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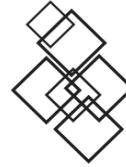
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TOPIC

CULTIVATING EQUALITY: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN RURAL CULTURAL SETTINGS

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CULTIVATING EQUALITY: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN RURAL CULTURAL SETTINGS

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Abstract

This study is about women's rights and the way these rights are influenced by cultural settings. To study the relationship between women's rights and culture, an anthropological lens will be used to understand the phenomenon. This is an exploration of the idea, of up to what extent; culture is responsible for influencing women's rights in different cultures and how the cultural settings can be transformed to encourage and ensure gender equality.

The relevant literature suggests that there is a close relationship between women's rights and the culture, they live in. Multiple studies have proved that there is a strong correlation between the culture and the provision of women's rights. This study will focus on the issues of women's rights and will explore their link to the cultural settings.

It is predominantly, a qualitative study that will employ the inductive research approach. Participants of the study include men and women from rural areas. Two different cultures within a rural setting have been selected for the study. This is because; it will bring clarity about women's rights and their relationship with the relevant cultural settings. Different data collection techniques will be used including in-depth interviews, archival research, and secondary data collection (data sets that have already been collected by government agencies or research organizations).

This topic is interesting and worth researching because there is no substantial research available on the relationship between women's rights and culture in Pakistan. Pakistan could not achieve its goals that were committed in the CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and Sustainable Development Goals (2030) declarations. So, this study has both practical and theoretical importance. Furthermore, this study will also give a way out and coping strategies for including women in the process of development and to ensure gender equality. Moreover, this study may encourage policy-makers to focus on the solution of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Women's Rights, Culture, Gender, Agency, Sustainable Development, Women's Empowerment, Women's Education.

Introduction

Women are dealt with as secondary to the men around them and this concept of women's subordination is a universal phenomenon. It can be seen in almost all the cultures of the world, though nature and intensity differ. Women are subordinated and discriminated against around the world. (Ortner, 1974).

There is a close relationship among culture, gender, and sex. Culture is such a powerful factor that it can transform social behaviors about gender inequality; it has the power to even eliminate the same. Culture may play an important role in encouraging and ensuring gender equality.

We cannot guarantee sustainable development until and unless gender equality is guaranteed. These two phenomena are so closely interconnected that one cannot be achieved if the other one is not present. The only way to achieve gender equality is to focus on women's rights and to ensure the same through proper legislation and law enforcement.

Pakistan is a member of international human rights organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and it has signed many human rights treaties and declarations including the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs). Yet the situation of women's rights is not very encouraging. Pakistan is the second lowest country in the world when it comes to gender equality. These facts have been declared by the Global Gender Index Report by the World Economic Forum.

"Patriarchy and the politics of gender in modernizing societies: Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan" a book, written by a famous feminist and sociologist, Valentine M. Moghadam argues that tradition and modernity are two opposite forces, their presence may result in destruction, especially when it comes to the women's status in a society. (Moghadam, March, 1992)

There are multiple factors that are responsible for this situation with respect to women's rights or gender equality in the country. One important factor that is impacting women's rights in the country is "Culture". Just like many other societies in the world, Pakistan has also a patriarchal social structure. Such a cultural setting makes women secondary to their male folks. Numerous studies have been conducted in different parts of the world that confirm a strong correlation between culture and women's rights. This is because a person cannot be separated from the culture he lives in. Cultural settings impact the behavior of individuals and they set a way for the overall behavioral patterns of the people living in that society.

While it is obvious that there is a great gender disparity in Pakistan, and women are discriminated against in all spheres of life, there is a need to know and understand to what extent these realities of the patriarchal structures are influencing women's lives. It is also important to investigate, whether it is the culture that is keeping women secondary to men or there are some other factors responsible for the phenomenon.

This study focuses on the relationship between women's rights and culture, and it will discuss the influence of culture on the lives of women living in the Patriarchal society. There is a great need to conduct such studies so that the concept of gender can be understood. Different aspects of women's rights and culture will be explored in the study.

