Gender dimensions in textiles and clothing sector of Pakistan

1Sabahat Akram*, 2Kotli Azad Kashmir
1Director Planning and development in University Management Sciences.
2University teaching, project planning and Management
*Corresponding author email: sabahat_abrar@hotmail.com
Accepted 08 January, 2015

Abstract

Purpose- This study presents an analysis of textiles labor market of Pakistan with a gender perspective. The study aims at highlighting different dimensions using indicators of gender mainstreaming in textiles and clothing sector in Pakistan. Methodology/sample- This analytical paper is large based only on Secondary research of Official data, recent surveys, research studies and articles, and civil society reports relating to this study. Primary research consisted of unstructured interviews/informal meetings of representatives of textile industry and stakeholders. The main dimensions being the gender, technology and skills, unequal and discriminatory wages and attitude towards women, unregistered work, social dimensions, gender and labor laws and globalization, and forward and backward linkages of this gender mainstreaming. Findings- The study concludes that although the existing laws are not that much insufficient but poor/weak implementation and enforcement of the laws make them weak. There is a need to diversify the training program throughout the textile and garment value chain segments so that more and more women could be able to get job opportunities and better working conditions. Practical Implications- This paper also suggests mitigation strategies like gender specific policymaking, implementation of international commitment, increased vigilance on labor laws to remove the impediments in the pursuit of growth of female employment and ultimately growth of the country's economy.

Keywords: textiles industry, female workforce, gender mainstreaming, labor laws and globalization.

INTRODUCTION

Gendered Workforce Composition

The Cotton value chain (CVC) or textile industry has a strategic importance in Pakistan, as it accounts for more than 60 percent to the country’s total exports that sum around 5.2 billion US dollars. The industry contributes approximately 46 percent to the total output produced in the country. In Asia, Pakistan is the 8th largest exporter of textile products. The contribution of this industry to the total GDP is 8.5 percent. Moreover, it provides employment to 38 percent of the work force in the country, which amounts to a figure of 15 million1. (Government of Pakistan, 2008). Table 1.

Textile and clothing sector is very important in this regard that Women account for more than two thirds of the global labor force in the sector, and employment in textiles and clothing accounts for almost one fifth of the total world female labor force in manufacturing. This sector is also very important in Pakistan's context also as it is providing employment to 2.3 million people in the
Table 1. Cotton Value Chain in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginning</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>10,314 m bales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinning</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>1818 m kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>5600 m sq. meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing/ finishing</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>2700 m sq. meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garments</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>650 m pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry towels</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>53 m kgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Looms 32 m kgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitwear</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>400 m pieces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Saleem (2003)

country (Adhikari and Weeratunge, 2006).

Moreover, textile industry is also important because after agriculture it is the second largest employer of women in Pakistan (MEDI, 2007) and the largest employer of female workers in Pakistani manufacturing. Although Of the employed labor force, women constitute only 20% (10 million) – (LFS, GOP: 2007). This is lower than in other South and Southeast Asian countries. Although the overall employment of female workers in the Pakistani textile and clothing industry is about 20 percent, relative female employment in stitching units is considerably higher, up to 75 percent of the total workforce is in the stitching units.

The textile industry has generally been viewed as an industry suitable for the employment of female workers for the following reasons:

- Tradition of textile production (particularly spinning and stitching/sewing as “women’s work” in the pre-industrial household economy,
- Secondly it is considered suitable for the “nimble hands” of female workers as it is considered light (rather than heavy) manufacturing industry.
- Widely held view of textile producers that women workers were both a more ‘docile’ and ‘cheaper’ alternative to male employment.
- And of the fact that women are more readily available as an expendable and/or untapped labor pool.

METHODOLOGY

In preparing this analytical paper, the researcher mainly relied on Secondary research of Official data, recent surveys, research studies and articles, and civil society reports relating to this study. Primary research consisted of unstructured interviews/informal meetings of representatives of textile industry and stakeholders who had the ability to provide feedback and make recommendations: their views are duly represented in the recommendations.

The paper begins by introducing the current situation of workers in the garment sector. The 2nd section summarizes the current scenario of the sector and discusses its pertinent issues. For example situation of labor laws concept of globalization and analyzes key issues in the garment sector. The concluding paper the third section identifies gender sensitive policy measures and mitigation strategies for the issues raised in 2nd part.

