

# **Impact of Aga Khan Rural Support Program's Gender Strategy on Rural Women in District Chitral**

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## **Abstract**

The study was conducted in Chitral Valley in the North of Pakistan to explore the gender related activities introduced by the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP). The findings show that the AKRSP has been playing a key role in the development of women in the area and initiated development programs in water supply, health and credit facilities. It imparted trainings for the local women in different disciplines through the Women Organizations (WO's) established in the area. These trainings were recorded and mostly repeated via video cassettes in different villages. Posters and charts were also used to make the trainings easier for the local women to understand. The AKRSP has also been successful to take few hours daily from the Local Government Radio in the area and communicate to the women in their local language about certain issues such as personal hygiene, procedure to get and pay back loans from the micro finance bank of AKRSP, about agricultural practices etc. Practical adoption of these trainings has made positive effect in the lives of the local women in terms of improved agricultural products and increase in income of the respondents. Further, the AKRSP is looking into the possibility of establishing a Community Radio which if established will play a major role for the development of the area. Thus, it is concluded that the AKRSP has made invaluable contributions in improving the access of women to education, health resources and economic empowerment opportunities. Nevertheless, gender disparities are so widespread that there is a perceptible need for making more concerted efforts for improving female livelihood at national policy level and to reduce gender inequalities in all sectors in order to have equitable development.

## **Introduction**

Gender is a concept used to analyze roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of women and men in a society. Other criteria for analysis may include ethnicity, regional differences, poverty levels, age etc. Gender describes the social, as opposed to biological differences between men and women that are learned, changeable over time, and have wide variations within and between cultures. The focus on gender emerged in order to illustrate how women's disadvantage deposition is not a result of any deficiencies in them, but is a result of socially determined relations. Gender is therefore able to change as opposed to being biologically pre-determined. As gender is socially and culturally constructed, its roles can be transformed by social changes induced by economic transformation, incentives and legal and regulatory reforms. In the past, gender issues were largely perceived as women's issues. New development approaches emphasize changes in men's and women's knowledge, attitudes and behavior regarding roles and responsibilities in the home, the work place and the national and international communities.

Through out the World there is an increasing recognition that gender equity is not only a fundamental human right and a mean to improve women's lives, but also a precondition for effective and sustainable human development in general. Development requires the full and active participation of healthy and educated women, with adequate access to facilities and opportunities and empowered decision makers in their households, communities and businesses, but in majority of the third World countries and especially in rural areas of Pakistan the role of women is determined by those functions and rights attributed to her by the society as mother, wife, sister and daughter, overlooking her role as income earner and a major input in the development process. She is further constrained by purdah system, which is a direct bearing on the mobility. Women will tend to remain invisible in the planning and development process unless

specific efforts and program are planned and implemented to integrate and mainstream them. In spite of the restrictions faced, the rural women still contribute substantially to the rural economy. In addition, unless progress is made from a view where women are treated as a disadvantaged group to a point where they are treated as integral members of the community development efforts will continue to sideline women's concerns. When talking about women, NGO's are playing a major role in the developing countries of the World and many of them are working for the cause of women empowerment and development. There are a number of NGO's running throughout Pakistan, rendering remarkable achievements for the down trodden masses. However, as far as the Northern Areas and Chitral are concerned major work in gender development has been done by the Aga Khan Development Network. The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme is a private, non-communal and non-profit company established by the Aga Khan Foundation to help improve the quality of life of the people of Northern Areas and Chitral (NAC). It was established in 1982 with the mandate to focus on the economic and institutional development of local communities in collaboration with the government department, elected bodies and national and international development agencies. AKRSP has over the last 22 years, acted as a catalyst for integrated rural development, organizing local, human and physical and financial resources in order to enable communities to bring about their own development in an equitable and sustainable manner. Major programs in which the AKRSP is working include Social Organization, Women Development, Natural Resource Development, Enterprise Promotion, and Credit and Saving Services. One of AKRSP's major contributions has been the establishment of a network of Village Organizations (VO's) and Women Organizational (WO's) through out the region. There are almost 4,000 AKRSP- fostered village institutions in the region. Membership of these organizations exceeds 140,000 households. A number of VO's and WO's have come together to form local development organization to take up broader sets of agendas, such as health and education at the valley level.

**General Objective:**

1. The main objective of this study was to identify the gender related activities of the AKRSP in the region.

**Specific Objectives:**

1. To examine the impact of gender development activities on the standard of rural women in the area.
2. To suggest policy measures regarding gender development in the region.