Though this topic needs very deep research from all the possible aspects, this study will focus on a couple of aspects including women's right to education and right to equal employment opportunities. This is to make the study comprehensive and authentic when it comes to these aspects. This topic needs to be explored since it has a huge impact on women, living not just in Pakistan but across the globe. Researchers must come up with their thoughts and ideas and ideas on the said topic so that the laws, policies, and practices can be improved according to the needs of the hour. This will not only bring ease to millions of people but will also help us to ensure sustainable development.

Research Questions

The following research questions are designed for this study.

1. What is the perception of women regarding women's rights within the locale of the study?
2. What is the community's perception regarding women's rights?
3. What are the cultural norms/practices that are influencing women's rights and that can be used to transform the conditions of women's rights?

All the policies for development cannot achieve their desired goals, if they are ignoring half of humanity i-e women. Mostly, cultural settings are said to be responsible for the gender disparity in the country. So, it is important to study the relationship between culture and women's rights to understand the extent of the problem and to provide possible policies and practices for the solution of the problem. Since the second half of the last century, there has been a great debate about discrimination against women and the measures that can be adopted to achieve this goal.

Significance of The Study

There is a growing literature on gender and culture but very little has been done about women's rights in Pakistani culture. The topic has been researched but the studies are Limited in scope with respect to women's rights and culture. Furthermore, there also has been a great need to look at the problem from an anthropological perspective to help various stakeholders from academia, research, and policy makers' viewpoint. It has been discussed already that Gender functions are considered the organizing principle for every society this is because of the cultural meaning attached to the sex of any individual in the society. There is no doubt about the fact there is a huge difference between men and women when it comes to the physiology of women, but discrimination based on gender in provision of the basic human rights is not justified.

This study will help to understand the role of culture in encouraging and maintaining gender discrimination against women that has been prevalent for centuries. It will also explore the cultural traits that provide a conducive environment for the women folk and what are the aspects of the culture that limit women from achieving their life goals and prevent them from living their lives to their full potential. It will be helpful to find out, whether culture is actually responsible for the secondary status of the female half of humanity in Pakistan or if there are other factors responsible for the same. It has not only damaged female half of the humanity but now it is a huge hindrance in achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development. United Nations Department for Women Development which is called UN Women reported that Pakistan "75% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the SDG indicator, with a focus on violence against women, are in place"(United Nations Women).

This study will help the readers to understand the social and political structures of the developing world, and how these factors influence the gender disparities and the status of women, living in such areas. This research can be read for a general understanding of Pakistan's and other developing countries' cultural, social, and political structures. It can also be used by students of anthropology, culture, sociology, human rights, and gender studies.

Review of Literature

A review of the relevant literature is very important to make the research study stand out and to be the best among others. It gives an idea to the researcher about what other researchers have already studied and researched in the chosen field of study. A good literature review also helps the researcher to find the research gaps in the relevant field of study.

It also prevents the replication of the studies and brings a thorough understanding of the research topic to the researcher.

Sometimes, finding the right topic for the research is very challenging, especially in the field of qualitative research, this is because, since the start of the twenty-first century, researchers have discovered a great deal of topics in the social sciences. So, finding an undiscovered field of study is very difficult (Flick, 2009).

Though research in social sciences has a thorough background at the same time the area of gender and especially women's rights is little discovered as compared to the other disciplines. In this section, I will present a review of the literature about the area of study I have chosen.

The field of women's rights has not yet been much explored in Pakistan. There was not enough literature available on the topic, however, there was enough literature available in the field of culture so I reviewed the literature that was relevant to my study in some way or the other.

In Pakistan, the majority of the population lives in the rural areas. Where cultural values are very strong. There is a close and complex relationship between culture and gender roles/relations in rural settings. In urban areas, culture is comparatively less dominant.

Cultural and social settings play a significant role in the development of the nations.