Profile of employment/employment laws for female workers

In Pakistan there are more than 70 different laws relating to the issue of labor force. Most comprehensive are the pre-partition laws importantly Trade Union Act 1946, Industrial Employment Act 1946, Industrial dispute Act 1947 and Factories Act 1934. These four laws provided bases for all the future legislation. Pakistan’s constitution has separate provisions for labor rights, some of which are gender specific. The existing laws are not that much insufficient but poor/weak implementation and enforcement of the laws make them weak. Specific gender related issues catered by constitution of Pakistan are

- Article 11: rights of union
- Article 18: equal rights to enter any profession
- Article 25: All are equal no discrimination on basis of sex only
- Article 27: equal opportunity for job, no discrimination on basis of sex, race or religion etc
- Article 37E: state responsible for securing just and humane condition of work for women and children - maternity benefit for women
- Article 38: secure the well being of people irrespective of sex, cast, creed.

There are many more ordinances and acts passed to safeguard the interests and rights of women workers more important of which are;

- Article 25 and 27 and Factories Act deal with issues of equality and prohibited discrimination on bases of sex, race and maternity benefits
- Occupational safety and health of labors act 1934 factories act 1934. Mine act 1923. These laws are comprehensive but their coverage is limited.
- There are many laws dealing with fixation of payment of wages like payment of wages act 1936. Coal

- Industrial relationship ordinance (IRO) (1969) amended by Bhutto government in seventies
- ICE standing order 1968: Industrial and commercial Employment (standing industrial and commercial employment standing order) ordinance 1968 caters the contractual relationship issues and amended in 2006 under which hiring and firing rules were determined for e.g. written contract (section 41). Termination rules (section 12) of IRA-2008
- The workers welfare legislation includes Employees age benefit Act 1976 and Employees social security ordinance 1965.
- Industrial Relations Ordinance, 2002. Simplifies the system, introducing a single body in place of the three previous ones: the joint works council (Article 24 of the IRO 2002). For workers' representation in management to deals with matters of productivity and efficiency, provision of minimum facilities for contractual workers, health and safety and bilateral negotiations. IRO-2002
- IRA Act-2008: consolidated and rationalized the laws relating to formation of trade unions, and improvement of relations between employers and workman, settlement of any differences or disputes and Freedom of association/union article of constitution (section 3 of IRA-2008) (Govt. of Pakistan (2008); labor force survey (2007), Islamabad Pakistan)

Gender dimension of globalization of trade in textiles and clothing

The textile and garment industries are among the most globalized of all industries. Clothing and other textile products are produced in nearly every country in the world, often sending elsewhere for sale, and together the garment and textile industries make up the largest source of industrial employment in the world. That means around 30 million people are working in textile and clothing industry across the globe of these 30 million, most are women.

This global trade was manned by The Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), enforced in 1974, which allowed industrialized countries to apply quotas unilaterally on textiles and clothing imports, complemented by high tariffs, and other non-tariff barriers to trade. From January 2005, the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) under the World Trade Organization (WTO) is being fully implemented. It has liberalized global trade in textiles and clothing also.

A lot was expected from this Liberalization of trade in textiles and clothing by many developing countries, including Pakistan. The economic implications of the ATC for Pakistan were more or less as predicted. In some areas as expected the Pakistani textile industry done well as a global supplier in cotton yarns and fabrics due to its cheap labor supply, access to local raw cotton guaranteeing a natural backward linkage in the textile chain. But otherwise its under-investment in technology and the lack of product diversification and lately energy crises and non-conducive environment due to law and order situation and terrorism contributed to detracting it from competitiveness. In mitigating these challenges of new era of globalization the area that was completely ignored is the distinct gender dimension of the textiles and clothing production.

The huge representation of women in the textile and clothing industry makes WTO regime a gender equality issue - potentially impinging on one of the few sectors that provides paid employment to women in Pakistan. The elimination of quota system can effect the textile industry both in positive and negative way. (Mehta, 1996) The positive factor may be the more employment creation resulting from increased demand. The negative effect of globalization can be reflected in more pressures on workers to produce more in less time compromising on work place social compliance standards. In the short-run, the current preparations to more liberalized trade in textiles and clothing may increase relative female employment in the industry in Pakistan. This is because the workforce in the units affected by laborsaving investments is predominantly male.

The long-term effects of globalization for the gender composition of the workforce are less clear but it felt that it will be is the female rather than male workers who may bear the consequences of a potential deterioration of working conditions. Since the female workers concentration is in the units where piece rates and other types of precarious contracts are in common practice, they already work in more vulnerable conditions and any external pressure will be felt more by them.

Women and trade union

Although initial legislation on labor law regarding trade union activities provided full freedom of organization for their rights. (Factories act 1934 selection) industrial relationship ordinance (IRO) collective bargaining–(1969) but afterwards due to repressive legislation by military rulers, their role and strength have diminished their role considerably. Official data available (Pakistan Statistical Year Book, 2008) shows that unions in the formal sector only represent 5% of workers. As of 318 unions present in 1996 there are only 39 operative in 2005.