### **Research Methodology**

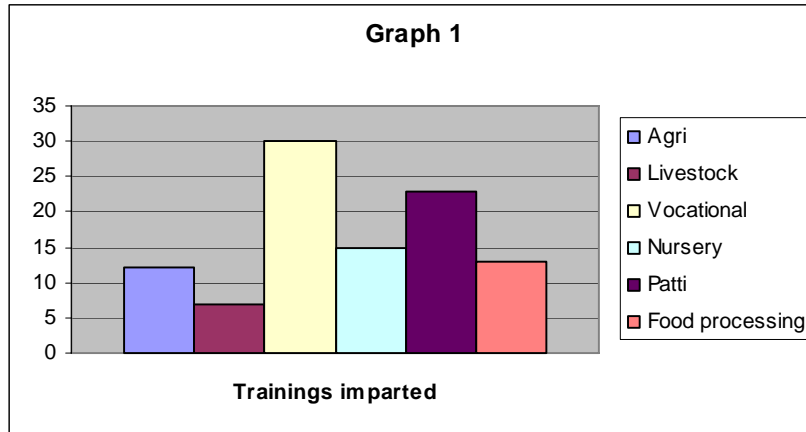
The study was conducted in district Chitral, where the AKRSP has been working since 1984. Out of six tehsils in district Chitral tehsil Lotkoh was selected for the study because the AKRSP first launched its gender development activities here. Tehsil lotkoh is a large area consisting of three valleys, which are; Garam Chashma, Karimabad and Arkari, out of which Garam Chashma was selected for the study because AKRSP has been working here for years and has done multiple projects like water supply, electricity, link road etc. A list of household was obtained from AKRSP. All those women who were members of WO's and were involved in women development activities in the area and had received maximum number of trainings, credit and other facilities from the AKRSP were purposively selected for the study. A total number of 60 respondents representing 50% of the total membership of WO's were selected for the purpose of data collection. A pre-tested interview schedule was prepared in the light of the study objectives. Primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews. After data collection the required statistical tools were applied to analyze the data.

### **Results and Discussions**

The AKRSP provides trainings to the sample respondents in different disciplines and is trying to motivate the people through these training programs to start different income generating activities, rear poultry birds, produce fruits and vegetables and other cash crops in order to improve the standard of living. Table 1 shows the number of trainings imparted to the sample respondents.

**Table 1**

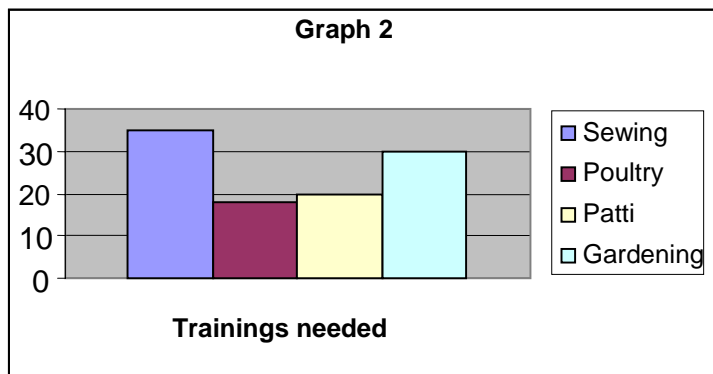
<b>Trainings imparted</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Vocational</b>	<b>Nursery</b>	<b>Patti</b>	<b>Food Processing</b>
Number	7	4	18	9	14	8
Percentage	12	7	30	15	23	13



Since it has been a long time since these were given so there is need for more training in the study area. Table 2 describes the areas in which the sample respondents need training.

**Table 2:**

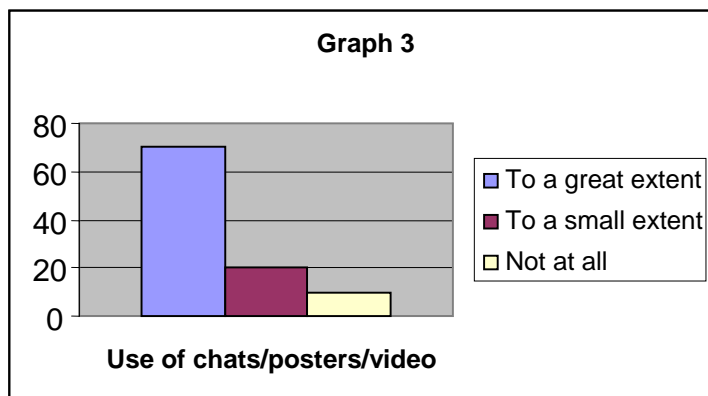
<b>Trainings needed</b>	<b>Sewing</b>	<b>Poultry</b>	<b>Patti</b>	<b>Gardening</b>
Number	21	11	12	18
Percentage	35	18	20	30



According to Table 3, 70% of the respondents were of the view that use of charts and illustrations and video recordings of the trainings were helpful in understanding the trainings to a great extent. Therefore, the AKRSP is taking initiatives to widen the use of such materials in its training programs.