Pakistan, In spite of being one of the first signees to the United Nations', Sustainable Development Goals charter which was an extension of the Millennium Development Goals (1979), Pakistan could not attain the development goals as per plans. Although it made an excellent plan of action, and a parliamentary committee was established in the National Assembly to monitor and evaluate the process of development according to the plans in spite of all these measures, not much has been achieved yet. The following statistics show the alarming situation regarding women's rights in the country,

According to the statistics by United Nations Women 2017, the adolescent birth rate is still very high. It is as high as 54 adolescents per 1000 who are aged 15-19. (United Nations Women, 2017). There is also a huge gender gap when it comes to politics. According to a report by the United Nations Women published in 2021, there are only 20.2% of seats in the parliament are occupied by women parliamentarians. (United Nations Women, February 2021)

In order to close these gender gaps, Pakistan needs to come up with practical solutions to the problems related to women's rights. Inclusive growth and sustainable development can be guaranteed only when men and women participate equally in building the nation. Literature shows that Pakistan is far behind in this quest. Studies in the field of women and gender also show that the pandemic has also affected women folk differently as compared to their male

members of the family. It has been reported that women faced more domestic violence during the times of pandemic. They felt more insecure with their houses during that time. A research study conducted in 13 different countries of the world including Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Pooled, Colombia, Cameroon, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Côte d'Ivoire, Albania, Thailand, and Paraguay showed alarming statistics.

The data for the above report was collected from 13 different countries. These countries have significantly different cultural settings but all of the cultures have shown almost similar statistics about the violence against women. (United Nations Women, 2021)

This report shows that all cultures have similar behaviors when it comes to gender. This report further argues that whenever men and women share space, be it public or private, women are on the verge of violence. Be it Psychological, Physical, Sexual, verbal, or emotional. There is a greater need for study than there was ever before; to find out whether it is nurture (or in nature) that inculcates such behavioral patterns in humans. So there is a dire need to study culture and its influence on gender relations.

Multiple studies have been conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) about gender disparity and women's rights in various cultures. Gender and development experts have shown particular interest and have raised serious concerns about the culture being a great hindrance in the process of development and gender equality. Program Officers of humanitarian organizations and partners of development argued that acquiring gender equality is a real challenge where the cultural settings are very strong. This is because promoting gender equality interferes with the local culture, this is usually not accepted by the locals, and achieving gender equality becomes impossible for ethical reasons.

Materials and Methods

Data can be approached in two different ways by the researcher. These two approaches are called inductive and deductive (Dewey). If a researcher plans to conduct the study by using the deductive approach, he takes his work from more general to specific. The study may be started by using a theory and then relating the same to the research problem. After that, a specific hypothesis is developed by narrowing the theoretical framework related to the study. In the end, the hypothesis is tested (Donnelly, 2006).

In other words, a theory related to the topic of investigation may be selected by the researcher and then it is broken down into a hypothesis that is tested on the next stage. (Donnelly, 2006).

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning is the opposite of the deductive reasoning. In the Inductive approach, a researcher starts from broader generalizations and moves to the specific observations. Observations are the basis of the inductive reasoning. In this approach, a researcher starts the study from the observations and explores the area of study. At the end of such a study, a generalization or a theory is expected to emerge (Donnelly, 2006).

The research will employ the inductive research approach to conduct the study. I chose this approach since the study is exploratory in nature. The inductive approach is also reflected in the methods that I use to collect the data for the study. I plan to use semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions (FGDs). I plan to ask open-ended questions from the respondents. It will allow me to understand their perspective on the topic. I will study the culture and its relation to women's rights. In order to do this, I will be using a specific cultural setting (Locale) to see what factors have an impact on gender roles and stereotypes in society and are consequently influencing women's rights. I will be moving from general observations to a specific result which makes this study approach “inductive” in nature.

In the inductive research study, a researcher just takes ideas from the preexisting theories to understand the phenomenon and does not relate the theories to the research problem at the beginning of the study. Observations are the basis of such a study. Moreover, no researcher can be free and empty-minded from his knowledge, beliefs, and interests. Since my research is also inductive in approach during the course of my research, I will not be trying to approve or disprove any theory rather I will be exploring the culture and its impact on women's rights, and will try to reach an understanding about the data.

During the course of data collection, I will also use the archival studies that have already been done in different regions of the world about the impact of the culture. It is also important to mention here that no research study has been done yet in the locale of my study. This is going to be the first study of this nature in my study locale. Online resources (websites of the governments and research organizations will also be used for the purpose of data collection.