Accordingly to secondary data out of registered trade unions the female members are less then 2%. (Pakistan Statistical Year Book, 2008). Except for Faisalabad where power loom sector there are large scale mobilization of workers otherwise trade union activities
are almost nonexistent and where present they are also all male. Female are not only disorganized but they are culturally discouraged from participating in any kind of collective mobilization.

Discussions with industry stakeholders revealed that most of the small factory female workers have no knowledge of companies’ code of conduct, the rights to unionize and collective bargaining.

**Engendering wages**

Wages in the textile sector all most all over the world reflect clear gender-based pay gaps. On average, men in the garment sector earn, more than women. Gender plays a key role in determining the level of skill or tier of work to be performed and the level of payment in the majority of national textile industries. Even in garment Units which are engaged for producing products for multinational companies like GAP, Levi Strauss are women are forced to work overtime and their wages are inadequate, far below the minimum wage. A study revealed that 95 percent women have no appointment letters. Another study by (2005) also reached at same figures of 95 percent of women having no written contract letters. Another study revealed 97 percent women were hired on temporary basis and 64 percent were getting less than minimum pay, which is fixed by government at Rs 7000. Workers having no written contracts are faced with greater job uncertainty in times of low demand. They are more prone to periodic forced layoffs and shortened weeks.

On average Women often earned as little as 45-50% of male wages under fixed wage structures. Even the same task or process, is paid less or more depending upon the operative being female or male. Workers are paid by the number of pieces they have produced, therefore a persons’ pay depends on how fast she is able to work. Even when both sexes were paid using the same piece-work levels, in reality Women generally earned less than men because of their lower output, which is again due to the working environment provided to them. A Researchers identify that it is the female rather than male workers who suffer most due to their concentration in units where piece rates and other types of precarious contracts are common. The vicious circle of ill will starts with Low-skill workers and poor productivity and quality management in the small factories. This leads to excessive overtime because fewer pieces can be made in each hour and workers spend time doing rework. Long hours lead to tiredness, illness and accidents. These contribute to low productivity and high levels of reworking, as Piece rate workers are not paid for reworking and so high levels of rework significantly affects there pays.

**Work conditions**

The work in both the women-dominated garment sub-sector and the men-dominated knitwear sector has never been easy as both jobs are very laborious. Studies reported that garment factories have extremely poor working conditions. Women garment workers may be more vulnerable because of childhood malnourishment, which weakens the immune system. So they are more susceptible to disease and prone to factories conditions related illnesses. Culturally traditional behavior of middle class women of subcontinent also dominate in Women garment workers with families who may prioritize feeding their husband and children, depriving themselves of important nutrients and pay attention to their medical needs as last priority. Working conditions in factory place can directly endanger workers health and safety. Problems found in the textile industry are health risks due to: continuously inhaling toxic substances for example pesticides and chemicals; not being allowed to move or stand while working repetitive strain injury, safety issues of fire safety and evacuation routes; ergonomic facilities; carpal tunnel syndrome, temperature, noise and dust and storage related allergies and illnesses and being forced to work extremely long hours. Because of pressure to produce more in less time and repetitive workers are more reluctant to take breaks to stand up this creates chronic back and neck problems.

**Mitigation strategies**

Many of these views and suggestions came from experts, academicians, and factory owner, representatives of various associations in our informal interviews with them.

**National legal legislations**

First and foremost strategy is the effective enforcement of labor standards and laws. As already discussed Pakistan has all the necessary legislation to cater the issues it’s the weak enforcement of law, which creates all the ills. There should be effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with labor legislation, particularly in ensuring the women workers’ enrolment to a social security system for health, maternity, disability, and wages retirement benefits. Workers’ especially women workers’, right to organize should also be emphasized so that they can take care of their problems themselves. Secondly the problem is of the coverage of these legislations. It generally extends only to workers in certain sub sectors of textile value chain and only to the formal sector in the other cases. In general the informal sector workers, particularly the home-based workers, are left out of most legislations even when they exist. The issuance of Identity Cards for the workers which has become law.
in neighbouring countries can play an important role in identifying these workers and safeguarding their rights. It can be funded through a cess or tax on the commodity they produce.

Laws such as ban on second shift for female workers or compulsory transport facility to female workers on second shift create some negative imperatives. While safeguarding the interests of female workers laws implementation should also include that positive incentives, such as tax cuts or subsidies for those companies that protect workers’ rights. So that Win-Win situation can be created for both the female workers and entrepreneur.

