

PATTERNS OF TALENT ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN SAARC REGION

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Talent Management is the emerging era of human resource management invigorating the practices and policies in integration with high performance and strategic advancement of the organization. Talent management refers to the human resource processes drafted to recruit, develop, motivate, retain and maintain potential and promising talent in the organization. In addition to the basic human resource practice, talent management outlines the organizational commitment towards their modern day strategic goals of sustainable development and high performance. Certain sections of our globe discriminate talent on the basis of gender. However, over the past few decades, the trend has reversed and societies are becoming gender sensitive. The present paper describes an analytical research of gender sensitive talent acquisition and management practices in SAARC countries. The intent of this paper is to study and analyze the patterns of talent acquisition and management with reference to gender equality in SAARC region. For this purpose, a plethora of researches and data have been analyzed. The analysis shows a positive view in some areas, whereas considerable gap still exists in others. Although, a steady improvement is noticeable in this regard that gives us a hope of better tomorrow.

Keywords: *Talent Management, Gender sensitivity, Gender equality, sustainable development, SAARC*

I. INTRODUCTION

Talent Acquisition and Management is the new buzz word in the area of human resource management. Organizations no longer visualize human resources as a separate and independent area of functions. It is rather identified as an integrated system of all the human resource processes along with organizational goals of performance and sustainable development. Talent management can be seen as an emerging era of human resource management invigorating the practices and policies in integration with high performance and strategic advancement of the organization. It refers to all the human resource processes designed in order to recruit, develop, motivate, retain and manage potential and promising talent in the organization.

Talent is the ability to perform. It can be an inborn skill as well as it can be learned and practiced. Every organization hires the skills of the individual. Technical skills, conceptual skills, team management skills, decision making skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, etc. are a few to be counted. It is inevitable to hire human resources without hiring their individual differences, sociability, value system, etc. So, organizations today understand the diversity and in order to harness the best talent in the market, they not only use contemporary human resource practices, but also integrate the processes with their performance goals. Sustainable development and long term organizational goals of growth can only be achieved with the best use of all available resources. Inequality in any form hinders the rate of growth in any economy. There are many aspects of inequalities in a society, specifically in south Asian region. Gender inequality has been a major issue in achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development around the globe. Leaving the female race behind does not only lead to the neglect of female talent and contribution towards the economy but also wastage of investment in education for girls and young women.

Gender equality does not mean that men and female are necessarily exactly the same or that the differences don't exist, but that they have equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and access to resources as well as the enjoyment of them. Systematic gender differences exist in different degrees in societies. In all the societies and cultures, males and females hold different hierarchical positions socially, economically as well as professionally. However, the degree of variation varies from country to country and society to society.

Organizations these days understand the need to tap full potential of talent available in the countries, irrespective of their gender. South Asia comprises of one of the biggest markets for the world organizations. Not only this, the region also holds enormous untapped talent for global organizations. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is an association of eight countries located in South Asia and Indian Subcontinent for economic and geo-political cooperation. SAARC, since its inception, has given importance to issues related to women. Quite recently, SAARC leaders have directed the focus towards women empowerment and towards establishment of gender equality. However, talent management and acquisition with respect to gender equality in SAARC is still a novel research area. Organizational gender based practices have not been an area of focus in many regions. So, we take this as an opportunity to study the talent acquisition and management practices for gender equality in SAARC region.

II. GENDER EQUALITY: SITUATION ANALYSIS IN SAARC REGION

Over the past few decades, focus of all the nations has been shifted in reducing the gender disparities. Gender gap has been reduced significantly; however, these disparities still exist in different fields of countries. SAARC has symbolically worked in its capacity towards this aspect since its inception. Issues related to women empowerment have been there on the agenda since the launch of regional cooperation in South Asian countries. A 'technical committee on women, youth and children' in its amateur stage began in 1986. Very recently, a 'Gender Policy Advocacy Group (SSARC-GPAG)' has been proposed for the empowerment of women and gender equality in the SAARC region. This Group is the result of rigorous efforts and establishments of regional mechanism to ensure gender equality. SAARC Gender Infobase has also been proposed to assemble qualitative and quantitative data and information on gender related issues in South Asia.

The development of a SAARC Gender database can be seen as a progressive change towards the gender equality in South Asian region. Human Development reports published by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2013 help us getting a glimpse of SAARC nations on world platform with reference to gender inequality. Gender Inequality index that was introduced in 2010 by UNDP as a result of recent developments in the area of gender balance. This index is a measurement of gender disparity in nations across the globe on the basis of certain defined parameters like reproductive health, empowerment and labour market.