Results and Discussions

Locale of Study

A village named “Maira” which is near Tehsil Kahuta, District Rawalpindi is selected as a locale of study. Its location is at **33°30'48"N 73°23'9"E** at an altitude of 2555 feet (778 meters).

It is located almost 65 Kilometers East of Islamabad. It has a population of just a few thousand. This information was gathered by consulting the union council of the village and other community-based welfare organizations during the data collection phase.

The exact number of the population is not available.

People live in small clusters called “Dhoke”. Agricultural land is in abundance. Wheat and corn are the main crops, cultivated in the region. There is an obvious trend of migration in the rural population. People migrate to bigger cities and even foreign countries for the sake of employment and for children’s education. A good number of people are employed outside the village, in bigger cities. The rest of them are either in business or engaged in agricultural activities. Some of the people are also settled abroad.

Rationale for Selection

The locale (Village Maira) that has been selected for this study has a very rich historical background. This village was ruled by the Sikhs before the partition of the sub-continent. There was also a Hindu population living in the village. Both Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony. There was a strong culture of mutual respect and brotherhood between Sikhs and Muslims.

Later, the Sikh population moved to India after the partition happened. The village welcomed some migrants from India. Those migrants were allotted the houses and property of those Sikhs who left the village and migrated to India, as per the laws of the Government of Pakistan. There are still many Monuments of the Sikh community in the area. The village is also very famous for its Sufis and shrines. Maira has a rich historical and religious background.

When it comes to art and artists, there is so much more to be explored. One can find a great deal of folklore, poems, and other literature, written by the locals. There are many local singers who sing poetry written in the local language. Wooden art is also very famous in the area; carvings are done by the locals on wood and stone.

The majority of the female population is well-versed in the art of threadwork, embroidery, stitching, sewing, and knitting. These prospects show the significance of the village in the field of art. The female population of the area actively participates in agricultural practices along with their male family members. So, the economic contribution of women is also significant. A small number of women in Maira are in formal employment. They teach at local schools. Female participation in the political affairs of the area is also very encouraging, though not satisfactory. The role of women in the village is quite prominent in identifying and interpreting local cultural heritage and customs. They are not only influenced by the culture, but they are also the ones who influence the culture.

Some of the people in the area are well-educated and financially stronger than others in the area. It provides a good chance for the comparative study of people with different socio-economic backgrounds when they live in the same culture.

There is also a strong caste system still operating in the area. People still believe in the caste system.

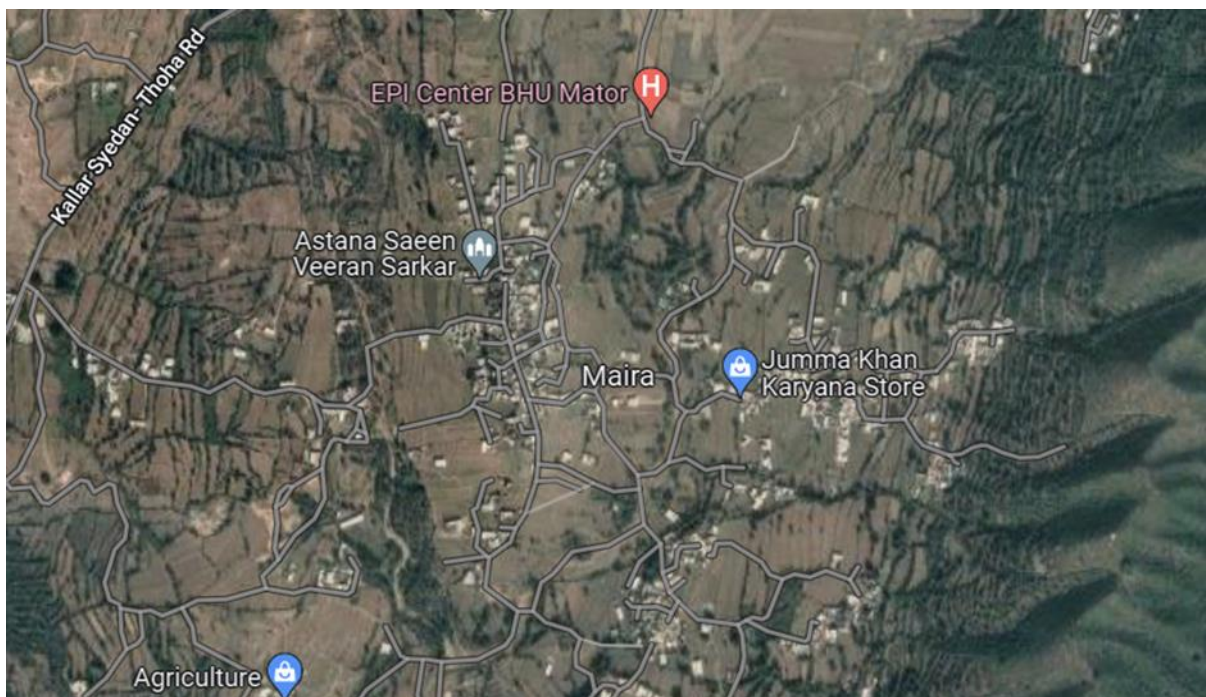
All the above-mentioned features of the village make the cultural setting very strong. Since it is a rural setting, people are highly sentimental about their cultural values and norms. Due to the use of the latest technologies (television cable network, mobile phones, and internet), people of the area are well-informed but local culture is still very strong.