2- the inclusion of a gender perspective in the analysis of globalization’s implications suggests that special mitigation strategies are needed for women workers on multi pronged issues in the sector. Such as

- Members of Pakistan Chamber and Commerce Industry (FPCCI) expressed time and again that there would be no job losses in the textile sector but rather more definite employment opportunities generated after post quota era if Pakistan textile sector is prepared well to meet the challenges.
- Policy reactions to globalization should include enhanced training opportunities for female workers. The most important factor in this regard is the Human resources development and is therefore advocated by many for example the sectoral strategy “Textile Vision 2005”(SMEDA, 2005); World Bank (2004); (Kazmi, 2002).
- Information centers related to employment opportunities and orders may be established.

Another very important factor to enhance female access to jobs is improvement of transport facilities to work. Its provision may be the employer’s responsibility as is the case for garment entrepreneurs who need to hire female workers for second shift. But positive aspect of this labor law is often been undermined by the fact that factory owners usually don’t hire female workers for the very reason of compulsory transport law. Given the expressed optimism of textile industry about post quota era they should take lead in this regard to have greater access to female labor supply, a vast untapped pool. Laws such as ban on second shift for female workers or compulsory transport facility to female workers on second shift create some negative imperatives. While safeguarding the interests of female workers laws implementation should also include that positive incentives, such as tax cuts or subsidies from workers welfare fund or some other scheme for those companies that protect workers’ rights. So that Win-Win situation can be created for both the female workers and entrepreneur.

Minimum wages

The minimum wage has been fixed recently for unskilled worker including garment workers at Rs.7000 per month. However, the issues here are whether this is adequate and how to ensure that a majority of the workers receive this wage. This is particularly true for the informal sector consisting of small factories and the home-based workers. Thirdly, high wages alone are not enough to sustain livelihoods. There is a need to ensure the minimum norm of 250 workdays to be observed. It is observed that it is not met for most workers not only in the garment industry, but also other sectors of textile value chain. It starts with cotton picking which is seasonal. Ginning is again a seasonal activity consisting of only three months. Work in piece rate contract is highly volatile as it depends on orders the factory owners could manage to get. This trend not only deprives the workers particularly the women of sustained livelihood but also exclude them from social security network of labor laws. As most of the labor laws don’t apply to seasonal and small time bound contracts.

Welfare fund or social security

- Researchers (Karin, 2004), stress on better implementation of labor standards to protect workers from harmful consequences of trade intensification.
- After abolition of quotas many developed countries have resorted to non-tariff barriers most importantly on social compliance issues section 301 alone is responsible for rejections of export consignment to America. There is need set up standards and codes of conduct with the aim to improve the situation regarding corporate social responsibility issues in factories.
- Government and research institutions, industry associations and business networks should work together in this regard.

Standard Social focus Environ. Focus Certification Verification Initiative/sector

Social standards

There are so many national and international standards for textile and clothing sector like the SA 8000. SA 8000 is an international standard for improving working conditions around the world. It is based on the principles of thirteen international human rights conventions, ten of which are conventions of the International Labour...
Organization (ILO), which Pakistan has ratified. It is based on among other convents on some women specific conventions like "UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women", and ILO Conventions 100 and 111 (Equal remuneration for male and female workers for work of equal value; Discrimination) Clause 6.3.7 of ISO 26000 (discrimination and vulnerable groups is based on GRI (LA14) which ascertains ratio of basic salary of men to women by employee category\(^\text{16}\) like wise Fair Labor Association standards also based on ILO convents seeks to provide for equal remuneration to men and women.

Clean Clothes campaign (also based on ILO convent) have implicit and explicit clauses relating to gender specific entitlements: apart from maternity leave, there are legal provision of gender-specific entitlements for women workers under these standards.

These all standards are not only based on ILO and UN conventions which Pakistan has ratified, but most of these standards are mandatory for export to developed countries purposes. Even then compliance of these standards are the neglected parts of the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pakistan’s constitution has separate provisions for labor rights, some of which are gender specific. The existing laws are not that much insufficient but poor/weak implementation and enforcement of the laws make them weak.

The economic implications of the ATC for Pakistan were more or less as predicted. In some areas as expected the Pakistani textile industry done well as a global supplier in cotton yarns and fabrics. But otherwise its under-investment in technology, in human resource development and the lack of product diversification and lately energy crises and non-conducive environment due to law and order situation and terrorism contributed to detracting it from competitiveness. In mitigating these challenges of new era of globalization the area that was completely ignored is the distinct gender dimension of the textiles and clothing production which can make or break the whole worth of this sector.

There is a need to diversify the training program throughout the textile and garment value chain segments so that more and more women could be able to get job opportunities. However, main focus should always be on garment sector. Integrated training programs for women should be introduced in the main textile cities. There should be Proper curriculum development through affiliation with recognized institutions for safe guarding requirements of the garment industry. And finally there should be Proper coordination among all the stake holders especially the Donors, INGOs /NGO’s, business associations and government/s for empowering women through skill development.

REFERENCES


Karin Astrid Siegmann et.al


