J-PAL, Job Training And Matching To Increase Youth Employment In Egypt)

Women are also subject to poorer working conditions and have to carry the burden of the household work. Research has shown that several approaches can be used to increase women's economic participation: programs can be initiated to encourage women to integrate into the labor force and to provide them with reliable information on wages rates and job vacancies. Such programs can also be used to change men's views on women's participation in the workplace. Education through classrooms and media campaigns can also be used to change or shift social norms.

Comparison Best Practices in Pakistan and Egypt:

In both countries practices aimed towards women primarily focus on increasing their participation in the labor force and giving them a more prominent role in economic activities. Practices in both countries acknowledge the societal norms that have placed women in an inferior position as compared to men and thus mainly tackle the limited mobility of women as well as cultural traditions which have prevented them from taking up jobs in the past. It was seen that through access to reliable information, the internet and improved public transportation, women can be integrated into the labor force.

In both countries, practices looking to expand educational opportunities and increase enrollment rates also primarily focus on increasing the quality of education. They acknowledge the disparity in education between rural and urban areas and therefore are mainly concerned with improving education in underdeveloped areas. However, they differ in their approaches. In Egypt, the practices focus on changing the method of teaching and allowing for more innovative techniques while in Pakistan the practices focus on improving the performance of teachers and the pricing of schools to up enrollment rates.

Other development practices in **Egypt** which are still under evaluation, such as Digital Marketing for Micro-enterprises and Small Businesses, show how the country is integrating technology to boost economic growth. However, no similar trend is seen in **Pakistan**.

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