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report, 2013, Table 4: Gender Inequality Index; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

The table 1 presents SAARC Nations as per the ascending order of their Human Development Index in United Nations Development Programme reports. According to the report, only one out of these nations i.e. Maldives, is included in High Human Development Index. It has been ranked at 73rd position in the report. Maldives, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh are positioned in Medium Human Development Index in that order. However, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan are in the category of Low Human Development Index nations. Minute analysis of the data also depicts that no other country than Sri Lanka has population with at least some secondary education for males and females both. Only Sri Lanka has the figures that are fairly presentable. All other countries either show a huge gap between male and female secondary education; or a very low population within educated group.

III. GENDER EQUALITY IN TALENT MANAGEMENT

Table 1: Gender Equality Index of SAARC Nations

Country	Human Development Index (HDI) Rank	Gender Inequality Index Value, 2013	Gender Inequality Index, Rank 2013	Maternal Mortality Ratio 2010	Adolescent Birth Rate 2010/2015	Share of seats in Parliament, 2013	Population with at least some secondary education, 25+ Female, 2005-2012	Population with at least some secondary education, 25+ Male, 2005-2012	Participation Rate, 15+ Female, 2012	Participation Rate, 15+ Male, 2012
Srilanka	73	0.383	75	35	16.9	5.8	72.7	75.5	35.0	76.4
Maldives	103	0.283	49	60	4.2	6.5	13.3	16.6	55.9	77.1
India	135	0.563	127	200	32.8	10.9	26.6e	50.4e	28.8	80.9
Bhutan	136	0.495	102	180	40.9	6.9	34.0	34.5	66.4	76.9
Bangladesh	142	0.529	115	240	80.6	19.7	30.8e	39.3e	57.3	84.1
Nepal	145	0.479	98	170	73.7	33.2	17.9e	39.9e	54.3	63.2
Pakistan	146	0.563	127	260	27.3	19.7	19.3	46.1	24.4	82.9
Afghanistan	169	0.705	149	460	86.8	27.6	5.8e	34.0e	15.7	79.7

Labour Market across the SAARC region displays several compelling features, specifically in talent management and acquisition. South Asian women have similarities in the light of conditions they work in. however; they differ in the class, religion, localities and culture. But these diversities too make them similar when assessed through the lens of nature of work, health and education status, political participation and empowerment. Women as a category and South Asian region as a region for analysis bring up the issue of heterogeneity vs. homogeneity. It has been stereotyped that strong patriarchal ideology prevalent in SAARC region prevent women from participating in economic development and availing opportunities for self growth. The region is also recognized as a 'patriarch belt'. However, recent trends have been progressive. South Asian women are seen to have progressed from their situation few decades ago.

Table 2: Trends in employed labour force in India and annual growth rates in India, (1983- 2010)

	Rural (In Millions)			Urban (In Millions)			Total (In Millions)
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	

1983	153.49	90.45	243.9	46.6	12.2	58.8	302.8
2010	231.9	104.5	336.4	99.8	22.2	122.0	458.4

Source: Deepak and Bhatt, 2012; National Sample Survey of India (2011), "Key Indicators of Employment in India, 2009- 2010", Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

IV. COUNTRY BASED ANALYSIS

South Asia is one of the fastest growing economic regions and abodes over one fourth of the world population. Indian subcontinent has the largest pool of youth population in the world. One can imagine the requirement of youth talent for economic growth. Economic growth of any country is a function of policies and commitment of country towards talent management strategies in all the sectors. However unequal resorting to talent on the basis of sexes interferes with the growth pattern of the economy. Sustainable long term growth can only be achieved by maintaining gender based equilibrium in talent acquisition and management. In South Asia, despite high economic growth, people have not been able to identify gender parity in various sectors. This section examines the talent management practices in South Asian countries over the last three decades. Since, economic growth has created better opportunities of employment; modern organizational setup offers better wages and working conditions to their acquired talent.

4.1 Employment Trends and Talent Management in India

India dominates the South Asian region with consistently high economic growth rate over the past three decades. World Bank has recorded the growth rate of 7.4 Percent in the year 2014 and is expected to grow 7.5- 8.3 Percent in the year 2015- 2016. According to World Bank, India will soon have the largest and youngest workforce the world has ever seen. Rising urbanization and governmental initiatives has given rise to various small and medium sector enterprises that have become a significant source of employment to the population in India. Information & Communication technology has also played a crucial role in the employment context. Talent acquisition has been made easier with the help growing technological organizations.