**Table 3:**

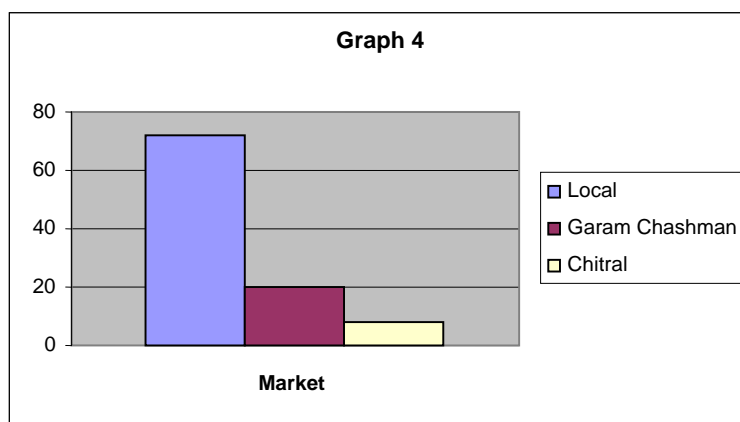
<b>Use of Charts /Posters Video recordings</b>	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>To a small extent</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
Number	42	12	6
Percentage	70	20	10



The results further show that 72% of the respondents were selling their products in local markets as they didn't have access to outside market due to lack of transportation facilities. To overcome the problem the people of the study area are looking towards AKRSP to introduce new marketing channels so that the local farming community can get benefit from their farms.

**Table 4:**

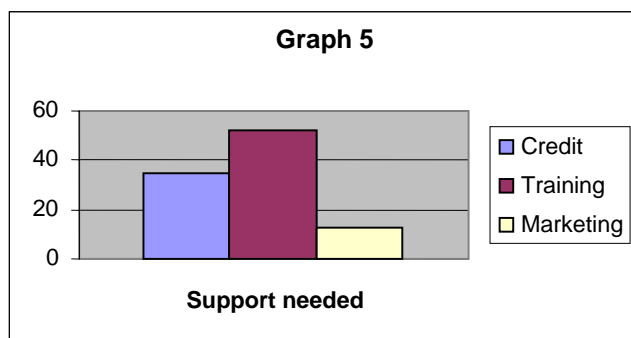
Market	Local	Garam Chashma	Chitral
Number	29	8	3
Percentage	72	20	8



Due to the efforts of the AKRSP a number of people had started income generating activities in the area. It is clear from table 5 that 52% of the respondents needed support for their income earning activities in the form of trainings to further develop their skills.

**Table 5:**

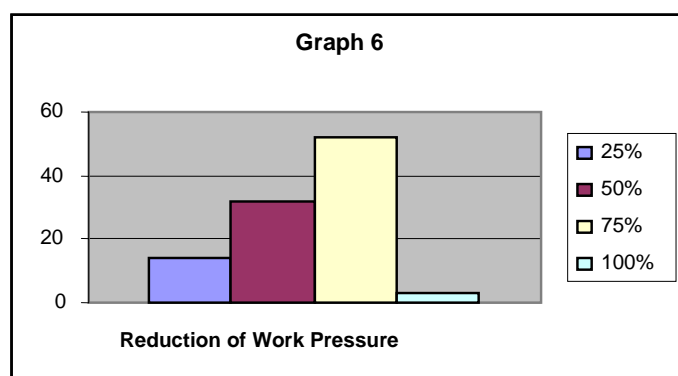
Support needed	Credit	Training	Market facility
Number	21	31	8
Percentage	35	52	13



The AKRSP has made tremendous efforts for the reduction of work pressure on rural people. For example by supplying water channels it has saved the women's time which they used to spend on water collection and due to the provision of electricity the women can do their work during the night which they were unable to do in the presence of lamps. Table 5 shows reduction in work pressure of the women after the intervention of the AKRSP.