These facets of this village make it interesting and worth studying. Furthermore, despite being so rich in culture, history, art, morals, and customs, no research study has been done in the area. These are the reasons; why this village is selected as the locale of the research study.

Data Collection and Analysis

“Data collection” was very challenging during the study. Union councils and Community-Based organizations do not have sufficient data on population. This study mainly relied on the primary data that was collected during the study. It is worth mentioning that elderly people of the area provided very useful information about the historical aspects and cultural evolution of the area.

The exploratory nature of the study provided a good chance to study the culture in detail through in-depth interviews. Four Dhokes (Population living in small clusters), and 10 people from each Dhoke were selected ($4 \times 10 = 40$ people in total).



Then data collected from the selected sample was analyzed. The main source of data remained interviews.

Women's Right to Education

The village of Maira provides a poignant backdrop for the study of women's right to education. Nestled in the heart of tradition, this community has undergone a transformation in recent decades. The stark contrast between the older and younger generations highlights the profound impact that education can have on women's empowerment.

Bridging Generational Gaps: An Evolution in Mindset

The study unequivocally underscores the shift in attitudes towards women's education in Maira. The older generation, predominantly women, were often denied the opportunity for formal education due to deeply entrenched societal norms. However, their experiences of being marginalized from educational opportunities instilled in them a fervent belief in the power of learning. As they witnessed the changing tides, they became fervent advocates for education, particularly for girls.

In stark contrast, the younger generation in Maira has embraced education with unprecedented zeal. The classrooms, once dominated by boys, now boast a significant representation of girls. This transformation marks a departure from age-old norms, signaling a new era of education in Maira. It is evident that the advocacy of the older generation has resonated deeply with their successors.

The Empowering Nexus: Education as a Catalyst

Education emerges as the linchpin in the empowerment of women in Maira. It is the tool that has facilitated economic independence and expanded the horizons of possibilities. By acquiring knowledge and skills, women have transcended traditional roles, engaging in diverse occupations that were once considered beyond their purview.

Moreover, education has endowed women with awareness and agency. In Maira, women are now cognizant of their rights and equipped to challenge discriminatory practices. This has resulted in a palpable reduction in instances of gender-based violence and the dismantling of archaic norms that once stifled progress.

Intergenerational Collaboration: Forging a New Narrative

The interplay between the older and younger generations in Maira is a harmonious convergence of values and aspirations. The older generation, having borne witness to the transformative power of education, has ardently championed its cause. They serve as living testaments to the enduring impact of education, dispelling misconceptions and nurturing a culture of learning.

Conversely, the younger generation personifies the tangible outcomes of this advocacy. They stand as beneficiaries of the struggles waged by their predecessors, seizing the opportunities education affords them. Their pursuit of knowledge is marked by a profound awareness of the broader societal implications of their empowerment.