	1983	2010		1983	2010
Self Employed	57.3	50.7			
Rural	48.5	39.8	Male	36.4	36.0
Urban	8.8	10.9	Female	21.0	14.7
Regular Salaried	13.4	16.3			
Rural	5.7	5.3	Male	10.8	13.4
Urban	7.7	11.0	Female	2.5	2.9
Casual Labourer	29.3	33.0			
Rural	26.4	28.3	Male	18.9	22.9
Urban	2.9	4.7	Female	10.4	10.1

Source: Deepak and Bhatt, 2012; National Sample Survey of India (2011), "Key Indicators of Employment in India, 2009- 2010", Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

As seen in the table 2, the gender gap in terms of employment trends in India has been present since long. However, the situation seems different and progressive in 2010. In 1983, 90.45 Millions rural females were employed in India. When compared with their counter gender, 153.49 Millions rural men were employed. In contrast to the situation in 2010, rural situation seems indifferent as an increase of around 10 millions females can be noticed. As far as urban population is concerned, a rise from 58.8 Millions females in 1983 to 122.0 Millions females in 2010 is significantly noticeable. Rural trend of women's low participation in employment can be positively attributed to their increasing enrollment in school education and migration to urban sectors of India. However, this can be a case of 'over optimism' in this context, especially in the light of employment patterns in India. In India, only 2.9 percent of women in 2010 had regular salaried jobs as compared to 13.4 percent of men (table 3).

Expansion of employment opportunities in urban areas has not improved the overall employment situation for women. The status of employment is a serious concern. The status i.e. self employment, regular salaried jobs and casual labour determines the quality of employment. Regular employment is the most secure status of employment and casual labour is the most vulnerable in this range. Over the last few decades, workforce can be seen moving out of self employment to regular salaried jobs, especially females. There has been a positive change amongst women, about decreasing casual employment and increasing regular salaried employment. Effective talent acquisition and management practices along with government efforts and commitment can be credit for this positive change. Since, Talent acquisition and management practices in India are driven by national employment policies and procedures. Labour laws in India are outlined by the Constitution of India, which supports equality of opportunity, social justice, humane working conditions and equitable living wages.

	Married	Divorced/ Separated/ Deserted	Widowed	Never Married	Total
Professional/ Technical/ Managerial	5.3	4.7	4.5	12.2	6.5
Clerical	1.4	2.3	2.4	3.5	1.8
Sales	3.7	5.4	5.2	3.2	3.7
Services	6.3	17.8	14.5	5.4	6.8
Skilled & Unskilled Labour	19.7	29.0	25.2	30.8	22.1
Agriculture	63.5	40.7	48.0	44.3	58.8

Source: Sunita Kishor & Kamla Gupta, "Gender equality and Women's empowerment in India", Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), India, 2005-2006

Table 4 shows that marriage is an important factor which is associated with Indian practices in the area of talent acquisition and management in selection and retention of women workforce. Organizations are more likely to hire and retain women in professional, technical and managerial occupations who are unmarried than ever married women.

	Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	
	Both	Female
1979	46.1	11.8
	77.3	
2010	45.9	21.5
	68.8	

Source: "Human Development in South Asia" The Economy and the people, Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, Pakistan

4.2 Employment trends and Talent management in Pakistan

Pakistan has witnessed an average growth rate of around five percent in the past three decades. Sufficient Job opportunities have been created, particularly in agriculture, farm and low productivity sectors. As far as gender based employment practices are concerned, labour force participation rate depicted in table 5 shows a significant growth from 11.8 percent to 21.5 percent of females in a span of three decades. Male labour force participation rate can be seen decreasing to 68.8 percent from 77.3 percent.

	Monthly Wages (In Pakistani rupee)		Annual Change (%) 1991-2010
	1991	2010	
Total	32.9	40.2	1.1
Male	34.1	42.1	1.1
Female	22.4	27.1	1.0
Rural	27.1	33.8	1.2
Urban	39.7	47.7	1.0

*Note: The wage index has been deflated by using CPI (2010=100)

Source: Irfan, 2008 and "Human Development in South Asia" The Economy and the people, Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, Pakistan

A gender disaggregated view of wages (Table 6) shows discrimination in the earnings of men and women. During the last three decades, female wages increased at an annual rate of 1.0 percent as compared to 1.1 percent increase in the wages of their male counterparts.

Talent acquisition and management practices are affected by a number of governmental policies and legislations. Pakistan's conservative culture however limits the gender parity at organizational levels and hence gender based discrimination in wage structures, employment opportunities, discouraging environment can be observed.