**Table 6:**

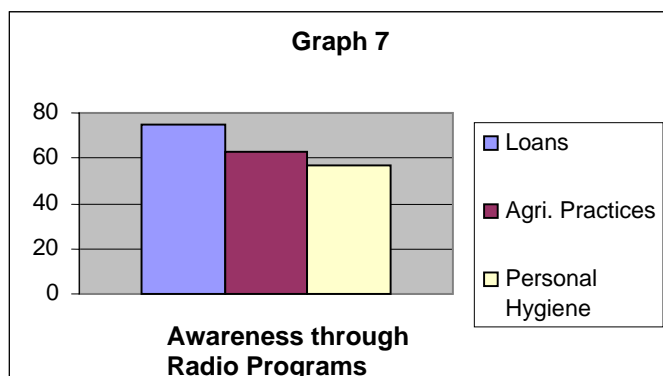
Reduction of Work Pressure	25%	50%	75%	100%
Number	8	19	31	2
Percentage	13	32	52	3



The AKRSP has also been successful to take few hours daily from the Local Government Radio in the area and communicate to the women in their local language about certain issues such as personal hygiene, procedure to get and pay back loans from the micro finance bank of AKRSP, about agricultural practices, different timings of vaccination etc. Results from Graph 6 show that 74% of the respondents got awareness about the loaning procedures of the Microfinance Bank of the AKRSP through the Radio Programs run on the Local Radio in the area. The AKRSP is also looking into the possibility of establishing a Community Radio which if established will play a major role for the development of the area.

**Table 7:**

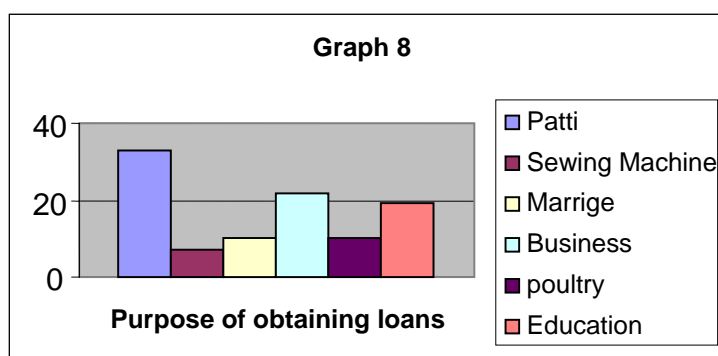
Awareness through Local Radio	Loans		Personal Hygiene		Agri. Practices	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number	45	75	38	63	34	57



The AKRSP provides loans to the members of the WO's for different purposes giving opportunity to the local rural women to utilize the money for different activities. These loans can be obtained on individual basis or collectively. Table 8 shows the reasons for obtaining loans.

**Table 8:**

Purpose of obtaining loans	Patti	Sewing Machine	Marriage	Business	Poultry	Education
<b>Number</b>	16	3	5	10	5	9
<b>Percentage</b>	33	6	10	22	10	19



The intervention of AKRSP has brought remarkable changes in the project area in terms of health, education, gender awareness and economic uplift. Table 9 shows that the health conditions of 75% of the sample respondents had improved after the AKRSP. Establishment of health unit in the village provided basic health facilities at their doorsteps and solved their complications related to childbirth and other such emergency problems. Education, gender awareness and economic uplift showed improvement of 77%, 60% and 63% respectively. School established in the village for girls promoted female education to a large extent.

**Table 9:**

Patterns of living							
Health		Education		Gender awareness		Economic uplift	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
45	75	46	77	36	60	38	63