Challenges and the Path Forward

While commendable progress has been made in Maira, challenges persist. Socioeconomic constraints and deeply ingrained gender norms continue to impede progress. Access to quality education remains uneven, particularly in remote areas. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach involving community engagement, policy initiatives, and infrastructural development.

In conclusion, Maira's trajectory towards gender equality through education is a testament to the profound impact of empowering women with knowledge. The intergenerational exchange of values and aspirations has been pivotal in propelling this transformation. Looking ahead, sustained efforts are imperative to ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, has unfettered access to education, thereby unlocking their full potential and contributing to the holistic development of the community.

Women's Right to Empowerment (Employment)

The village of Maira serves as a compelling microcosm of the transformative journey towards women's empowerment. The profound transition witnessed between generations illuminates the potential unleashed by granting women their rightful place in economic and societal domains. This study dissects the intricate web of factors underpinning this transformation, examining how education and economic participation have been instrumental in fostering empowerment.

A Generational Shift: From Contribution to Empowerment

The older generation in Maira exemplifies silent contributors to the village's economy. Engaged in a multitude of activities - from care work to intricate handicrafts and farming - these women played pivotal roles in sustaining the community's economic fabric. However, their contributions largely went unnoticed, obscured by the prevailing norms that relegated them to the private sphere. While their efforts were indispensable, they operated within the confines of tradition, without reaping the rewards of formal recognition or economic independence.

In stark contrast, the younger generation in Maira stands as a testament to the potential unleashed through education and formal employment. With a significant representation in the

teaching sector, these women have ventured beyond the confines of their immediate community, establishing themselves as professionals. This generation is not only economically independent but also wields newfound agency in decision-making processes, both within and outside the household.

Education: The Catalyst for Transformation

Education emerges as the fulcrum of this transformative journey. It is the gateway through which women in Maira transcended traditional roles and accessed opportunities previously denied to them. The younger generation, armed with formal education, has shattered glass ceilings, venturing into sectors that were once considered inaccessible. This not only augurs well for their personal development but also enriches the intellectual capital of the entire community.

Furthermore, education has engendered a paradigm shift in mindset. It has instilled in these women a newfound confidence and awareness of their rights, enabling them to challenge regressive norms. This has a cascading effect on societal perceptions, gradually eroding deeply entrenched gender biases.

Economic Empowerment: A Catalyst for Agency

Formal employment, particularly in the teaching sector, has been a cornerstone of the younger generation's empowerment in Maira. It has afforded them economic independence, bolstering their confidence and decision-making capacity. Moreover, these women serve as role models for the wider community, dispelling the notion that certain professions are inherently gendered. Their presence in formal employment sectors challenges stereotypes and normalizes the idea of women as professionals.

Preserving the Legacy, Paving the Way

The interplay between generations in Maira is a harmonious blend of tradition and progress. The older generation, with its rich tapestry of skills and experiences, serves as a reservoir of wisdom. Their contributions, though often undervalued, form the bedrock upon which the younger generation builds. The younger generation, in turn, stands as torchbearers of change, embodying the potential unleashed through education and economic participation.

In conclusion, Maira epitomizes the transformative power of education and economic empowerment in the journey towards women's empowerment. The intergenerational dynamics, characterized by silent contribution and visible agency, underscore the potential that lies within every woman. This study serves as a beacon, illuminating the path toward a more inclusive and empowered future for women in Maira and beyond.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, Maira stands as a beacon of the transformative power of education and economic empowerment in the journey towards women's empowerment. The intergenerational dynamics, characterized by silent contribution and visible agency, underscore the boundless potential inherent in every woman. This trajectory towards gender equality through education is a testament to the profound impact of empowering women with knowledge. The exchange of values and aspirations across generations has been pivotal in propelling this transformation. Looking ahead, sustained efforts are imperative to ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, has unfettered access to education, thereby unlocking their full potential and contributing to the holistic development of the community. This study not only sheds light on the remarkable progress in Maira but also serves as a guiding light for communities far and wide, illustrating the tangible benefits of investing in women's education and economic agency.

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