4.3 Employment trends and talent management in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the economy has created jobs at a slower rate than the increase in number of workforce. However, most significantly, Bangladesh has witnessed increasing role of women in the economy and labour market. A significant increase of female talent participation in employment is seen. As depicted in table 7, both in rural and urban areas, increasing role of women can be analyzed. The share of women in total labour force exponentially grown to 30.0 percent from 8.9 percent in 2010. In Bangladesh, these developments can be credited to positive talent management patterns which are gender sensitive. The environment seems conducive for gender parity and equality.

These practices are responsible for sharp increase in women talent in employment. However, significant disparity in wage structure of casual workers is observed. Despite significant improvements, there have been issues with respect to the quality of work. Female workers earn 66 percent less than their male counterparts. (Table 8).

		Female	Male	Both
1984	National	2.5	26.0	28.5
	Rural	2.1	22.5	24.6
	Urban	0.4	3.4	3.9
1996	National	5.4	30.7	36.0
	Rural	3.8	23.9	27.7
	Urban	1.6	6.8	8.3
2010	National	17.2	39.5	56.7
	Rural	13.2	30.2	43.4
	Urban	4.0	9.3	13.3

Source: Manjeri 2004, Government of Bangladesh 2003- 2010

	2006	2010
Overall	1250	1686
Male	1412	1905
Female	478	646
Urban	1367	1838
Rural	1204	1627

Source: ILO 2013a

4.4 Employment trends and talent management in Nepal

Nepal has witnessed growth of economy with creation of job opportunities in farm and nonfarm informal sectors which are more vulnerable and provide low quality of jobs. Labour force participation rate is higher in males as compared to females (Table 9). However, Nepal has been embracing positive trends in employment sector.

As far as organizational practices with respect to talent management and acquisition are concerned, gender based discrimination exist in wages and salaries determination. A huge gap in the wages of males and females exist. Such practices can be disheartening for a gender sensitive organizational environment.

	1999	2008
Total	85.5	83.4
Male	90.1	87.5
Female	81.9	80.1
Urban	73.3	67.3
Rural	87.7	86.8

Source: Government of Nepal, Nepal Labour Force Survey (Various Issues).

	1999	2008
Total	2143	5117
Male	2389	5721
Female	1368	3402

Source: Government of Nepal, Nepal Labour Force Survey (Various Issues)

4.5 Employment trends and talent management in Sri Lanka

Present Human Development Index has kept Sri Lanka at the top most position amongst other South Asian countries. In the past three decades, Sri Lankan economy has created more job opportunities than increase in the labour force. As far as gender based talent management practices are concerned, high rate of unemployment is however seen in women workers.

Despite improvements, it remains lower than men's participation rate in labour force. Female participation rate improved over the past few decades to 32.1 percent from 25.8 percent (Table 11). Gender disparities in wages, lack of relevant market skills, conservative and male dominating culture persist which indicates exploitation of women in organizational setup.

		Labour Force Participation Rate (%)
1981	Both	46.5
	Male	66.8
	Female	25.8
2010	Both	48.6
	Male	67.3
	Female	32.1

Source: Government of Sri Lanka 2011b and 2014b

4.6 Employment trends and talent management in Maldives

The 2012 gender gap index had put Maldives ahead of India but behind Sri Lanka. Maldives has shown strong gender equality commitment. Many talent management and acquisition policy reforms taking place in Maldives have been encouraged by legal and governmental policies. The 2008 constitution of Maldives is founded on the principle of “equality for all” and guarantees the same right to female and female citizens.

Limited budget allocation is a major problem in the implementation and monitoring of gender equality legislations in Maldives. However, organizational environment is found to be sensitive towards gender equality in talent management and acquisition.

Occupation	Women		Men			
	1995	2000	2006	1995	2000	2006
Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers	1.76	2.03	2.3	5.01	5.63	8.03
Professionals	12.37	12.76	14.03	4.28	6.83	5.62
Technicians & Associate Professionals	20.42	6.68	11.19	15.06	7.73	9.89
Clerks	7.95	7.66	11.71	3.21	4.18	5.97
Service Workers and Market Sales Workers	9.30	7.16	10.41	17.68	14.79	12.89
Skilled Agricultural & Fisheries Workers	13.19	4.96	7.01	37.27	17.67	13.57
Production Workers	31.29	26.97	38.14	12.92	31.32	37.19
Armed Forces		0.28	0.35		2.36	3.15
Not Stated	3.73	31.49	4.86	4.57	9.49	3.69