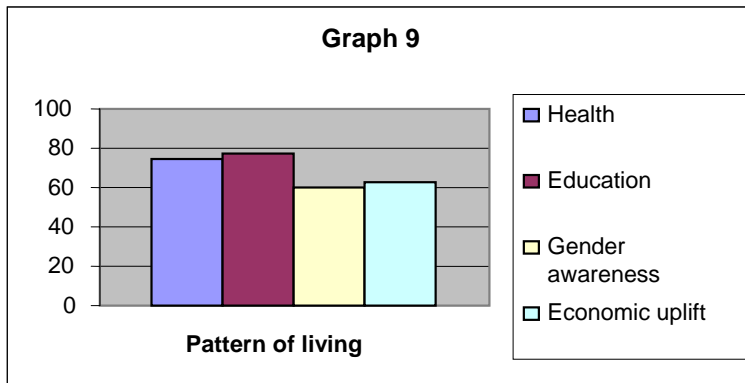
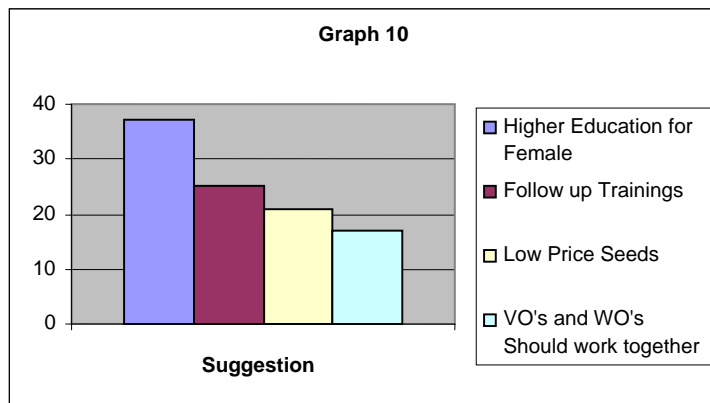


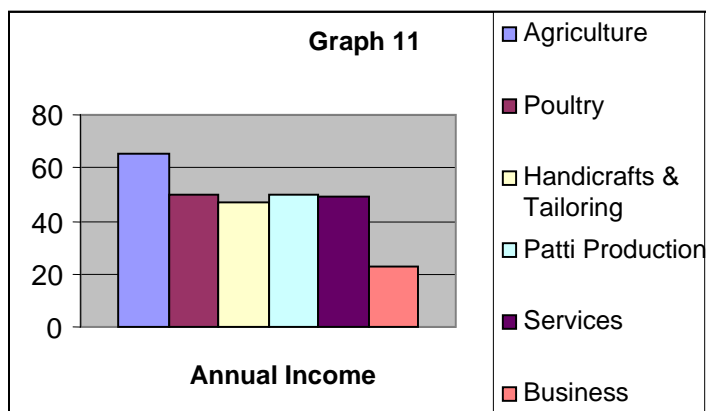
Table 10 shows 37% of the respondents were in favor of giving higher education to female and urged the AKRSP as well as the Government to play their roles in improving gender equity. Among the rest of the sample respondents 25% suggested follow up trainings in different fields.

**Table 10:**

Suggestions	Higher Education	Follow trainings	Low Price Seeds	VO's & WO's working together
<b>Number</b>	22	15	13	10
<b>Percentage</b>	37	25	21	17



Lastly, Graph 11 indicates that the annual income from agriculture in the study area showed an increase of 65% change after the intervention of the AKRSP. This is partly because after the AKRSP the trend of marketing was introduced in the region. Thus, more land was brought under cultivation, more trees were planted and consequently income from agriculture increased. Annual income from poultry showed an increase of 50% because of introduction of new breed by the AKRSP Income from handicrafts and tailoring showed an increase of 47%. Patti production which is the main source of income for the women of the study area also showed an increase of 50%. This is because after the AKRSP the women got the opportunity to sell their wool at higher rates. Income from Services and Business showed increase of 49% and 23% respectively.



### **Conclusion**

The project has brought about positive changes in overall living standard of the people of the study area. This can be partly attributed to trainings provided in different fields and income earning activities introduced by the AKRSP in the region. Due to the trainings given by the AKRSP and the marketing facilities provided in the area annual income of the people increased. Furthermore, AKRSP's intervention also reduced work pressure of the people. Education and health conditions were improved to a large extent and gender awareness was promoted. The household income, saving and consumption patterns improved considerably. Thus it is concluded that the AKRSP made invaluable contributions to improving the access to and control of women and girls to education, health resources and economic empowerment opportunities. Nevertheless, gender disparities are so widespread that there is a perceptible need for making more concerted efforts for improving female livelihood at national policy level and to reduce gender inequalities in all sectors in order to have equitable development. Thus women development is and continues to be one of the main cornerstones of AKRSP'S development in Chitral.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) Women should be encouraged for higher education.
- (2) Measures should be taken to give trainings to the young female.
- (3) Refreshed trainings should be given from time to time.
- (3) Workshops should be arranged on gender awareness.
- (4) Seeds should be easily made available locally.
- (5) Proper marketing channels should be further enhanced for ensuring the sale of locally made products.
- (6) The AKRSP personnel should make frequent visits to supervise the efficiency of the WO's.
- (7) The WO's and VO's should work together for the development of the communities.

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