Source: Census, 2006

4.7 Employment trends and talent management in Bhutan

	Male	Female	Total
Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers	1.4	0.5	1.9
Professionals	4	1.9	5.9
Technicians & Associate Professionals	2.6	1.1	3.7
Clerks	1	0.9	1.8
Service Workers and Market Sales Workers	4.4	4	8.3
Skilled Agricultural & Fisheries Workers	23.7	38.2	61.9
Craft and Related Workers	2.3	3	5.2
Plant and Machinery Operators and Assemblers	4.2	0.3	4.5
Elementary Occupations	3.5	1.1	4.6
Armed Forces	2	0.1	2.1
	49	51	100

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2013, Bhutan

In Bhutan, the gap in the rate of labour force participation between men and women is decreasing. However, the discrepancy is high in urban area, i.e. 41.5 percent females compared to 76.8 percent for men. In terms of employment status too, female unemployment rate is more pronounced in urban areas and twice as high when compared to that of men [tenth plan document, Volume-I].

Farm sector and fishery work has more number of women working than men (23.7 percent men and 38.2 percent women). This shows a progressive trend. But the sector is vulnerable with respect to employment security. However a huge gender gap still exists in the men and women wages.

V. CROSS COUNTRY ANALYSIS: SAARC REGION

Analysis from different nation specific studies supports the implementation and enforcement of a number of policy interventions in SAARC region. Of particular significance is a transformation approach that boosts the value and security of women workers. The analysis also supports the skill development initiatives for women and implementation of gender responsive social protection measures. Measures such as safe workplace conditions, overtime pay and paid benefits promote wellbeing of workers and lower turnover rates. Position of Sri Lanka, Maldives and India is better than the rest of the SAARC nations. This can be attributed to the cultural norms in south Asian region.

5.1 Talent Management and Acquisition Practices for Gender Equality in SAARC Region

The prevailing discrimination in talent acquisition and management is going to take the growth nowhere. Women's desire to work and their work commitment are driven by equal and fair treatment towards them. Hostile work environment or the environment of exclusion is forcing women talent to opt out of their organizations. It's high time that the South Asian Economies move from formal & theoretical policy making to overt gender equality practices. SAARC is now attending to the work environment at both micro and macro level of South Asian Countries. The recommended practices in this regard are following.

5.2 Personnel decisions based on accurate knowledge of the job

The stereotyping of Feminine and Masculine jobs has to end. Instead, a thorough Job analysis is required to ensure skills, behavior, experience and personality characteristics suitable for the job. It is important to base decisions on accurate impressions of the job along with assessing the individuals who work at it.

5.3 Use of Structured Evaluation Techniques

Important organizational decisions are often based on unstructured and ambiguous evaluation techniques. These ambiguous techniques should be supported by structured programs to evaluate both men and women on the same criteria. This can be done by facilitating accurate assessment of employees' contribution and explicitly defined decision making rules.

5.4 Fixing Accountability for bias-free decisions

Merely fixing quotas and defining rules may not be effective in every situation. A transparent decision making process encourages managers to be accountable for decisions they make.

When managers have to justify their decisions to stakeholders they tend to be more fair. This will reduce the discrimination in turn.

5.5 Creating formal processes to build relationships

Organizations should indulge in formal relationship building and networking practices. Mentoring, Career guidance and counseling can be treated as the micro level techniques to build healthy professional networks for a congenial work environment.

5.6 Linking diversity programs and performance

Organizations should explicitly define the scope and content of every program. Mentoring programs, diversity programs, recruitment programs should be fairly and transparently implemented by frequently communicating their scope and role. This will create the acceptance of organizational principles and practices across organization.

VI. CONCLUSION

Workplace gender equality is an inescapable debate. Organizations and countries that lead the way in workplace gender equality have in place a policy that specifically supports gender equality. The lack of sensitive talent management and acquisition practices result in smaller pool of available talent, less work engagement of capable employees and unequal discriminating environment at micro level. Also, at macro level, countries face lesser chance to develop participative and inclusive leadership potential when follow an unequal approach towards gender based talent management practices. As far as patterns of gender based talent management and acquisition in SAARC nations are concerned, the association clearly outlines the gender equality intent, practices and priorities. To ensure the equal representation of men and women in employment, countries have been working in harmony with each other. SAARC policy on gender equality based on measureable gender equality objectives provides an overall framework for responsibility and accountability for the implementation. Present scenario in this direction is progressive but requires a strategic approach towards gender equality to fill the existing gap. So, it is recommended that organizations, policy implementing institutions and nations explicitly include gender equality and workforce diversity objectives in their gender equality policy at all levels and work on correcting inequalities to balance the situations.

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